An underwater photograph of a coral reef. The reef is covered in various types of coral, including branching and table corals. There are several pieces of plastic litter, including a red bottle and a white plastic bag, scattered across the reef. The water is clear and blue.

Plastic Busters MPAs Policy Brief of the state-of-play of marine litter management in Mediterranean MPAs

Photo © Thomais Vlachogianni

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This document (Deliverable 6.4.1) maps out all recent policy and legislative advances made at European and Mediterranean level related to marine litter.

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1. The issue at stake

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the areas most affected by marine litter worldwide. Marine litter is found lying on the shores, as well as floating anywhere from the surface to the bottom of the sea. Even in pristine environments of the Mediterranean, such as coastal and marine protected areas (MPAs), marine litter is building up threatening habitats and species. Impacts vary from entanglement and ingestion, to bio-accumulation and bio-magnification of toxic substances released from litter items, facilitation of introduction of invasive species, damages to benthic habitats, etc. MPA managers stand at the forefront of this issue, and sadly they lack the tools, knowledge, and often the resources to effectively tackle it. As a result, the achievement of the conservation goals set is hampered.

2. About this document

This policy brief provides an up-to-date overview of the main policy and legislative instruments in place at the European and Mediterranean level that can be instrumental in the collective fight against marine litter in Mediterranean MPAs. Moreover, this document features some key messages with recommendations on how MPA managers can utilize these policies and legislations at the MPA level to tackle the problem of marine litter. This document does not seek to provide an exhaustive inventory of existing policies and legislative tools related to marine litter. Instead, it seeks to contribute to the debate on better managing marine litter in Mediterranean MPAs by looking at existing tools targeting this issue within other contexts and supporting future efforts to tackle this global environmental challenge.

3. The Plastic Busters MPAs in a nutshell

This policy brief has been developed within the framework of Plastic Busters MPAs, a 4-year-long Interreg Mediterranean funded project aiming to contribute to maintaining biodiversity and preserving natural ecosystems in pelagic and coastal marine protected areas by defining and implementing a harmonized approach against marine litter. The project entails actions that address the whole management cycle of marine litter, from monitoring and assessment to prevention and mitigation, as well as actions to strengthen networking between and among pelagic and coastal MPAs.

The Plastic Busters MPAs consolidates Mediterranean efforts against marine litter by:

- ▶ Assessing the impacts of marine litter on biodiversity in MPAs and identifying marine litter 'hotspots';
- ▶ Defining and testing tailor-made marine litter surveillance, prevention and mitigation measures in MPAs;
- ▶ Developing a common framework of marine litter actions for Interreg Mediterranean regions towards conserving biodiversity in Med MPAs.

The Plastic Busters MPAs project deploys the multidisciplinary strategy and common framework of action developed within the Plastic Busters initiative, labelled under the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2016, capturing the political support of 43 Euro-Mediterranean countries.

4. The policy context

The main policy and legislative instruments in place, at the European and Mediterranean level, are presented in the following infographic. These instruments (strategies, directives, action plans, etc.) are organized per geographical scope of implementation (global, regional, European) and per marine litter categories addressed (shown as pictograms).

Legend



Solid waste



Fishing gear



Plastic bags



Passively fished waste - litter collected in the nets



Plastic products



Packaging



Single-use plastics






















Microplastics



Marine litter

POLICY & LEGISLATION TITLE	YEAR	SHORT DESCRIPTION	Marine litter categories
GLOBAL LEVEL			
MARPOL Convention - Annex V "Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships"	1988	Convention - Annex V related to controlling and preventing pollution from garbage, meaning pollution from solid waste, including plastic waste.	
UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	1993	Convention - Parties are urged "to develop and implement measures, policies and instruments to prevent the discard, disposal, loss or abandonment of any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material in the marine and coastal environment (Decision of 2016 XIII/10 on addressing impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity, points 6 and 8).	
UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	2015	Action plan - Sustainable Development Goal N. 14 - By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.	
REGIONAL LEVEL			
Regional Plan on the Management of Marine Litter in the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention)	2013	Action plan - The main objectives are to prevent and reduce to the minimum marine litter pollution in the Mediterranean and its impact on ecosystem services, habitats, species, public health, and safety; remove to the extent possible already existent marine litter; enhance knowledge on marine litter.	

Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea (IMAP) (Barcelona Convention)	2016	Programme - a key achievement for the Mediterranean region for quantitative, integrated analysis of the status of the marine and coastal environment based on common regional indicators, targets, and Good Environmental Status descriptions - EO 10: Marine litter: Marine and coastal litter do not adversely affect the coastal and marine environment.	
2030GreenerMed Agenda (Thematic Axis 2) (Union for the Mediterranean)	2020	Agenda - It will support actions to prevent and reduce pollution on the land, sea, and air from different sources, focusing on plastic pollution and marine litter, strengthening the mechanisms for their prevention, facilitating investments in infrastructure, and promoting nature-based solutions whenever feasible.	
EUROPEAN LEVEL			
Directive (EU) 2015/720 amending Directive 94/62/EC as regards reducing the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags (Plastic Bags Directive)	2015	EU Directive - It requires the Member States to take measures such as national reduction targets and/or economic instruments (e.g. fees, taxes) and marketing restrictions (bans).	
EU Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy	2018	Strategy - The first EU-wide policy framework adopting a life-cycle approach integrating design, use, reuse, and recycling of plastic products.	
Directive (EU) 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment (SUP Directive)	2019	EU Directive - Where sustainable alternatives are easily available and affordable, single-use plastic products cannot be placed on the markets of EU Member States. Different measures are being applied to different products. For other single-use plastic products, the EU focuses on reducing consumption, introducing design requirements, labelling requirements, and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. Regulation on fishing gear is also included.	
Directive (EU) 2018/851 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste (Waste Framework Directive)	2018	EU Directive - Amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste. The latest amendment contains updated measures to protect the environment and human health by preventing or reducing the generation of waste, the adverse impacts of the generation and management of waste and by reducing overall impacts of resource use and improving the efficiency of such use, which are crucial for the transition to a circular economy and for guaranteeing the Union's long-term competitiveness.	
Directive (EU) 2018/852 amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste	2018	EU Directive - Amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste. The latest amendment contains updated measures to prevent the production of packaging waste and promote the reuse, recycling and other forms of recovering	

waste (Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive)		packaging waste. It also sets specific targets for recycling by 2025 and 2030.	
Directive (EU) 2019/883 on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships	2019	EU Directive - It regulates the discharges of waste from ships by improving the availability and use of adequate port reception facilities and the delivery of waste, including derelict fishing gear from the fishing sector. The directive further targets “fished waste” (waste collected in nets during fishing operations).	  
EU Action Plan: ‘Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil’	2021	Action plan - The 2021 Zero Pollution Action Plan, a key deliverable of the European Green Deal, puts forth key targets to speed up reducing pollution at source. Target 5 addresses water quality improvement by reducing waste; by 2030, the EU should reduce by 50% plastic litter at sea and 30% microplastics released into the environment. Furthermore, the significant reduction of waste generation and by 50% residual municipal waste is aimed at.	  
Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) 2008/56/EC	2010	EU Directive - The first EU legal instrument to explicitly address marine litter; it required “Good Environmental Status” for marine litter to be achieved by 2020, i.e. that “properties and quantities of marine litter do not cause harm to the coastal and marine environment”. Assessment of the status, target setting, monitoring, reporting, and implementation of marine litter and microlitter measures are carried out following relevant MSFD provisions and have been further specified within a Decision by the European Commission (2017/848/EU).	  
Regulation on microplastics	Upcoming	The EU is drafting legislation to restrict microplastics intentionally added to products and, then, reduce the potential risks to human health and the environment; moreover, within the new Circular Economy Action Plan 2020, the EC committed to addressing the presence of microplastics in the environment by also addressing unintentional releases of microplastics.	
European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	2020	Strategy - Pillar 1: Legally protect at least 30% of the EU’s land area and 30% of its seas. Strictly protect at least a third of the EU’s protected areas - representing 10% of the EU land and 10% of the EU sea. Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures and monitoring them appropriately.	 

5. Key messages

- ▶ **MPAs are at great potential risk from the impacts of marine litter pollution and urgent action is needed**

MPAs are exposed to similar levels of marine litter pollution as non-protected sites, highlighting the urgency for effective management strategies to reduce marine litter inputs in the coastal and marine environment. Impacts from marine litter can be particularly harmful in MPAs, considering they are home to vulnerable and/or highly sensitive species and habitats and providers of important resources and ecosystem services. Furthermore, as litter is considered by the public to be an indicator of an unhealthy coastal and marine environment, its presence in MPAs may alter the public perception of the condition and effectiveness of MPAs.

- ▶ **MPAs can serve as a unifying force and catalyst for change towards litter-free coasts and seas through the participatory elaboration and implementation of MPA-specific marine litter action plans**

MPAs can serve as a unifying force and catalyst for change towards litter-free coasts and seas by bringing together all stakeholders (policy and decision-makers, socio-economic actors, research institutes and academia, citizens) and engaging them in the participatory elaboration and implementation of MPA-specific marine litter action plans. These plans should include site-specific marine litter prevention and mitigation measures and a monitoring plan with well-defined marine litter indicators.

- ▶ **MPAs can pave the way for improved policy implementation and legislation enforcement regarding marine litter**

Even though a dedicated legislative framework to tackle marine litter in MPAs has not been developed, MPAs can benefit from implementing at local level policies and measures established at the national, European and regional level aiming at preventing and mitigating the marine litter impacts. In doing so, MPAs can demonstrate how the gap between local field actions and high-level policymaking can be bridged by also joining forces with municipalities and local authorities.

- ▶ **MPAs can address the marine litter threat by directly operationalizing targeted prevention and mitigation measures**

MPA managers, who stand at the forefront of the marine litter threat, are not powerless; they can directly design and implement no regret measures to prevent and mitigate the impacts of marine litter in their MPAs. These measures may include one or more options from the following graphic list:



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