



2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

The Regional response for the protection of the marine environment and its marine living resources from plastic pollution – A concrete case from the Mediterranean

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3 June 2022, Altice Arena, Side Event Room 1

Organized by:

- (i) Ministry of the Environment and Energy of Greece (Lead Organizer);
- (ii) United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) (Co-organizer);
- (iii) Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication (INFO/RAC) of UNEP/MAP;
- (iv) Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (MedWaves) of UNEP/MAP;
- (v) Plan Bleu Regional Activity Centre of UNEP/MAP.

Background on the event (one paragraph)

Marine litter, especially plastics, poses severe threats to nature and people in the Mediterranean. With an estimated annual leakage of 229,000 tonnes, plastic pollution causes considerable social and economic challenges and undermines activities upon which Mediterranean economies and communities depend, including tourism and fisheries. The side-event has been designed as a concrete Mediterranean contribution to the global debate on addressing marine plastic pollution. It showcased progress and lessons learned in the Mediterranean, a regional Sea where the Contracting Parties to the [Barcelona Convention](#) have made notable strides on a common normative framework on marine litter, including plastics and micro-plastics, well ahead of the adoption of the [landmark resolution](#) for an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution at UNEA 5.2 (February 2022).

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- The **Mediterranean was the first Regional Sea to adopt legally binding regulations to reduce and prevent marine litter and plastic pollution with time-bound implementation targets**. In particular, the [Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean](#) in place since 2013, updated and further aligned to circular economy principles in 2021, constitutes a new phase in the region's endeavor against marine litter and plastic pollution. From this perspective, the pioneering experience of the Mediterranean can offer important insights and lessons learned to other regions in the world.
- Apart from regional efforts, **detailed policies and measures at the national level** exist throughout the Mediterranean. At the side-event specific initiatives to address the plastic pollution challenges,

including upstream and downstream measures, have been presented by representatives of Greece and Tunisia.

- Successful **Circular Economy approaches** and recommendations to boost the required upstream actions to tackle plastic pollution were highlighted by the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (MedWaves) of UNEP/MAP.
- The New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, launched in October 2018 by the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#) and UNEP, supporting a circular economy for plastics, was presented as a tool to encourage countries and stakeholders to step up activities and adopt voluntary measures to combat plastic pollution, including through circular economy approaches, while negotiations on the global treaty on plastic pollution continue until 2024.
- The wealth and importance of **voluntary initiatives in the Mediterranean** undertaken by stakeholders and the private sector were captured in presentations of successful activities that boost citizen/participatory science and support monitoring, ocean literacy, citizens' engagement. Activities presented by [MIO-ECSDE](#) and [ENALEIA](#) (with a spotlight on those taking place in Greece) include clean-ups, "fish for litter" and "adopt-a-beach" initiatives by regional and national organisations around the Mediterranean, as part of a whole-of-society endeavor against marine litter.
- The side-event presented examples of concrete measures and up-scalable pilot interventions as well as proven successful national approaches aiming to facilitate the sharing of experiences in meeting national commitments to tackle plastic litter. Concrete solutions for a circular blue economy, including targeted actions and common shared solutions anchored to the SDGs, have also been presented.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- **At the global level**, the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) towards the elaboration of a global treaty on plastic pollution by 2024 needs to be supported and made as effective and as inclusive as possible, covering both strategic and substantive aspects, the full-life cycle of plastics, upstream and downstream measures, as well as legal and technical issues.
- **At the regional level**, the Barcelona Convention through its instruments, in particular the Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management, provides a comprehensive framework to promote circular economy objectives and achieve collective tangible targets. Moreover, citizen/participatory marine science should be further and systematically promoted.
- **At the national level**, countries need to intensify policies and measures on three levels:
 - Sustainable design of products;
 - Reduction of plastic consumption and use; and
 - Increased collection, sorting and recycling.

While monitoring as well as setting baselines and feasible roadmaps should be further enhanced and policies should be designed through participatory processes together with stakeholders, in particular the private sector, considering economic implications. Only through an inclusive multistakeholder approach, with the meaningful participation of all concerned partners, can the challenge of marine litter be tackled effectively.

- "We need to act together!" It is crucial that consistent efforts are made towards **large-scale interventions on ocean literacy and general public awareness raising for enhanced citizens' engagement**. Bottom-up initiatives of regional and national NGOs/CSOs and other actors need support so that all stakeholders become part of the solution and drive the momentum that will accelerate progress.

Voluntary Commitments (one paragraph)

GREECE:

- committed to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic beverage and food containers, at least by 30% by 2024, and at least by 60% by 2026 compared to 2022, and to promote more sustainable materials and alternatives;
- committed to collect and recycle 40% of fishing gear containing plastic, starting from 2025;
- committed to halving marine plastic litter and reducing the disposal of microplastics by 30%, by 2030.

MIO-ECSDE (Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development):

- committed to strongly advocate the inclusion of ocean literacy as major priority in the revised Action Plan of the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development.
- committed to promote large-scale campaigns throughout the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) on: (i) ocean literacy and related teachers' training in cooperation with UNESCO; (ii) citizen/participatory science contributing to marine litter monitoring in cooperation with the Barcelona Convention system and the European Environment Agency (EEA).

ENALEIA:

- pledged to collect more than 10,000 tons of plastic from the sea by 2025 through the fishing - community network engaged and trained in "fishing for litter" activities.