

Environment and blue economy



UfM-labelled project Plastic Busters (Italy)

The Mediterranean region is one of the world's 25 climate change hotspots, facing **environmental threats to its biodiversity, natural resources and habitable areas**. Furthermore, millions of marine animals die every year because of polluted oceans, while 18% of Mediterranean species are already threatened with extinction.

Aware of this pressing issue, the UfM has adopted a cross-sectoral, region-wide approach, facilitating dialogue to ensure the coherence of policies developed in the region to address these common challenges.



Plastic Busters for a litter free Mediterranean

Marine litter represents a serious threat to the Mediterranean's marine and coastal environments, as well as to human health. Approximately **80% of marine litter is land-based** and most of it is made of plastic and micro-plastics. Its impact on marine biota within marine protected areas, including on endangered species, remains poorly addressed. However, it is clear that prevention and mitigation measures are urgently needed.

The **Plastic Busters MPAs** project stems from the overarching Plastic Busters initiative, promoted by the University of Siena and labelled in 2016 by the 43 UfM member states as a priority regional initiative to prevent, reduce and remove marine litter from the Mediterranean Sea.

Its official launch took place in 2018, following €5 million in funding received from the EU Interreg Med Programme. The project will be implemented by the University of Siena, the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) and a wide consortium of national and regional organisations, with the overall goal of maintaining biodiversity and preserving natural ecosystems in marine protected areas by implementing a harmonised approach to marine litter. Over a 4-year period, **the project will address the entire management cycle of marine litter**, from monitoring and assessment to prevention and mitigation, as well as actions to strengthen networking between pelagic and coastal marine protected areas located in Albania, Croatia, Greece, Italy, France and Spain. Furthermore, it will also develop a **regional plan on marine litter management** in the Mediterranean, including recommendations for policymaking at regional, national and local levels, enabling the transfer of knowledge to Southern Mediterranean countries as well.

“Our ocean plays such a critical role in our economy, and the Mediterranean is both a tourism and conservation hotspot filled with rich biodiversity. We cannot afford to continue turning our ocean into a vast, contaminated plastic soup.”

Antonio Troya, *director of the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation*



A sea of opportunities

The promotion of the blue economy enables us to harness the potential of the Mediterranean Sea. The wealth of resources available to us needs to be exploited in a sustainable and collaborative manner, enabling growth, investment and job creation, while reducing poverty and safeguarding healthy seas.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, the **WestMED initiative** seeks to promote specific measures to secure sustainable development of the maritime economy in ten western Mediterranean countries. The UfM is working alongside the initiative to ensure coherence and synergies with the broader **Mediterranean Blue Economy Agenda**. At the end of 2018, ministers of the WestMED countries, together with the EC and the UfM, adopted a declaration to strengthen regional cooperation on this initiative. A common roadmap was agreed on for the development of a sustainable blue economy that generates growth, creates jobs and provides better living conditions for Mediterranean populations.

Furthermore, in an effort to contribute to the development of an **interactive Blue Economy Community**, the UfM Secretariat currently manages a virtual knowledge centre, the **Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform**. As a web-based portal, it provides a centralised platform for marine and maritime information in order to improve synergies across different initiatives and projects. Accessible to all 43 UfM member states, the platform is continuously improved to better meet user expectations, providing up-to-date information and enabling networking among its members.

BY 2050, THERE MAY BE **MORE PLASTIC THAN FISH IN THE SEAS AND UP TO 99% OF SEABIRDS WILL HAVE INGESTED PLASTIC** ←

Source: European Commission



CONNECTING THE MEDITERRANEAN WITH THE GLOBAL AGENDA

Following on from the mandates given by the 2014 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Change, the UfM Secretariat has been closely involved in the coordination, implementation and monitoring of the Horizon 2020 initiative. This initiative aims to provide a feasible timetable to depollute the Mediterranean Sea by 2020, while providing appropriate financial resources and technical support. A meeting held in early 2018 provided a framework for the fine-tuning of actions to be undertaken during the remaining two years of the initiative's work plan. Furthermore, the conclusions of the H2020 initiative will contribute to the post-2020 UfM environment agenda. To this end, discussions have been held within the UfM framework with member states and regional stakeholders in order to gather inputs and identify specific topics to be prioritised post-2020, in line with the UN SDGs and building on the achievements of H2020.

EXPERTS' CORNER

In line with the objective of supporting access to financing for green entrepreneurs, the UfM Secretariat and the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP/RAC) have worked on a publication on **Innovative Financing Instruments for Green Entrepreneurs in the Southern Mediterranean region**. Visit the UfM website to find out more!

ALSO ON THE AGENDA...

- The integrated intervention programme for the depollution of Lake Bizerte
- The Mediterranean ReSCP Post Rio+20 project
- Collaboration with the United Nations Convention on Desertification
- The BLUEMED Initiative (see p.21)

ufmsecretariat.org/what-we-do/