

Protection of the Marine Environment and Exploitation of Resources of the Adriatic Sea

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Marko Starman is a Justice of the Constitutional Court of Slovenia and an expert in administrative, environmental, spatial and nature protection law. He holds an LL.M. from the University of Chicago Law School and previously served as State Secretary in the Ministries of Justice, Environment, and Regional Policy. He directed the Strunjan Nature Park (a designated SPAMI area under the Barcelona Convention) for many years and led major projects establishing and managing marine and coastal protected areas. He is the author of *Scenario for the Design of a Network of Marine Protected Areas in Line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030* (EUSAIR/INTERREG), a key strategic document for the Adriatic–Ionian region. He co-authored the *Green Infrastructure Handbook*, providing legal and methodological guidance for integrating ecosystem-based solutions into spatial planning. He is also a co-author of *Strategy for Adapting Coastal Use and Activities to Sea Level Rise*, a foundational study for Slovenia’s coastal climate-adaptation policies. His work on *Legal Assessment of the Model for Integrating Spatial and Development Planning at the Regional Level* informed reforms of spatial governance. In 2023 he was appointed to a two-year mandate on the Compliance Committee of the Barcelona Convention, overseeing implementation of the Mediterranean nature-protection regime. As a university lecturer, he researches legal mechanisms for coastal and marine protection, spatial planning, and climate-change adaptation.

Towards 2030: Strengthening Marine Protection and Natural Regeneration in the Adriatic–Ionian Region

This presentation explores how the Adriatic–Ionian region can advance the EU’s 2030 nature-protection objectives by expanding marine protection, improving ecological coherence and integrating restoration priorities into maritime spatial planning. Current protection levels remain low, with “about 5% MPA coverage” and “no protection at all for the marine space in the bathyal zone”, revealing a clear gap between EU ambitions and implementation. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 calls for at least 30% protection of marine areas and a significant share under strict protection. Natura 2000 remains the backbone of EU conservation, with its “umbrella effect” extending protection beyond listed species. For non-EU countries, the Bern Convention’s Emerald Network provides a parallel framework for safeguarding habitats and species across the wider region. Complementary instruments—the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive—offer the operational tools for achieving good environmental status and organizing human activities at sea through an ecosystem-based approach. The presentation reframes the Nature Restoration Law through a practical question: could broader, ecologically functional protected areas—capable of natural regeneration—deliver more durable outcomes than narrowly defined restoration obligations? Given the regulation’s flexibility, feasibility clauses and exemptions, investing in larger, well-designed protected areas may offer a more resilient and cost-effective pathway to regeneration, especially in marine environments where recovery accelerates once pressures are reduced. A proposed scenario foresees expanding protection in the region from roughly 10% to about 34%, including strictly protected core zones exceeding 12%. This would significantly improve representativeness, connectivity and the protection of offshore and deep-sea habitats. The presentation concludes that achieving the 2030 objectives requires coordinated regional action, shared monitoring systems and harmonised maritime spatial plans. The Adriatic–Ionian region offers a unique opportunity to align EU nature-protection law, marine governance and restoration policy into a coherent model capable of supporting natural regeneration at scale.

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Guglielmo Bonacchi is an Italian lawyer based in Genova at Turcilex – Studio Legale and holds a Ph.D. in International Law from the University of Genova. During his Ph.D. Guglielmo attended both the Queen Mary University of London and the Max Planck Institute for Private and Private International Law studies of Hamburg. Being a certified specialist lawyer in International Law, his practice often involves International Law aspects, especially relating to carriage of goods by sea, ship operations and management, and administrative law (including port and terminal operations). He is also a member of Turcilex team on maritime employment law, assisting shipowners and managers in Court and out-of-Court disputes.

The New Shape of Maritime Jurisdiction over the Adriatic Sea: The Italian Perspective on the Protection of the Marine Environment after the EEZ Declaration and the Agreement with Neighbouring States

The presentation will cover the efforts made by Italy to declare its own EEZ under Article 55 of UNCLOS and the agreements concluded by Italy with other Adriatic States. It will then move on to the latest steps, including the formal declaration of the EEZ made by Presidential Decree No. 193 of 26 September 2025, which entered into force on 3 January 2026, according to which Italy has finally established its jurisdiction also over the Adriatic Sea. This part of the presentation will focus on the more specific effects of such a declaration on the existing legal framework applicable to the Adriatic Sea, considering that Italy will have jurisdiction over at least half of the Adriatic Sea up to the median line agreed with other States, such as Croatia. The Adriatic Sea will be divided in such a way that each Adriatic State will have a share of jurisdiction over it and sovereign rights over the marine and natural resources, but also the duty to ensure adequate protection of the marine environment. The last part of the presentation will duly consider the applicable framework for ships sailing through the Adriatic Sea after these changes from an environmental perspective, as well as the framework applicable to platforms and other infrastructures at sea. A new era in the Adriatic Sea awaits those interested in investing in this region.

Božena Bulum, PhD
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Božena Bulum is a Scientific Advisor with Tenure at the Adriatic Institute of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. She passed the Croatian bar exam in 2003. In 2008, she obtained a PhD from the Faculty of Law, University of Split. Dr. Bulum is a visiting lecturer at the Maritime and Transport Law Department of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, the Maritime Law Department of the University of Zadar, where she holds the academic title of Assistant Professor, and the University of Western Brittany, Master's Degree – Law of Maritime Spaces and Activities. Actively contributes to expert committees of the Croatian Ministry of the Sea, Transport, and Infrastructure in drafting maritime legislation. She has been invited to speak at many international and domestic conferences and has also served as a member of organizing committees for various academic seminars and conferences. Leads the scientific project "*Market Competition in the Maritime Sector – Croatian and European Union Legal Framework*", supported by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts Foundation. She is a Supervisory Board member of the Croatian Maritime Law Association and a founding member of the Croatian Competition Law and Policy Association. Her academic contributions include the publication of an academic monograph, several book chapters, and over 50 scientific and professional papers.

Gorana Jelić Mrčelić, PhD
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Gorana Jelić Mrčelić was born in Split, Croatia. She graduated from the Maritime Faculty Dubrovnik – Study in Split, obtaining a BSc in Maritime Transport, Department of Sea-Fishing Technology, and an Engineer in Maritime Transport, Department of Nautical Studies. In 2024, she earned a PhD in Biotechnology from the University of Zagreb, Croatia. She is a Full Professor of biotechnology at the University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, where she teaches and conducts research in sustainability, the blue economy, marine fisheries, marine environmental protection, Integrated Coastal Zone Management, and Marine Spatial Planning, with a particular focus on aquaculture. She has also been a guest professor at the University of Split Department of Marine Studies, University of Dubrovnik, Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries Split, University of Rijeka Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture, and Dr Franjo Tuđman Defence and Security University. Gorana Jelić Mrčelić has published over 100 articles in journals and conference proceedings and has participated in over 15 international and national competitive projects. She currently leads one international and one institutional scientific project. She is an Advanced Open Water Diver (SSI).

Marija Pijaca, PhD
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Marija Pijaca is an Associate Professor at the Maritime Department of the University in Zadar, Croatia, where she holds lectures in several courses in the domain of maritime law. She also held lectures in the course of commercial law at the Management Department of the University in Zadar and in courses of labour law, health and social legislation in the Department of Health Studies at the University of Zadar. She graduated from the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb and after graduation enrolled in the Postgraduate Scientific Study of “Maritime Law and the Law of the Sea” at the Faculty of Law of the University in Split. During the Postgraduate Studies, she showed interest in the majority of courses, especially in the matter of maritime property law. The postgraduate master’s degree studies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Split, she finished with the thesis “*Contracts on Towing Operation at Sea*“. She also obtained a PhD degree at the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Law with the thesis “*Bareboat Charter*“. She lived and worked in London for the British-Croatian Chamber of Commerce. She is the author of a scientific monograph titled “Bareboat Charter” and many scientific and professional papers.

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Aquaculture Regulations in the European Union – The Croatian Context

Since the 1990s, the catch of Atlantic Bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*, ABFT) in the Republic of Croatia has been of substantial economic value, particularly for farming purposes. It constitutes a key segment of the national fisheries. In the Mediterranean, ABFT is the most important commercial tuna species in both fisheries and tuna aquaculture. Aquaculture production has grown substantially since the 1960s. The role of aquaculture in the sustainable nutrition of the population and rebuilding fish stocks has been increasingly emphasized, with farmed fish serving as a low-carbon footprint protein source. Farming of ABFT has started in 1996 in Spain and Croatia, and today Spain, Italy, Malta, and Croatia are its leading producers. In the Mediterranean, ABFT farming and fattening include catching wild tuna with purse seines, feeding tuna with small pelagic fish in floating rearing cages, and exporting it for the sushi - sashimi market, mainly to Japan. The catch and farming of ABFT are regulated at three levels: regional, European, and national. Matters regarding ABFT management at the regional level fall under the jurisdiction of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Croatian fisheries operate under the Union's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which aims to create preconditions for fishing and aquaculture activities to achieve sustainable economic, environmental, and social benefits. Furthermore, its goal is to increase food availability and strengthen overall food security. The authors analyse

the challenges fishermen and aquaculture producers face in implementing European legislation on ABFT catching and farming, along with the strategies to overcome them through the application of smart technologies.

Zlatko Imamović, LLB
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Zlatko Imamović is currently working as a legal intern at ABACO LLC Montenegro, gaining practical experience in maritime law, from both legal and regulatory aspects. He is also pursuing Master's degree in International Maritime Law and Shipping Business at Frederick University. He graduated from the Faculty of Law, University of Donja Gorica. His interest in maritime law started during his studies at the Maritime High School in Kotor, where he was first introduced to the field and developed a strong, lasting interest in its legal aspects. In addition to his academic background, Zlatko also gained first-hand experience of the maritime industry through two contracts onboard a Virgin Voyages cruise ship, working as a bar waiter. This experience provided him with valuable insight into the operational realities of the shipping and cruise sectors, further strengthening his commitment to maritime law. His academic path and professional experience reflect a growing dedication to the study and practice of maritime law.

Marine Protected Areas in Montenegro – Legal Framework, Management and Protection

Marine protected areas are a modern legal tool for safeguarding marine and coastal ecosystems, focused on conserving biodiversity, shielding sensitive habitats, and ensuring sustainable use of marine resources. Their significance is particularly evident in Mediterranean countries, where marine ecosystems face intense pressures from tourism, urbanization, fishing, and other economic activities. In this context, Montenegro created its first marine protected areas (Platamune, Katič, and Stari Ulcinj) marking the beginning of developing a national legal framework to protect its marine environment. This presentation examines the legal framework for the protection of marine protected areas in Montenegro, with special attention to their concept, significance, and legal basis for protection. The focus is on existing marine protected areas in Montenegro, the conditions for their declaration, domestic regulations and competent state bodies, as well as international conventions that bind Montenegro in this area. Special emphasis is placed on the relationship between national legislation and the Mediterranean regional system of marine protection, primarily the Barcelona Convention and the SPA/BD Protocol. The starting point of the paper is that marine protected areas in Montenegro are not only an instrument of nature protection, but also part of a broader system of marine space management. The paper indicates that the legal framework for their protection exists, but that its actual effectiveness depends on the consistent application of regulations, clear institutional responsibilities, and efficient management in practice.