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TITLE: Marine spatial planning in practice

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ABSTRACT:

Multiple competing uses of continental-shelf environments have led to a proliferation of marine spatial planning initiatives, together with expert guidance on marine spatial planning. This study provides an empirical review of marine spatial plans, their attributes, and the extent to which the expert guidance is actually being followed. We performed a structured review of 16 existing marine spatial plans and created an idealized marine spatial plan from the steps included in recent expert papers. A cluster analysis of the yes/no answers to 28 questions was used to ordinate the 16 marine spatial plans and to compare them with the idealized plan. All the plans that have been implemented have a high-level government mandate and the authority to implement spatial planning vested in existing institutions. Almost all the plans used data with clear criteria for data inclusion. Stakeholders were included in almost all the plans; they did not participate in all stages of the planning process but their roles were generally clearly defined. Decision-support tools were applied inconsistently across plans and were seldom used dynamically over time. Most spatial planning processes did not select specific outcomes, such as preferred use scenarios. Success is defined inconsistently across plans; in half the cases there are no metrics of success with reference benchmarks. Although monitoring is included in the majority of plans, only in some cases do monitoring results feed back into management decisions. The process of marine spatial planning had advanced in that some of the more recent plans were developed more quickly and contain more desirable attributes than earlier plans. Even so, existing marine spatial plans are heterogeneous?there are essential ingredients, but no single recipe for success.

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