2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

Science and awareness: building Mediterranean networks against marine litter

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Organized by: Legambiente Onlus, University of Siena, Union for Mediterranean

Background on the event (one paragraph)

More than 450 million people populate the Mediterranean region, and the anthropogenic pressures are on their rise due to forecasted population growth, coastal urbanization, maritime traffic, fishing, inputs from large rivers. Furthermore, the Mediterranean, that is one of the 25 major biodiversity hotspots in the world and is home to about 17000 different species, is warming 20% faster than the rest of the world and, with current policies, temperatures are expected to increase of 2,2 °C by 2040.
According to the IUCN report "Mare Plasticum: The Mediterranean", the region is one of the most polluted in the world mainly due to the threat of marine litter and to one of the highest concentrations of plastic debris, producing between 208-760 kg of solid waste per capita per year. About 229.000 tons of plastic end up in the Mediterranean every year, mainly from Turkey, Egypt, and Italy,
This specific situation requires, in fact, a strong governance and a joint policy among the Med countries, NGOs, local authorities, research institutions and other stakeholders.
To better understand sources of pollution and try to propose valuable solutions, marine litter monitoring activities are crucial, they need to be harmonised and jointly implemented as common solutions for a sea without borders. In this respect, a strong link between scientific research and awareness activities, in our vision, is the best option to reach these objectives.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- Link between research activities and awareness events: using citizen science activities to sensibilise and to raise awareness, inducing a real change in behaviour.
- How minimize the impact of ML on biodiversity at Mediterranean level: understand the impact of ML in different compartments and categorize it to understand the sources.
- Improve and share proposal for common policies to fight ML at Mediterranean level: a cooperation between north and south is fundamental.

- Importance of Blue Economy on preventing ML pollution.
- Importance of cooperation and the support of European financial programmes(Mission Restore our Ocean, ENI CBC Med, InterregMed…).
- Importance of the science-policy interface to find common solution to reduce the impact and prevent ML pollution.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- Enhance synergies between countries but also between financial programmes and institutions to coordinate actions and create consensus.
- Work on basin level building networks and partnerships to share data, best policies and best practices.
- Harmonize monitoring protocols: the results have to be comparable, so we need to transfer all the strategies to the south of the Mediterranean basin.
- New harmonize diagnosis approach: use multiple species approach and work on different environments; three folder approach for a more complete assessment of the real impact of ML.
- Communication and transformation of scientific results in concrete actions: transform diagnosis in mitigation actions that have to be replicable.
- Integrate scientific results, local knowledge, citizen science to build recommendations based on participatory approach within ICZM tool for new solutions to tackle ML.

Voluntary Commitments (one paragraph)

The commitment presented in 2017 by Legambiente and University of Siena contributed to the creation of network on Mediterranean sea for harmonizing monitoring techniques and sharing best practices to minimize the impact of ML in the whole basin through the usage of participatory processes and citizen science activities. Starting from research activities of PB_MPA and LIFE Muscles projects we try to push real changes in behaviour and in legislations with the actions of COMMON project capitalised in the PB_CAP project, supporting governance at basin level.