

Concept note of the India-EU-France webinar on

“Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Conservation and Marine Protected Areas” (8 June 2021)

The content of this non-paper is only meant to facilitate discussion; it does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union, France nor India. It would be further revised and completed in light of the speeches, key notes, panel discussion and questions posed during the virtual event (under Chatham House Rule), as well as written feedbacks received afterwards. It does not create any commitment for any parties involved and aims at structuring/reflecting the content of the discussions, without attributing ideas or positions to individual participants, unless where they explicitly ask so.

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Marine Biodiversity Conservation and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are gaining traction in the context of increasing pressures on sea resources as well as fast-developing, multi-sectoral activities at sea. They are being discussed in multilateral frameworks like the Convention on the Biological Diversity (CBD), the draft convention on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), or the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

India is active in this field, and it has already established 100 + MPAs in its territorial waters. The European Union and its Member States are also active, and they promote the central role that MPAs can play in the above-mentioned frameworks.

In particular, France promotes and co-chairs the so-called **High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HAC)** as an intergovernmental group. Its objective is to support the adoption of a target aiming to protect 30% of the planet's land and 30% of its oceans by 2030 (30x30 target), within the future global framework of the CBD. This science-based target reflects the recommendations of the IPBES and the IUCN. These institutions have identified protected areas as essential and effective solutions for the preservation of species and ecosystems and recommended that their scope increase significantly, up to at least 30% by 2030. During the latest Joint Working Group on Climate Change and Environment between EU and India, the latter committed to consider undersigning the HAC and/or the Leader's Pledge to Nature LP4N, and signaled that it was close to reach 30% of terrestrial protected areas or under other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Be it in India or at global level, the progress of protected areas in seas and oceans has been more mixed.

Besides this, it is key that protected areas cover sites of particular importance for biodiversity and that they are well connected and managed both sustainably and effectively, with the involvement of local communities. To this end, **MPAs require proper governance, inter-sectoral coordination, institutional and operational capacities, solid information systems, and scientific inputs.**

MPAs have a conservation and restoration purpose for fragile ecosystems but they are also a tool to organize orderly and balance activities related to the **Blue Economy** (fishing, shipping, sailing, off-shore energy, eco-tourism and the sustainable use of underwater resources) while at the same time preventing/reversing environmental threats like pollution or loss of biodiversity. Hence MPAs can contribute to marine spatial planning and strengthen the rules-based development of maritime activities, as well as the sustainable exploitation of sea-resources.

The European Union, including France, on the one hand, and India, on the other hand, have so far had limited exchanges on Marine Biodiversity Conservation and MPAs. Hence the proposed workshop aims to allow a contact between respective authorities, a better understanding of their priorities as well as a sharing of best practices, as a first step to potential future cooperation. Given the inter-sectorial nature of a MPA, the workshop would gather several departments and institutions.

The workshop would tackle the following questions

- **What are the global or regional processes that shape and underpin European and Indian respective priorities on Marine Biodiversity? Is there scope to intensify policy dialogue, and foster stronger alignment between EU and India in those fora? How?**
- **What does science say about the socio-economic as well as environmental benefits of improving the governance and management of marine/coastal protected areas? Which open questions call for more and better research in the next 5-10 years?**
- **What have we learned from success stories in European & Indian experiences? What could contribute to further improve Marine Biodiversity Conservation and ensure the sustainable development of the Blue Economy sector?**
- **The way forward for EU, India and France:** next steps to dialogue and mutual learning on improving Ocean Governance, and contributing harmoniously to the rules-based development of sea resources and activities?

To help answer the above questions, the workshop would notably address: the respective European and Indian priorities on Marine Biodiversity Conservation and MPA nationally and internationally, a presentation of the respective models of governance for an MPA, their scientific activities and the sharing of best practices through a case study.

For the first time, the workshop would gather all the main stakeholders in India and Europe in charge of MPAs and hence pave the way for further exchanges on the Blue Economy and Marine Biodiversity Conservation.

The workshop is expected to be open, through invitation, to public administrations and oceanographic institutions including, in India, **Zoological Survey of India, Ministry of Fisheries or National Institute of Oceanography.**