

Folder | Marine

State of marine ecosystem and associated descriptors

European Environment Agency 

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State of marine ecosystem and associated descriptors

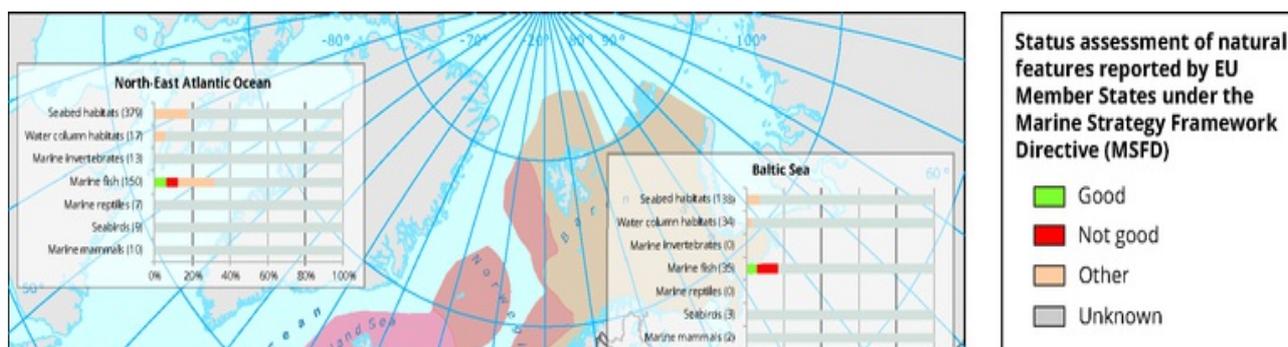
Are Europe's seas healthy? Current status and trends

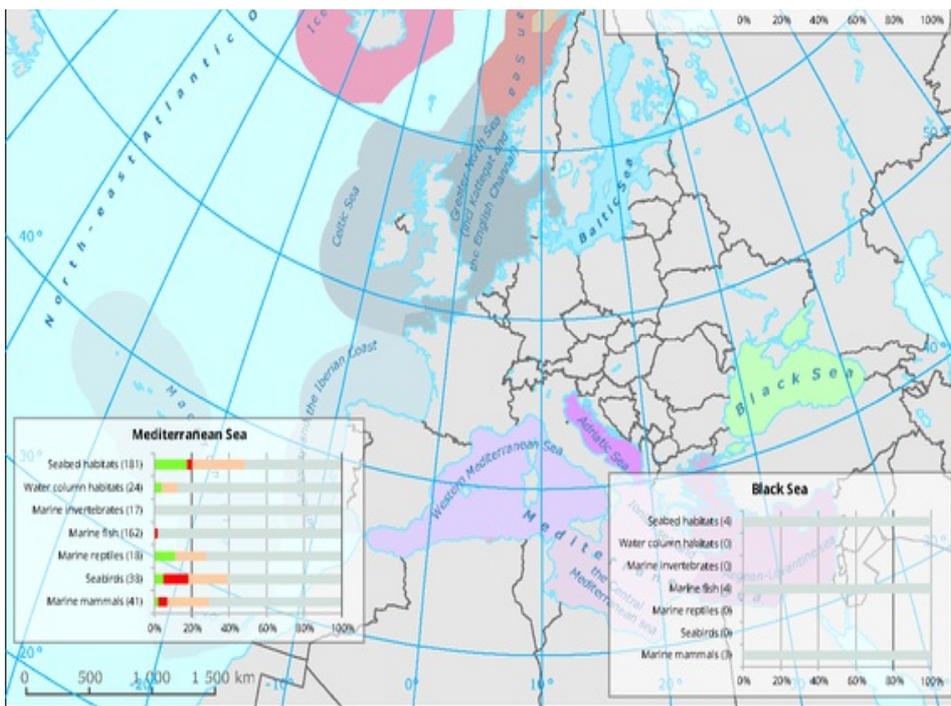
European seas are home to a variety of marine ecosystems, ranging from the stable deep oceans to the highly dynamic coastal seas. Our seas can be divided into four distinct regions: the Baltic Sea; the Black Sea; the Mediterranean Sea; and the North-east Atlantic Ocean.

Human activities have a variety of impacts on marine ecosystems and species. Currently, there is a lack of information on the status of species and habitats, which limits our understanding of the pressures that may impact on biodiversity and ecosystems. Current assessments suggest that many marine ecosystems across all regional seas are not in a healthy state. Accurate assessments remain difficult because the interdependencies between biodiversity and the functioning of marine ecosystems are often complex and difficult to assess. Our focus to establish healthy seas is about maintaining or restoring overall ecosystem resilience now and for the future, rather than looking back in history for an unexploited state. Halting loss of biodiversity and establishing sustainable levels of human use and exploitation are imperative for the long-term capacity of marine ecosystems to meet societal needs and be more resilient to human-induced changes (e.g. marine climate change).

Two recent assessments help indicate the status of Europe's seas: The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Habitats Directive. In the first MSFD report of 2012, only 4 % of species and habitats have achieved the 2020 target of 'good' environmental status, while the status of 80 % of species and habitats are categorised as 'unknown'. Similarly, the Habitats Directive assessment in 2013 concluded that only 9 % of marine habitats and 7 % of marine species were in a 'favourable' conservation status, while 66 % of marine habitats and 27 % of marine species were in an 'unfavourable' conservation status. In the MSFD report, 40 % of commercial fish stocks are not currently assessed, but 58 % of those that were assessed are not in 'good' environmental status.

Status assessment of natural features reported by EU Member States under the MSFD





S o u r c e : <http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/status-assessment-of-natural-features-1#tab-data-references>

Information on the status of commercial fish stocks is limited. Approximately 50 % of all landings from stocks in the EU Atlantic and Baltic waters, and 80 % of landings in the Mediterranean and Black Sea come from data-poor stocks. This means that we still know little about most of the stocks and how much their future reproductive capacity is being threatened.

Despite the uncertain outlook of European marine ecosystems, there are positive examples of habitat and species recovery. These examples show that some aspects of European regional seas maintain a certain level of resilience and ability to recover when the appropriate legislation and protection is enforced.

Roseate Tern Case Study:

Roseate tern numbers have increased from 18% of the reference level to 57% of the reference level following management actions. Management has included the removal of predators (such as gulls, and brown rats); prevention of human disturbance; maintenance of suitable nesting habitats for the birds at existing colonies; and creation of new potential breeding sites. Click [here](#) to find out more about the status of European marine birds.

