



**P1.60 - Optimal tool selection for EBM approaches supporting GES assessments:
How sensitive is the guidance from the SEAS4GES decision support tool?**

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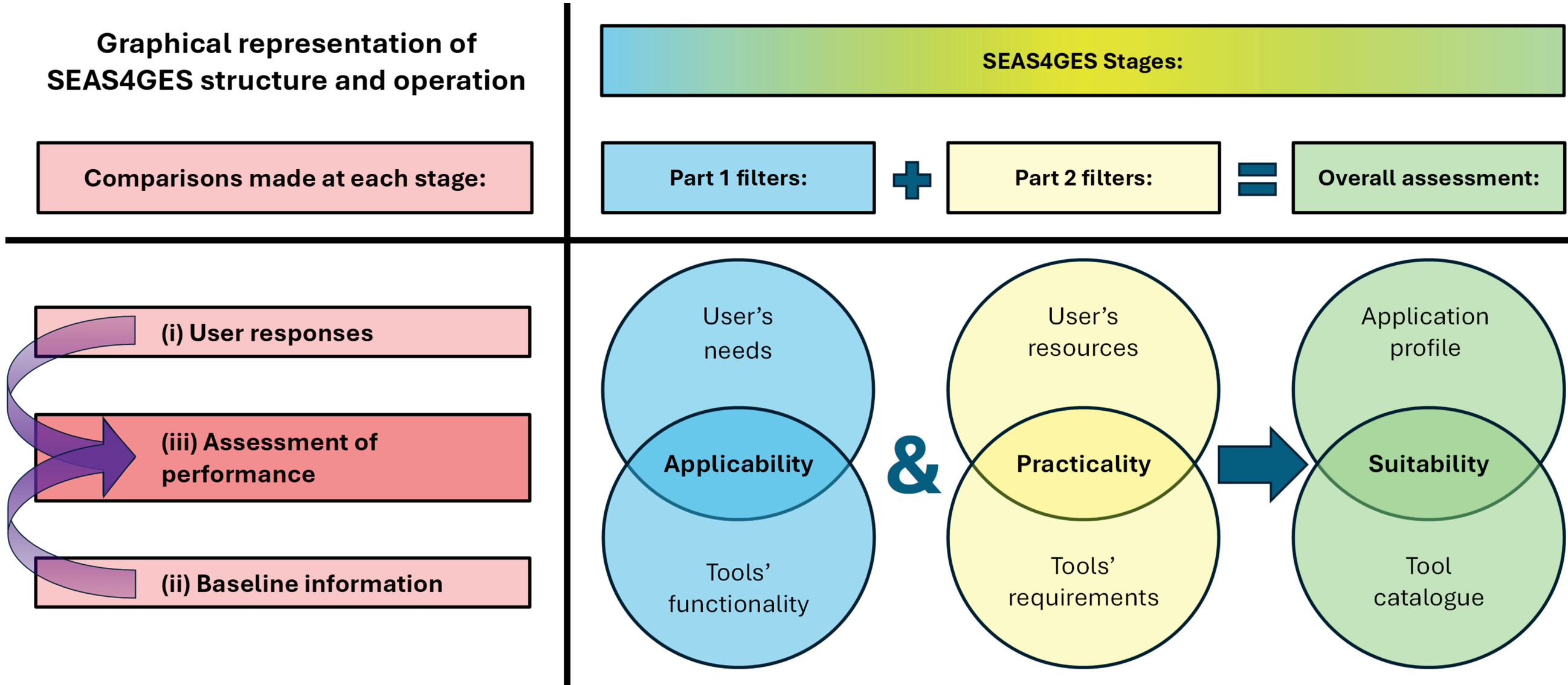


1. Introduction: Many different tools and approaches can be used to implement EBM as part of GES assessments, and each comes with its own strengths and weaknesses (e.g. [Berg et al., 2015](#)), but what has the GES4SEAS project told us about the application of Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) tools to GES determinations under the MSFD?

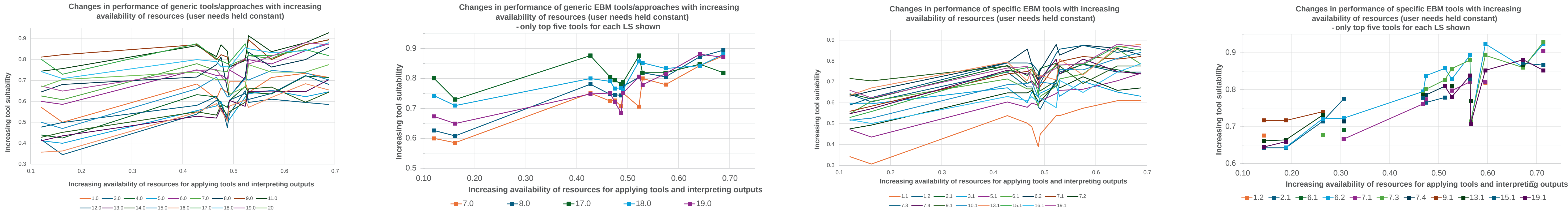
- We know that **EBM tools that support ecosystem-based management principles in marine spatial planning processes are important** – e.g. [Galparsoro, et al. 2025](#);
- We know that **there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach**, and that **different situations call for different tools** – [Papadopoulou et al., 2025](#); and
- We have **developed a decision support tool capable of identifying optimal EBM tools for specific scenarios** (Selection of Ecosystem-based Approaches **S4 GES**, SEAS4GES) – e.g., [Barnard et al., 2026](#); and see related poster, [P1.59](#)).
- The **SEAS4GES tool assesses the overall suitability of EBM tools as a function of their applicability** (will the tool deliver what the user wants?) **and practicality** (can the user provide the resources required to apply the tool?). It **considers both generic EBM approaches** (e.g. simple assessment indices such as M-AMBI), **and prominent examples of specific EBM tools** (e.g. overarching assessment tools such as NEAT).

2. Sensitivity of the SEAS4GES tool: It is evident that optimal tool choice is related to the specific circumstances of each application, a combination of **user-needs** and **resource availability** (i.e. the **type and quality of input data**, and the **skills and experience of staff**).

- **In practice**, when looking to apply EBM tools or approaches to address either statutory reporting obligations or operational (management) needs relating to the EU MSFD, **users are likely to have only limited freedom of choice over their range of needs** (e.g., over the particular element, or application, of EBM that they need to address, or over which GES Descriptors they are concerned about).
- Conversely, **there is potentially much more variation in the user’s options around resourcing, and so in meeting the needs of particular tools**. For example, additional user-specific expertise may be co-opted onto a project, and access to ancillary data might be improved by increased cooperation with other agencies or research groups.
- The investigation reported here **examines how sensitive the SEAS4GES tool is in its responses to the estimation of overall suitability scores** for a suite of 35 EBM tools or approaches, **given changes in the level of resource availability**, as reported across the SEAS4GES Project’s 13 Learning Sites (LS).



3. Performance & sensitivity (user needs held constant, resource availability varied by site):



- **For all assessments, the responses to the first set of filters (user needs) were kept constant**, based on responses provided by GES4SEAS colleagues from AZTI, **reflecting a standardised application scenario (S.01) developed to provide feedback on the useability of the SEAS4GES tool from across the project’s 13 LS** - specifically, the responses were intended to represent a situation where the respondent assumed the role of a decision-maker, working in the national competent authority, and implementing the MSFD with a particular focus on using EBM tools to support single MSFD Descriptors/single issues (e.g., eutrophication, NIS, HABs) as well as wider GES assessments.
- **Responses to the second set of filters (user resource availability) were provided by other members of the wider GES4SEAS project team across the 13 LS** during the early development and testing of the SEAS4GES tool. These **responses provided a wide variation in the users’ reported resource availability, which reflected ‘real world’ situations**.
- **An overall index of the level of resource availability was calculated for each LS** (based on the overall number of resource elements that each LS was able to provide, as defined by their responses to the second set of filters).
- Selected **outputs from the SEAS4GES assessments across all 13 LS are reproduced above** - for all generic EBM tools/approaches (plot 1), and for specific EBM tools (plot 3); and also for just the five top performing generic tools/approaches, and for specific tools, at each LS (plots 2 & 4).
- For each plot, **estimates of tool suitability for each LS were plotted against the index of the LS resource availability**.
- Consequently, in the plots above, **the LS are arranged along the horizontal axis, with each LS being represented by the value for its index of resource availability**.
- **Overall each of the 35 EBM approaches and tools show a general increase in suitability as resource availability increases**. This was expected given the structure of the SEAS4GES assessment algorithms.
- The outputs show that **changes in tool suitability as a result of increasing resource availability are not steadily incremental**. The unique requirements of each tool generates ‘noise’ around the general increasing trend. The assessments undertaken assume that all aspects of the tools’ requirements are equally important, whereas **the absence of a key resource may be ‘critical’ for one EBM tool whilst for another it may be considerably less important**.
- It is clear that there is also a **considerable amount of variation in the make-up of the top five tools for each LS**. Across three of the assessments (plots 1, 3 & 4) between 10 and 12 different tools appear within the top five identified across the 13 LS. In contrast, the assessments for the top five generic tools/approaches at each LS (plot 2) has the same set of tools appearing across all 13 LS. This firmly **underlines the concept of there being ‘no single best EBM tool’** ([Papadopoulou et al. 2025](#)), and **clearly demonstrates how different tools become more, or less, suitable with changes to the scope of the user’s application parameters** (i.e. changes either to their needs or, as in this study, resources).
- Overall, these results **show the SEAS4GES tool to be sufficiently sensitive as to discriminate between changes in tool suitability given relatively small changes in assessment inputs**, and that **it provides a consistent means of assessing how EBM tools vary in their suitability when presented with differing levels of user needs and resource availability**.

4. References cited:

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