



Improving stakeholder engagement in marine management

through ecosystem service assessment

A guide for practitioners based on experience from the VALMER project



The VALMER project was selected under the European cross-border cooperation programme INTERREG IV A France (Channel) - England, co-funded by the ERDF.

Ecosystem Service Assessment as a tool for engagement or as a tool for management?

ESA can be used both as a tool to enhance stakeholder engagement and as a tool to inform marine management.

If the main aim of your ESA is to enhance stakeholder engagement

- The concept of ecosystem services and ESA should be explained to the stakeholders
- Stakeholders should be enabled to share their knowledge and views
- The stakeholder knowledge and views should be integrated into the ESA
- The stakeholders should be given the opportunity to validate other data collected for the ESA
- The stakeholders should be given the opportunity to discuss the ESA results

If the main aim of your ESA is to inform management

Option 1:

The ESA can be undertaken without involving stakeholders

Option 2:

Stakeholders can be involved in the ESA, for example to contribute local knowledge and validate data

You can find out more about how ESA can support marine governance in the VALMER 'Advice note for using ecosystem service assessment to support marine governance'.

How to use Ecosystem Service Assessment as an engagement tool

To get the most benefits out of ESA based engagement, a mixed group of stakeholders from relevant sectors should be brought together for a series of workshops in which, in a stepwise process:

- The concept of ecosystem services and ESA is explained to the stakeholders.
- The stakeholders are asked to feed their knowledge and views into the ESA and to validate other data collected for the ESA.
- The ESA results are presented to the stakeholders.
- The stakeholders discuss different management options based on the ESA results.

Some stakeholders might be sceptical and resistant at first. In these cases they might need to be pre-engaged through one to one meetings in a neutral and non-threatening setting.

Optionally, ESA can be used in combination with scenario building exercises to explore how different activities, management or policy alternatives might affect the provision of ecosystem services in the future.

You can find further information about scenario building in the VALMER documents 'Transnational scenario synthesis' and 'Building site based scenarios', available on the VALMER website: www.valmer.eu.





Ecosystem Service Assessment as an engagement tool

Ecosystem Service Assessment (ESA) provides a useful tool for effectively engaging stakeholders in marine management. Involving stakeholders in an ESA process not only ensures more effective incorporation of relevant local knowledge into marine plans and management decisions. **It can also support better dialogue between managers and their stakeholders and improve relations among different stakeholders.** ESA can therefore contribute to reducing user conflicts and increasing stakeholder buy-in to management measures and regulations, thus facilitating the implementation of integrated ecosystem based marine management.

The VALMER project applied an ESA based engagement approach to six case studies with different stakeholder groups and governance contexts. At the end of the project, 39 interviews were conducted with a range of different stakeholders across all six sites to capture their views on the ESA engagement process. The experience from the VALMER case studies highlights what ESA can add to stakeholder engagement in marine management. It also provides useful guidance on what should be considered by practitioners when using ESA in a stakeholder engagement process.

Added benefits of Ecosystem Service Assessment to stakeholder engagement

An engagement approach based on ESA can support better dialogue and relations between managers and stakeholders by bringing relevant stakeholders around the table to share information and discuss issues and management options in a **neutral, objective and inclusive setting.**

The experience from the VALMER case studies shows that:

- **ESA is perceived as neutral and objective – this facilitates constructive stakeholder dialogue and mutual learning**

VALMER stakeholders perceived ESA to be a neutral and objective approach that shows how the different elements of an ecosystem and the different activities in an area are linked. It helped them better understand each other's positions and the role that each stakeholder plays in the socio-ecological system. The stakeholders felt that they could share their views and knowledge without having to justify themselves. One VALMER participant commented that unlike other consultation processes where people only participate to defend their own interests, with the ESA approach the different stakeholders actually listened to each other.

- **ESA is inclusive – it enables the integration of different knowledge, views and interests**

By giving them the opportunity of feeding their knowledge and views into the ESA and validating the data collected for the ESA, the VALMER stakeholders felt that they were being involved in the management or decision making processes and that their interests were being taken into consideration.

- **ESA can encourage people to think outside the box**

VALMER stakeholders said that ESA provided a neutral and more comprehensive view on the marine environment and its human uses. This enabled people to look at 'old problems' from a new perspective and to overcome entrenched views.

"The VALMER project has shown that the ecosystem services approach was a brilliant vehicle for dialogue between the different stakeholders of the marine environment. Bringing together people with a nature conservation background and those more receptive to the vocabulary of socio-economic activities is crucial for the governance of the marine environment. Talking about ecological functions and ecosystem services is a means to achieve this." François Gauthiez, Deputy Director of the French Marine Protected Areas Agency

Guidance on using an Ecosystem Service Assessment approach to stakeholder engagement

Be aware of who your stakeholders are

The VALMER findings suggest that different people (individuals or from different sectors) will join the engagement process with different levels of knowledge of ESA and different expectations of what they will get out of the process.

- Generally, people involved in the management of a marine or coastal site tend to have heard about ESA before without having a clear understanding of what it is about. They often expect to find out how ESA can support their work and are interested in the mechanics of ESA.
- Site users, such as commercial fisheries groups or recreational user associations, are less likely to have heard about ESA before. They mostly participate out of interest in the site or the topic or to represent their interests in the discussion. For this group, understanding the mechanics of ESA is less relevant.

Suggestion:

adapt the contents of the engagement process to suit the audience, for example:

- In workshops with mixed stakeholders, focus on explaining the ESA concept, information sharing, scenario building exercises and discussion of ESA outputs
- Run separate workshops on ESA methods, modelling or scenario building methods for site managers

Allow sufficient time to explain things

The experience from VALMER shows that ESA is a difficult concept for stakeholders to understand and work with.

Suggestion:

provide supplementary information material before and between workshops

ESA is very conceptual and technical – explain it in a local, practical context

Most of the VALMER stakeholders, including those who thought that it was an interesting and useful approach, found ESA difficult to understand for someone with no academic background. What helped them understand the ESA approach was

- Making it real and relevant by explaining it in a local context using local examples
- Explaining how ESA could be practically applied in marine management, for example by informing the evaluation of different management options through scenarios
- Presenting ESA in a conceptual context that the stakeholders were familiar with, for example integrated management or the ecosystem approach

Avoid scientific and technical terminology – use vocabulary that the stakeholders are familiar with and talk about specific habitats, species and services

Many VALMER stakeholders found the ESA terminology to be full of scientific jargon. What helped them understand the case study ESA was

- Applying it to a specific habitat or species and clearly defined topics
- Talking about benefits, impacts and interactions between habitats or species and human activities instead of ecosystem services
- Avoiding terms like 'ecosystem', 'habitat', 'species' or 'ecosystem services'

Examples of expressions stakeholders used to describe 'ecosystem services'

- "the benefits that an ecosystem gives you"
- "the things the environment does for us"
- "those things that the natural environment provides for the economic, social and health of the people and communities"
- "the value that the sea provides to the human population"

Guidance on using an Ecosystem Service Assessment approach to stakeholder engagement

Monetary or non-monetary assessment?

While monetary valuation of ecosystem services might support decision making under certain circumstances, the findings from VALMER suggest that for engaging stakeholders, non-monetary ESA is more useful.

The key elements of ESA for stakeholder engagement are:

- The qualitative description of what the ecosystem services are
- Showing the interconnections between different elements of an ecosystem
- Showing the links between the ecosystem and human activities at the site, including how human activities depend on, benefit from and affect the provision of ecosystem services

Scenario building exercises can help the understanding and discussion of ESA

In the VALMER case studies, local scenarios

- Helped make ESA real and relevant to the local context and thus understandable for the stakeholders
- Provided a framework for the discussion of ESA outputs and management options

But scenario building also presents challenges

Feedback from stakeholders on the scenario exercises in the VALMER case studies suggests that

- Scenarios should be relevant to the stakeholders' interests
- Some stakeholders prefer realistic scenarios, others feel safer discussing hypothetical scenarios
- Some scenario building methods are too complex and do not encourage engagement

You can find further insights on scenarios from VALMER as well as guidance on scenario building in the VALMER documents 'Transnational scenario synthesis' and 'Building site based scenarios'.

Modelling can be part of the methods for your ESA but consider carefully whether you want to involve your stakeholders in the process

Feedback from VALMER stakeholders suggests that

- Modelling can be very abstract, confusing and difficult to understand
- Knowing about the modelling and understanding the methods is not relevant to all stakeholders (site managers might be interested in this; for recreational and commercial users this might be less relevant)
- Modelling outputs can be used in the engagement process without providing detailed information on modelling techniques
- It can be frustrating for stakeholders if they are introduced to something that they cannot understand

If you want to involve your stakeholders in modelling, **keep it simple, make it visual and avoid technical terms.**

You can find further information about methods for ESA in the VALMER document 'A Framework for the Operational Assessment of Marine Ecosystem Services'.





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VALMER Valuing ecosystem services in the western English Channel

The VALMER project was selected under the European cross-border cooperation programme INTERREG IV A France (Channel) - England, co-funded by the ERDF.

The aim of the project was to examine how marine ecosystem services assessments (ESA) can support effective and informed marine management. The project involved six case studies at three sites in the UK and three sites in France. You can find further information about VALMER on the project website www.valmer.eu.

This document forms part of a complementary set of reports and recommendations from VALMER, which we suggest be read together for a better understanding of the use of ESA in marine ecosystems. All VALMER outputs are available on the project website www.valmer.eu. Supporting evidence for this guide can be found in the report on the potential role of ecosystem service assessment on marine governance in the Western Channel.

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