



# Marine strategy framework directive Threshold values for 'Good environmental status' descriptor 6: sea-floor integrity

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# Why do we need a healthy seabed?

- **Healthy seabed habitats** are essential for healthy marine ecosystems and provide **nursery and spawning grounds** for many species
- Healthy seabed habitats provide many ecosystem services, including to the **fishing sector**, and contribute to **food security**
- Seabed habitats are **under pressure** from many human activities

- EU seafloor is over 1.8 times larger than EU's land area
- It is home to some 2,500 species of seabed organisms
- 79% of the EU's coastal seabed is considered to be physically disturbed (COM(2020) 259 final)

# MSFD Descriptor 6 – Sea-floor integrity

- *“Sea-floor integrity is at a level that ensures that the structure and functions of the ecosystems are safeguarded and benthic ecosystems, in particular, are not adversely affected.”*
- Links with the Nature restoration law
- Five criteria to define good environmental status for D6 (Commission Decision 2017/848)
- Requirements to define thresholds at Union level for:
  - **Habitat loss (D6C4)**
    - Maximum allowable extent of habitat loss
  - **Adverse effects on habitats (D6C5)**
    - Level of adverse effects on the condition of the seabed (‘quality’)
    - Maximum allowable extent of adverse effects (‘extent’)

## Threshold value for the **maximum allowable extent of habitat loss** (D6C4)

- Loss is a **permanent change** to the seabed substrate
- The total extent of habitat loss should be determined by taking into account the documented changes to the habitat type as far back as possible and at least since 1992
- Adopted by Member States' Marine Directors in June 2023

**D6C4 Habitat loss:** *the maximum proportion of a benthic broad habitat type in an assessment area that can be lost is 2 % of its natural extent ( $\leq 2$  %).*

## Threshold value for the **maximum allowable extent of adverse effects** (D6C5 - extent)

- Rationale based on the precautionary principle, scientific recommendations to reduce pressure on the seabed, EU legal and policy frameworks (Habitats Directive, Biodiversity Strategy)
- Allows for the **sustainable use of marine goods and services**, including **fishing**
- Adopted by Member States' Marine Directors in June 2023

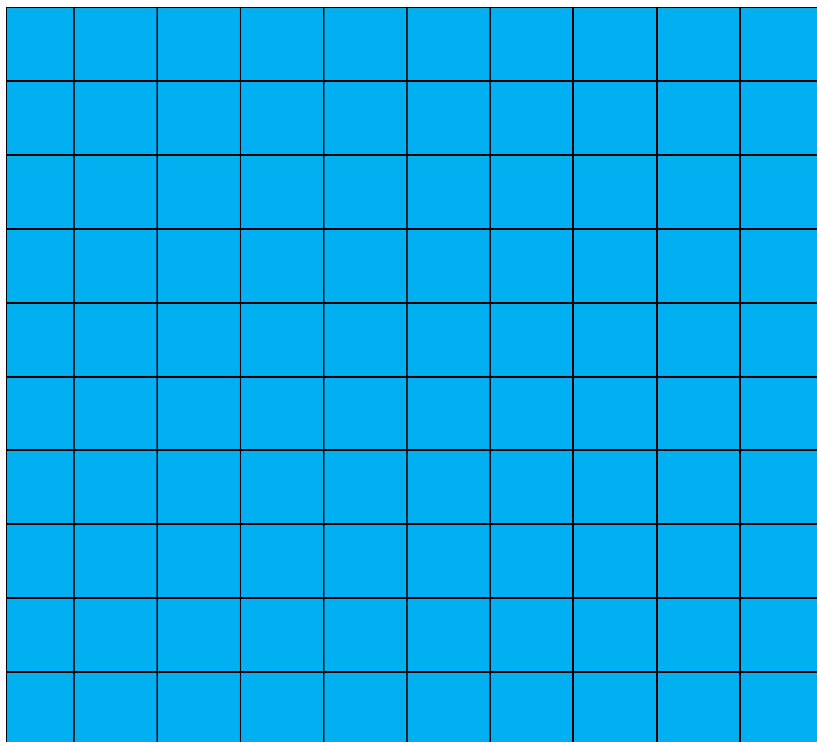
**D6C5 Adverse effects on habitats – extent:** *the maximum proportion of a benthic broad habitat type in an assessment area that can be adversely affected is 25 % of its natural extent ( $\leq 25$  %). This includes the proportion of the benthic broad habitat type that has been lost (D6C4).*

## Recommendation for threshold value for **adverse effects on the condition of habitat types** (D6C5 – quality)

- Effects from human pressures cause changes to the biotic and/or abiotic components of a habitat
- Avoiding adverse effects = achieving ‘good’ quality/condition of the seabed
- Many indicators to assess adverse effects but no single indicator captures all elements needed
- **Work is ongoing** with Member States’ experts (NWWAC as an observer)

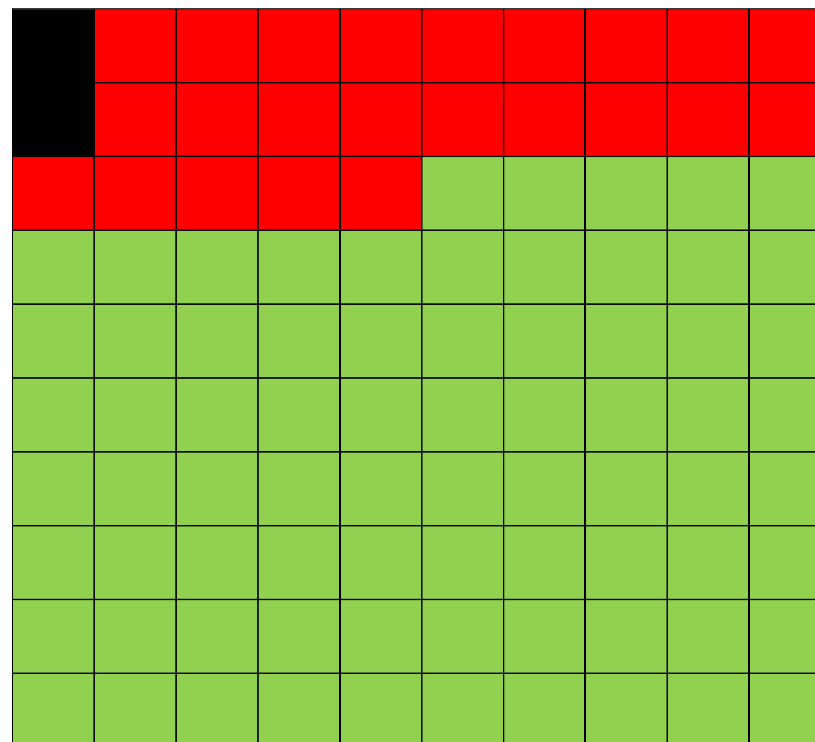
*A benthic broad habitat type is adversely affected in an assessment area if it shows an unacceptable deviation from the reference state in its biotic and abiotic structure and functions (e.g. typical species composition, relative abundance and size structure, sensitive species or species providing key functions, recoverability and functioning of habitats and ecosystem processes).*

## Benthic broad habitat type (BHT) in reference state ('pristine')



Whole BHT in reference state  
(100%)

## Benthic broad habitat type in Good environmental status



D6C4: Extent of loss (2%)

D6C5: Extent adversely affected (23%)

D6C5: Extent not adversely affected  
(i.e. in good quality/condition) (75%)

# Final words

## Article 4(1) Commission Decision

Threshold values should be :

- Consistent with Union legislation
- Set on the basis of the precautionary principle
- Make use of best available science

## Article 4(4) Commission Decision

*“Threshold values established by Member States in accordance with this Decision may be periodically reviewed in the light of scientific and technical progress and amended, where necessary, in time for the reviews provided for in Article 17(2)(a) of Directive 2008/56/EC”*

**Commission notice** of 11 March 2024 on the threshold values set under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC and Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 (document 2024\_1268) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52024XC02078&Bqid=1710328433367>





# Thank you



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