BLUE CONNECT

Risk Management Plan

DELIVERABLE 1.2

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BLUE CONNECT

Project No.	**101156759**
Project Acronym	**Blue Connect**
Project Title	**Strict protection, restoration and co-management of Marine Protected Areas to ensure effective ecosystem conservation and improved connectivity of Blue Corridors**
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Deliverable Lead Partner	**SUBMARINER**
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02	18.11.2024	Revised Draft	Froukje Maria Platjouw (NIVA)

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1. Acronyms

Deliverable (D)

Demonstration Site (DS)

Demonstration Site Lead (DSL)

European Commission (EC)

European Digital Twin of the Ocean (EU DTO)

Horizon Europe (HEU)

LP Lead Partner (LP)

Project Partner (PP)

Steering Committee (SC)

Work Package (WP)

Work Package Lead (WPL)

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2. Executive Summary

This deliverable sets up routines for risk management and quality assurance in the BLUE CONNECT project, which are needed to ensure its successful outcomes.

This deliverable corresponds to **Task 1.1 "Project governance and ethics management"**, which aims at ensuring a smooth coordination of the project for a high quality of results and implementation. It first describes the participatory process conducted within the BLUE CONNECT consortium to identify the risks that might occur during the project implementation. Risks for the following categories were identified: **technical integration, stakeholder engagement, environmental factors, project management and 5) synergies with other EU projects.**

A detailed analysis of the nature and dimension of these risks is outlined, including the Work Packages (WP) which they might affect, their likelihood and the envisaged measures to mitigate them in case of their occurrence. SUBMARINER will, as Project Coordinator and Lead Partner (LP), ensure that the risk mitigation and contingency measures provided in this plan are met and regularly updated, if needed.

3. Introduction

The goal of the **BLUE CONNECT Risk Management Plan** is to increase the probability of the project's success by identifying potential challenges early and envisaging mitigation measures to avoid or reduce the probability of negative occurrence.

The main objective of the BLUE CONNECT project is to directly support effective achievement of marine conservation and restoration targets in the EU and beyond by advancing implementation of EU Policies. By applying an innovative, collaborative, science-based and data-driven systematic approach for the designation and management of marine protected areas, a widely applicable ecosystem-based Blueprint will be created A co-development approach in cooperation with site-specific stakeholders and citizens in 12 Demonstration Sites (DS) is set to establish co-ownership for the effective conservation management and their long-term commitment to the jointly established conservation objectives. The Blueprint will be developed as transferable and scalable beyond the project DS, coupled with a deployment and transferability plan.

4. Risk Management

The project Consortium holds very ambitious goals. Therefore, it is important to identify any potential risks and have good processes for managing and mitigating them. As described in the Consortium Agreement, the Project Coordinator will be responsible for

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daily project operation, which includes risk identification and mitigation as an important task. The following aspects will be considered as part of the risk management strategy:

- **Risk management register:** Each Project Partner (PP) is responsible for **reporting potential risks** (and proposing remedial actions) to the Project Coordinator. A 'Risk Register' will be kept, reviewed and updated at least quarterly following the SC meetings. Each WP leader (WPL) is to investigate the risks identified in their WP and to follow up regularly with the reporter of each risk. The Coordinator has the final responsibility to decide on whether a risk has materialized.

- **Consortium meetings:** During monthly SC meetings, the status of risks per WP will be discussed and WPL will report on the development of each risk in terms of its likelihood, status and whether other mitigation actions should be taken. If a risk is reported, the WP Leader, DS Leader and the LP have the responsibility to, together with the concerned partner(s), assess the risk impact, probability of occurrence and remedial actions. All risks that can be managed at this level should be addressed as soon as possible. The concept of "risk" will be neutralized, and examples will be given by the Coordinator to encourage partners to notify possible risks at a very early stage. The SC will provide strategic guidance on how the problem should be addressed and take actions and decisions, where needed. Major risks will be reported to the European Commission (EC) by the LP.

- **Quality and risk managers:** The coordinator will take the role of the quality and risk manager. Its main role is to ensure that the project's risk management process is respected, and to ensure that the most prominent risks are monitored in greater detail. This also alleviates the pressure on the project coordinator in this regard.

- **Collaborative risk management culture:** A culture of collaboration and transparency among project participants will be promoted as this will facilitate effective risk communication and coordination. Open dialogue regarding risks and uncertainties will be encouraged and facilitated by the Coordinator, allowing team members to share insights, concerns, and proposed solutions.

- **Continuous improvement and lessons learned**: The effectiveness of risk management processes will be continuously evaluated. Identified areas for improvement will help the mitigation of future risks and the refining of risk management strategies for future collaborative projects.

Components of the iterative risk management strategy:

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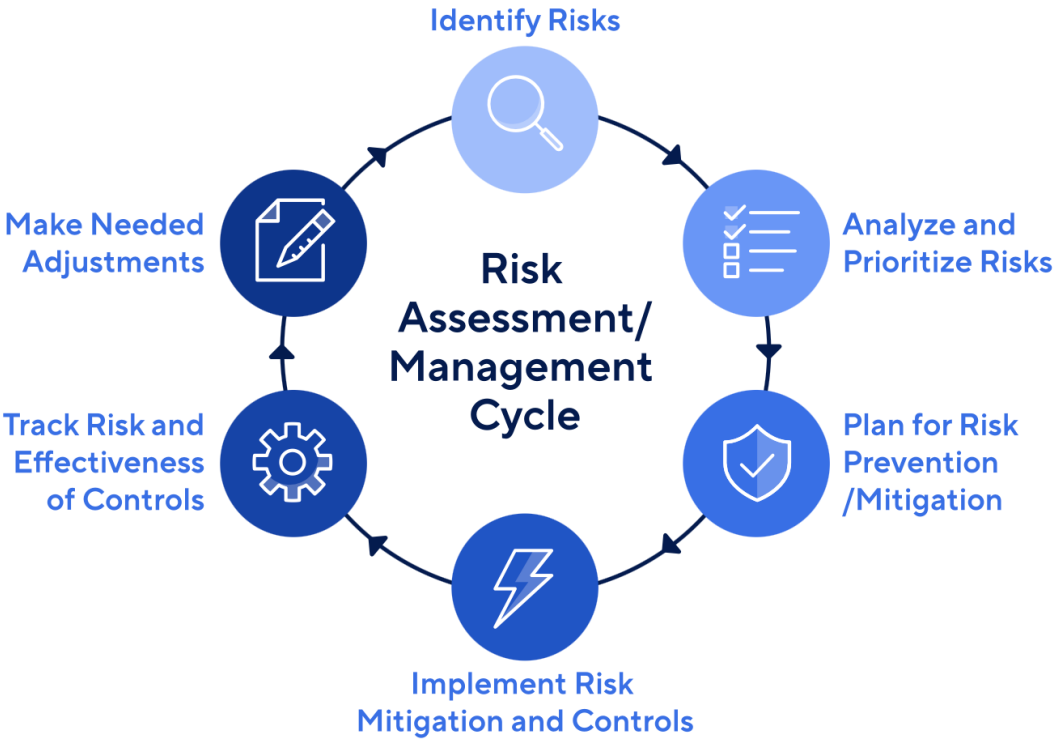

Figure 1- Risk Assessment Cycle, Copyright: Smartsheet Inc. 2022©

5. Identification of risks

To ensure effective risk response planning, each project partner (PP) contributes to the risk management plan. In BLUE CONNECT, partners have actively participated in identifying and analysing risks that could impact the achievement of project objectives. The Coordinator has engaged all PPs to assess potential deviations and risks related to their specific tasks, activities, deliverables, and milestones. This collaborative process enables the identification of additional risks beyond those outlined in the proposal and refines suggested mitigation measures, ensuring comprehensive coverage across all work packages while addressing the diverse contexts of the Demonstration Sites (DS). This risk management plan will be updated in line with the established participatory process for producing a risk registry.

The potential risks identified by the Consortium were related to 1) **technical: data collection and model integration, 2) stakeholder engagement, 3) environmental factors 4) project management and 5) synergies with other EU projects**. These are further elaborated in the following sections. Their likelihood of occurrence as well as mitigation measures are identified.

A risk analysis was conducted in the proposal phase and further reviewed for the purposes of this deliverable. Each risk was analysed in terms of its probability or

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likelihood and its impact or consequences for the project using the risk assessment matrix (Table 1).

Table 1- Risk Assessment Matrix

Impact	Probability				
	Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain
Severe	Moderate	High	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme
Major	Moderate	High	High	Extreme	Extreme
Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	High	Extreme
Minor	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
Negligible	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate

2Following, the risks identified for the BLUE CONNECT Project are listed:

5.1 Technical Risks: Data Collection and Model Integration

The quality and availability of marine ecological data is a significant barrier, as this can affect the robustness of the integrated modelling framework. To mitigate this, the project will work to improve current data collection and monitoring techniques and, where possible, use innovative data collection technologies such as remote sensing or citizen science initiatives. Task 4.1 will compile an inventory of currently available data at each DS, which will serve as the project's centralised data catalogue. Available databases from other EU funded projects such as MSP4BIO will be integrated. In addition, there is inherent uncertainty in predicting the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems. This barrier can be mitigated by incorporating different climate change scenarios into the model, thereby increasing its adaptive capacity.

The development and integration of different models within a hybrid modelling framework is a complex technical challenge, as well as its integration in the existing platforms such as EU DTO. To address this, the project team will start early cooperation with the ongoing EU DTO projects to align on the technical and other aspects and reduce possible integration challenges.

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Risk Description	Work Package No(s)	Probability; Impact	Proposed Mitigation Measures
Quality and availability of marine ecological data.	WP2	Likely; Moderate	The project will work to improve current data collection and monitoring techniques and use innovative data collection technologies such as remote sensing or citizen science initiatives. A centralised catalogue of data available at each DS will be compiled.
Uncertainty in predicting the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems.	WP2		Integrating climate change scenarios into the model to improve adaptive capacity.
Integration of wide range of models and methodologies into a single holistic framework.	WP2, WP6	Minor; Minor	Integrating different models into the holistic framework will require a collaborative approach that encourages input and feedback from multiple disciplines. Drawing on expertise from different fields in the consortium will ensure a comprehensive representation of all relevant factors and enhance the overall success.

5.2 Stakeholder Engagement

The ultimate success of the project depends on active stakeholder engagement and buy-in. Early and ongoing stakeholder engagement with particular attention to the end users, with clear communication of project objectives and benefits, and agreed DS implementation plans with clear stakeholder engagement plans is expected to improve buy-in and therefore long-term impact of the project. Aligning the outcomes of the project throughout its implementation to the end users' needs can be challenging due to the diverse interests and priorities of different stakeholder groups.

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Risk Description	Work Package No(s)	Probability; Impact	Proposed Mitigation Measures
Resistance to adopting new strategies may stem from systemic barriers like rigid structures and mandates, limiting stakeholders' ability to embrace novel approaches.	WP2, WP3, WP4, WP5, WP6	Likely; Moderate	Stakeholders will be involved from the very start of the project through the establishment of Local Stakeholder Working Groups (LSWGs), and the co-creation of solutions will start with the assessment of their tailored needs and views, thus ensuring their commitment to co-ownership. Regular involvement/interaction and communication will support demonstration of the benefits and positive impacts of such strategies, coupled with support for transition processes.
Little engagement by Demo sites' stakeholders leading to limited or lack of site-specific information and co-development.	WP2, WP3, WP4, WP5	Unlikely; Moderate	Carefully planned, regular processes of engaging relevant stakeholders by the different DS leads and WP4 leads will be crucial to ensure buy-in and active participation from all relevant parties, avoid duplicating efforts and maximize interactions' outcomes. Regular interactions and communication strategies will be used to keep the stakeholders involved and informed on the importance and benefits of new conservation strategies and tools. Different timelines, preferences and ways of working with be carefully accounted for.

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Poor understanding of the aims and objectives of the project and the expected results/MPAs benefits as well as from the citizen`s involvement and the exchange between the key **stakeholders and** the **general public.**	WP3 WP4 WP7	Likely; Moderate	To ensure effective communication and engagement, the project will organize additional, less formal citizen knowledge-sharing events, potentially aligned with LSWG meetings, to share progress, conduct Ocean literacy surveys, and carry out other information activities in demonstration sites. These events aim to foster two-way interaction between experts and local communities while highlighting the co-development process. In addition to scientific and technical publications and project deliverables, the project will produce and distribute promotional materials tailored to a general audience, using accessible language and engaging visuals to reach a broader public. Partners and stakeholders will be engaged early and consistently throughout the project, with regular communication to foster collaboration. Feedback from stakeholders will be collected to assess their understanding and address any areas of confusion. Clear roles and responsibilities will be established to ensure efficient teamwork and accountability. Finally, the project will remain flexible and prepared to adapt as needed to respond to emerging challenges or opportunities.
Specific problems arising in Demonstration sites, such as difficulties with certain groups of stakeholders, deviations from the initial work plan in	All	Likely; Moderate	The BLUE CONNECT Consortium includes partners which represent all the Demo sites, and which will be in charge of the coordination of the activities in their sites including stakeholder involvement. The main issues and needs were already identified at each site in the proposal preparation phase, as well as stakeholders to be involved. Consortium involves active NGOs from some of the sites, in some cases national authorities as Associated partners, in order to strengthen commitment and impact. In addition, WP1 envisages a specific Task 1.4 which will coordinate the Demo sites, discuss issues and exchange on the needs, challenges, good practices

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the site, change of policies and priorities etc.			and will produce Demo site implementation plan (Milestone 2) in month 6 of the project which will be discussed with site-specific stakeholders.

5.3 Environmental and External Factors

Risk Description	Work Package No(s)	Probability; Impact	Proposed Mitigation Measures
Unpredictable shifts in environmental conditions due to climate change.	WP3, WP2	Likely; Moderate	The project will build adaptability into its hybrid modelling framework, anticipating and planning for potential future scenarios to increase resilience in the face of uncertainty.
Drastic change in the political scenario on national level	All	Possible; Major	BLUE CONNECT will strive to include different stakeholders including authorities in its LSWGs, addressing their needs and supporting the implementation of the EU and national policies. In addition, the project will work on building and diversifying partnerships, and ensuring long-term sustainability. This will include strengthening local community engagement, developing adaptive management plans, and fostering public awareness.

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5.4 Project Management and Scheduling

Risk Description	Work Package No(s)	Probability; Impact	Proposed Mitigation Measures
Delays in one or several tasks causing cascading effects on dependent tasks.	All	Likely; Moderate	BLUE CONNECT tasks are planned in a dependent way ensuring exchange of the results to be used in the final outputs of the tasks. Deadlines and task-level work plans were discussed in the proposal preparation phase and tasks were planned in a way to enable exchange of intermediary results and products. Regular monthly SC meetings, as well as WP and Task meetings, will facilitate adequate collaborative work and alignments in case of need to adjust timelines. The same key partners are involved in the highly inter-dependent tasks, such as the tasks T2.1-T3.1; T2.1-T2.3; T2.2-2.3.
Project partner falling out.	All	Unlikely; Moderate	The project involves multiple disciplines, with many partners possessing diverse capabilities and overlapping expertise, enabling them to assume new responsibilities if necessary. However, all partners are fully dedicated to the project from the very beginning.

5.5 Synergies with other projects

There is a potential for overlaps with other Horizon and Ocean Mission projects resulting in “competing tools” rather than complementary and integrated platforms/frameworks. The BLUE CONNECT Consortium consists of the partners participating in many of the key marine conservation projects in Europe, such as BLUE4ALL and Ocean Citizen, different EU lighthouses and other Horizon Europe (HEU) projects. In addition, there are ongoing talks with the two projects from the Ocean Mission Atlantic-Arctic lighthouse call BioProtect and PHAROS which will be running in parallel to start cooperation from the very beginning of project implementation, with BLUE4ALL as the main link. BLUE CONNECT will initiate the cooperation and bring the relevant projects together for focused discussions and possibly joint policy

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briefs and think tanks meetings. The cooperation will focus on stakeholder engagement, communication and dissemination, and tools that will be produced.

Risk Description	Work Package No(s)	Probability; Impact	Proposed Mitigation Measures
Competing/overlapping tools of projects running in parallel.	All	Likely, Medium	To involve all consortium members participating in other projects to actively promote synergies and integration amongst projects. When needed, the consortium has already started facilitating cross-project meetings and joint events to discuss tools being used to ensure alignment.
Lack of communication.	All	Unlikely; Moderate	The consortium has already initiated cooperation with several projects that have similar scope, and in which many of the consortium partners are involved. Some partners participating in the implementation of sister projects have been involved in BLUE CONNECT consortium as associate partners to ensure alignment and communication between projects.

6. Conclusion

This document describes **risks** related to the BLUE CONNECT Project Implementation. No risk identified in this document has a high probability of occurrence and the likelihood of most risks is low, which facilitates their management. The corresponding **mitigation actions** as mechanisms to partially or completely prevent these risks, as well as mitigation measures to solve them in case of their occurrence have been carefully elaborated and are detailed in the document.

This **Risk Management Plan** will be thoroughly applied throughout the BLUE CONNECT project life cycle under the supervision of the Coordination Team and will be updated if needed throughout the project lifecycle.

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7. References

MSP4BIO Risk Management Plan

BLUE4ALL Risk Management Plan

The Risk Assessment Cycle- UK

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