

LITTER-FREE IS THE WAY TO BE

ACTIONS FOR A HEALTHY MEDITERRANEAN



Union pour la Méditerranée
Union for the Mediterranean
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط



THE ISSUE AT STAKE

Marine litter — and marine plastic pollution in particular — is a major threat due to its significant environmental, economic, social, political and cultural implications. Marine litter negatively impacts **coastal and marine ecosystems** and the **services** they provide, ultimately affecting **people's livelihoods** and **well-being**. Marine plastic pollution is not just an oceans' pollution issue. It is an air pollution and climate issue too as plastic — admittedly an indispensable material of today's

societies — contributes to greenhouse gas emissions at every stage of its lifecycle, from its production to its refining and up to the way it is managed as a waste product.

Plastic pollution in the Mediterranean Sea poses a threat to **countries' wellbeing, economic resilience** and **environmental sustainability**, with potential effects on human health yet to be fully understood.

as estimated in 2015, are at the level of over **260,000 tonnes** per year or **730 tonnes per day**, depending on the coastal population, which may vary depending on the country, representing more than 2% of the total inputs in the world's oceans (UNEP/MAP, 2015).

The root causes of marine litter in the Mediterranean are the same as anywhere else in the world: a complex combination of **production and consumption patterns, irresponsible behavior of individuals and economic sectors**, weak enforcement and/or **lack of policy and legislative frameworks**, poor solid waste management practices, **misconceptions** related to possible solutions, fragmented understanding of the problem due to the lack of fit-for-purpose data.

Overall, the Mediterranean economy is still marked by a linear system, which over-exploits natural resources, causes pollution and thus undermines fragile ecosystems: in a region considered a biodiversity hotspot, waste prevention and reduction through upstream solutions are urgently needed.

Circular economy is a unique opportunity for Mediterranean countries to 'build back better' after the current COVID-19 crisis and to improve

the resilience of the economic system. It also constitutes a lever to help achieve the UN 2030 Agenda and several of its SDGs.

Within this context, **PLASTIC BUSTERS** is continuously and concretely consolidating and advancing actions towards a litter-free Mediterranean.



The Mediterranean basin is **particularly vulnerable** to pressures from its densely populated coasts, highly developed tourism, and heavy maritime traffic (30 percent of the world maritime traffic); a vulnerability exacerbated by the low renewal rate of its waters and the structural lack of proper waste management systems and infrastructure (from collection to recycling) in most surrounding

countries. Litter items found on Mediterranean beaches appear to originate primarily from recreational and tourism related activities, and poor municipal waste management practices.

It is widely acknowledged that the Mediterranean Sea is one of the most affected seas by marine litter worldwide. Inputs of plastics into the sea,



PLASTIC BUSTERS

Connection with key regional frameworks on marine litter as well as with related processes and projects

UNION FOR MEDITERRANEAN

UfM Ministerial(s) on Sustainable Blue Economy, February 2021, and related UfM Working Group (1)

MED Blue Economy Platform (2)

UfM Ministerial on Environment and Climate Action (3)

'GreenerMed Agenda', October 2021, and related UfM Working Group (4)

BARCELONA CONVENTION

Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean (5)

Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea (IMAP) (6)

Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine Litter in the Mediterranean (7)

Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring Marine Litter

EUROPEAN UNION

Marine Strategy Framework Directive (8)

Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy (9)

Green deal (10)

Directive (EU) 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment (SUP Directive) (11)

Marine Strategy Framework Directive Technical Group on Marine Litter (12)

PLASTIC BUSTERS INITIATIVE

ACTION 1 ASSESSMENT VIA HARMONISED MONITORING APPROACHES

Addressing data gaps and needs with regards to marine litter, to complement existing assessments carried out in the region as well as the further development and practical implementation of harmonized monitoring approaches in line with the related advances made at Barcelona Convention and EU levels.

ACTION 2 DEMO ACTIONS FOR TESTING PREVENTION & MITIGATION MEASURES

Developing and coordinating the implementation of demonstration projects showcasing actions to prevent, reduce and mitigate marine litter in the Mediterranean Sea, based on the measures provided by the Barcelona Convention Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean, the EU MSFD Programmes of Measures, the EU SUPs Directive, etc.

The **Plastic Busters Initiative** kick-started in 2013 to address some of the scientific and policy gaps existing at the time in the Mediterranean region. Since then, improvements have been implemented on the science policy interface, with Plastic Busters contributing to the regional policy context as well as being informed by it. Born under the umbrella of **SDSN Mediterranean** (United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network), the Initiative provides a **concrete opportunity** to like-minded projects dealing with marine litter issues to **get together** and **fully explore** the potential for synergies towards ensuring aligned and synchronized marine litter activities across the Mediterranean. The Plastic Busters Initiative strives to push forward a shared common objective: to **effectively tackle the issue of marine litter in the Mediterranean** by addressing its entire management cycle, from monitoring and assessment to prevention and mitigation, thus contributing to evidence- and science-based support to governance.

Led by the **University of Siena** (scientific Coordinator Prof. Maria Cristina Fossi), and implemented by a consortium of 15 Partners from around the Mediterranean, the Plastic Busters Initiative works in four key areas of intervention:

ACTION 3 GOVERNANCE SUPPORT

Strengthening the science-policy interface by providing fit-for-purpose marine litter data; recommendations for a comprehensive and harmonized marine litter monitoring strategy; concrete showcases and guidelines for operationalizing best practice marine litter measures; capacity building of institutional actors on marine litter related issues, etc.

ACTION 4 CAPACITY BUILDING & AWARENESS RAISING

Designing and coordinating the implementation of awareness raising campaigns and education for sustainable development programmes, tailor-made to the needs of different stakeholders, including the educational community.

PLASTIC BUSTERS INITIATIVE (13)

UfM labelling of Plastic Busters (14)

PROJECTS WHICH ARE PART OF THE PLASTIC BUSTERS INITIATIVE

Interreg Med — Plastic Busters MPAs (15)

ENI CBC MED — COMMON (16)

ENI CBC MED — Plastic Busters CAP (17)

PROJECTS WHICH ARE ASSOCIATED/LINKED TO THE PLASTIC BUSTERS INITIATIVE

EU Water and Environment Support (WES) (18)

Interreg Med Green Growth Community (19)

Interreg Med Blue Growth Community (20)

SwitchMed (21)

OTHER RELEVANT PROCESSES ASSOCIATED LINKED TO PLASTIC BUSTERS

EU Mission for Oceans, seas and waters (22)

BLUEMED (23)

WESTMED (24)

EUSAIR (25)

Interreg Euro-Med Strategic Framework (26)

ENI CBC MED Strategic Framework (27)

MOVING FORWARD

MOST URGENT ACTIONS TO ADDRESS MARINE LITTER POLLUTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

WHAT DOES EXPERIENCE TELLS US

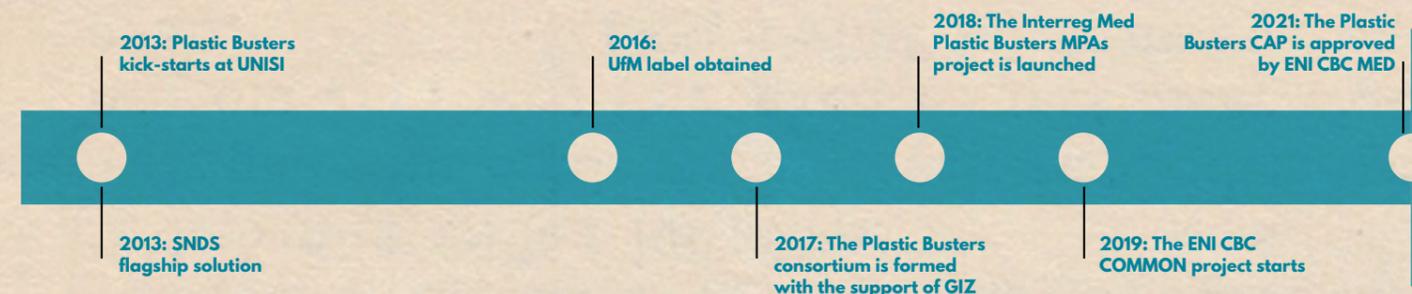
Time is not in our favour. Urgent actions are needed to reverse the increase of marine litter pollution in general and marine plastic pollution in particular in the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean needs to accelerate the transition towards a regenerative growth model that gives back to the planet more than it takes, advance towards keeping its resource consumption within planetary boundaries, and therefore strive to reduce its consumption footprint and

double its circular material use rate in the coming decade.

The **processes, initiatives** and **projects featured in this document**, all align in illustrating the need for a shift in production and consumption patterns, coupled with ambitious actions to prevent and mitigate marine litter effects. In concrete terms there is urgency in:

THE PLASTIC BUSTERS INITIATIVE TIMELINE



1. MOVING TOWARDS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

Keeping a linear economy and reducing the amount of environmentally harmful materials is not enough to curb the catastrophic path of marine litter. This approach can have more damaging effects by creating a false sense of “environmental consciousness and responsibility” in consumers.

Reducing the consumption footprint and increasing the circular material use rate is a targeted priority, which should also be seen in the context of the European Green Deal. Natural resources underpin national economies, provide crucial raw materials for everyday life, and are necessary to almost every sector of the global economy. In particular, given the size of the demand, raw materials (including both primary and secondary raw materials obtained through recycling) will continue to play a key role in the economy.

A comprehensive intervention is needed with a strong focus on new/sustainable behaviours and lifestyles, different from the current *throwaway culture* in society, with waste prevention becoming a priority. They should include:

The **full embedment of circularity in policy and institutional frameworks.** Governments’ intervention (national and regional levels) is key to steer the circular economy transition in coordination with the business sector and the civil society. Actions like raising awareness, mobilising private sector and other key stakeholders (i.e. consumers), are critical and need to

be coordinated. Likewise, enabling frameworks require coherent measures in large number of relevant policy areas such as industrial development, entrepreneurship, trade, research and innovation and education and skills development.

Enhance Integrated Waste Management Plans. Ambitious waste prevention (e.g., those integrating zero waste objectives and strategies) and management measures (including through waste prevention and management plans aligned with the waste hierarchy and circular economy objectives; targets for recycling of key waste streams and reducing landfills; extended producer responsibility schemes and deposit return schemes for plastic products and packaging) are urgently needed;

New business models, are needed to favor resource-efficient production and uptake of clean technologies; promote upcycling businesses, engage and involve the private sector including the need to implement safe and sustainable approaches in the design stage of product development; use the Green Public Procurement as a lever for new business models.

Phase out Single Use Plastics and prevent plastic pollution by enhancing the capacities of national and regional authorities in transposing the main requirements of the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive.



2. DEVELOPING INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE AND ACTIONS.

The Mediterranean Sea has to be considered as a whole, and marine litter as a multi-dimensional challenge for which non-coordinated responses offer little effectiveness and impact. Geographical, administrative, sectoral boundaries cannot constitute a hurdle to action. In that sense it is urgent to:

- Strengthen the **cooperation among all Mediterranean initiatives**, from both the North and the South rims of the Mediterranean basin, maintaining a clear overview of the entire management cycle of marine litter, **ensuring land/sea dimensions. Capitalize on current results and advance towards a region-wide approach**, ensuring long term support to the ongoing process. Disseminate and exchange best practices and, where relevant, compare the different circular economy initiatives, to take forward partnership initiatives.

- Although useful data on marine litter exists and has been recently improved in the region (types, quantities, etc.) it is inconsistent and geographically restricted mainly to the North Mediterranean. Standardized monitoring data for assessment purposes concerning the problem of litter across the whole Mediterranean is still a necessity and information sharing between and among NGOs, IGOs, research institutes, relevant authorities, etc. in the region regarding marine litter related data needs to be improved through **an enhanced common information sharing system**.

- Map domestic policies and regulatory frameworks** in Mediterranean countries on the management of natural resources (e.g. water, soil, minerals, biomass) and the circular economy transition, including sustainable use, improving circularity, and strengthening resilience to climate change impacts. Enhancing the implementation of selected ML policy/regulatory prevention and reduction common measures at sub-regional/national levels and sharing of related best practices.

- Developing and applying regionally harmonized approaches, guidelines and tools to ensure effective implementation of selected measures. Improve, and/or widely implement a **Harmonized Marine Litter monitoring strategy at the Mediterranean level**, working with a novel, harmonized protocol to detect the presence and impact of marine litter on biodiversity via a set of bioindicator species (ranging from invertebrates to marine mammals) across the entire Mediterranean basin, in line with both MSFD and IMAP indicators. Such harmonized protocol shall allow the identification of hotspot areas for marine litter threats to marine biodiversity as well as of prevention and mitigation actions (such as banning single use plastics; establishing derelict fishing gear management; banning specific activities; introducing extended producer responsibility; implementing awareness raising campaigns). Significant efforts should be addressed on enlarging the geographical scope of marine litter monitoring programmes to assess the presence and effects of marine litter in marine protected areas (MPAs), within the context of the SDG 14 Life Below Water

- Reinforce the role of the Science-Policy-Society interface**. This should be strengthened by favouring Research & Development projects gathering industry and academia and by encouraging the connection between scientific research and societal needs to address marine litter. Effective implementation of such interface must also be enabled via adequate capacity building programs and proper financing of key actors, such as MPA management bodies, local and national environmental protection agencies, and the alike.

- Enforcing current **legislation and policy measures addressing marine litter including on responsibility and liability issues** and further develop and upgrade them.

3. ADOPTING A SYSTEMIC, INTERCONNECTED APPROACH.

- Going forward, a more holistic and systemic approach shall be adopted to fight marine litter in order to really understand (and address via new diagnostic systems) the whole set of impacts and stressors that human activities are posing on biodiversity and on oceans' health. **Cumulative direct and indirect stressors** caused by marine litter, chemical contamination, climate change, and emerging pathogens among others, concur in destabilizing the precarious balances of marine biodiversity, marine ecosystems, and their services.

- A paradigm shift should then be embraced to recognise the health-environment nexus as the core of planetary health and evolve **from cost-benefit analysis to recognition of**

'co-benefits'. A new approach to addressing environmental problems is needed that does not recognise a trade-off between 'saving the economy' and 'saving lives', nor between 'the economy' and 'the environment', but rather works towards the concurrent achievements of the preservation of oceans, marine economic activities, and human livelihood and wellbeing.

- To this end, it is of priority to link **human livelihood and well-being with ocean health** and realize that monitoring and addressing cumulative stresses on the oceans via a co-benefits approach means not only to preserve the health of ocean ecosystems but also to preserve human livelihood via accessing better quality ecosystem services (e.g., fisheries, climate stabilization, etc.).



The PLASTIC BUSTERS INITIATIVE and its operational actors will continue working together in further consolidating the collective fight against marine litter in the Mediterranean driven by the aforementioned priorities and recommendations.

- 1 <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Declaration-UfM-Blue-Economy-EN-1.pdf>
- 2 <https://medblueconomyplatform.org/>
- 3 <https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Declaration-UfM-Blue-Economy-EN-1.pdf>
- 4 https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UfM-2030GreenerMed-initiative-and-Annex-1-post-Task-Force-June-2021_updated.pdf
- 5 <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/index.php/news/news/regional-plan-marine-litter-management-mediterranean-prevent-and-eliminate-pollution#:~:text=Jul%202014%20News-,Regional%20Plan%20on%20Marine%20Litter%20Management%20in%20the%20Mediterranean%20to,eliminate%2>
- 6 <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/monitoring-and-assessments>
- 7 <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/projects/MarineLitterMED>
- 8 https://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index_en.htm
- 9 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0028&from=EN>
- 10 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal>
- 11 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/904/oj>
- 12 https://mcc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/main/dev.py?N=41&O=434&titre_chap=TG
- 13 <https://plasticbusters.unisi.it/>
- 14 <https://ufmsecretariat.org/human-story/plastic-busters/>
- 15 <https://plasticbustersmpas.interreg-med.eu/>
- 16 <https://www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/common>
- 17 <https://www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/funded-projects>
- 18 <https://www.wes-med.eu/>
- 19 <https://green-growth.interreg-med.eu/>
- 20 <https://blue-growth.interreg-med.eu/>
- 21 <https://switchmed.eu/>
- 22 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/missions-horizon-europe/healthy-oceans-seas-coastal-and-inland-waters_es
- 23 <http://www.blued-med-initiative.eu/>
- 24 <https://www.westmed-initiative.eu/>
- 25 <https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/>
- 26 <https://interreg-med.eu/index.php?id=13352&L=0>
- 27 <http://www.enpicbcmed.eu/communication/eni-cbc-med-2014-2020-strategy-new-programme-explained>

