



Engaging European Stakeholders in the CleanSea Project for Mutual Learning and Policy Recommendations

In the CleanSea Project, stakeholder engagement was practiced in order to ensure societal relevance of the research, and hence to guarantee a more effective uptake of research results. This was achieved by mutual information exchange between stakeholders and researchers, with stakeholders, as potential end-users of the project's results being invited to contribute to research results either by providing or validating information. In terms of researcher-stakeholder interactions, a mixed strategy was applied in the CleanSea Project, including workshops, conference sessions, formal or informal meetings and interviews. The present executive summary, however, mainly focuses on the eight workshops and three conference sessions carried out in the different regional seas (i.e. Black Sea/Bulgaria, Mediterranean Sea/Spain, North Sea/Netherlands and Baltic Sea/Germany).

It should be noted that stakeholders for the more technical CleanSea WPs dealing with macrolitter, microplastics impacts and new tools were heavily engaged with stakeholders but mostly via other routes, making use of existing platforms where this type of exchange and engagement takes place. While the CleanSea workshops described in this report were organised to specifically support the economic and policy related research, for engagement on technical and natural sciences issues of marine litter and microplastics, CleanSea Project Partners and the Coordinator actively participated in and engaged in discussions with the Technical Subgroup Marine Litter throughout the entire duration of the project. CleanSea Coordinator and partners engaged with the Joint Program Initiative Oceans and the CSA Oceans FP7 project (which facilitates JPI Oceans implementation in its start-up phase). In some cases, CleanSea science partners are in close contact with those implementing the MSFD in their respective Member States, which ensured another way to connect CleanSea's efforts to the real world. For instance, several CleanSea partners were actively contributing to and participating in stakeholder workshops in the MSFD public consultations over the course of the project. CleanSea partners held leading and contributing roles in the first UN Gesamp Working Group 40 on marine microplastics, which produced its final report in 2015. CleanSea actively participated in conferences with the goal of linking up European FP7 marine projects in Europe, particularly in the southern seas (organised by HCMR and participation also by Coordinator VUA). Of course there has also been intensive interaction and engagement with other marine litter scientists in Europe and worldwide, in particular through the many symposia, workshops and conferences (e.g. Society of Toxicology and Chemistry, ICES, OSPAR, MICRO project conferences, Berlin Conference, etc.) attended by CleanSea partners and being embedded in the established scientific and monitoring networks and projects that already existed when the CleanSea Project started.

Overall, it can be concluded that the stakeholder engagement in CleanSea was effective. Stakeholders provided abundant and valuable input into project components 'Socio-economic impacts of marine litter and barriers to GES' and 'Overcoming institutional barriers to GES with management measures and policy options to reduce marine litter'. The stakeholder workshops were envisioned in the CleanSea project's Stakeholder Platform to provide input into these two policy-oriented components, as well as give participants information, as was particularly the case in the Black Sea region.

One of the challenges in organising workshops in the CleanSea Stakeholder Platform was encountered in the mobilization of stakeholders to attend. The sometimes low participation rate by stakeholders could possibly be explained by a number of factors, including a lack of ownership and perceived urgency of the problem, a lack of resources (as travel-costs could not be reimbursed). Furthermore, also the high number

of events related to marine litter which took place around the same time as the CleanSea workshops, the abundance of which leading to stakeholder fatigue and a reluctance to participate - this could be overcome in future by better bundling events with the same topic, thereby creating a higher incentive to attend. Another aspect for enhancing participation of stakeholders could be to provide reimbursement of travel costs, or to reduce the travel-distance of participants to the workshops venue, e.g. by creating local events. Smaller workshops with key stakeholders have their advantages as well, as each participant may get more time to provide input and actively engage in the discussions. When the groups are too big, it is more difficult to capture the input of especially quieter participants.

As indicated above, self-organised workshops were not the only route of stakeholder engagement, and the numbers of participants were sufficient for the needs of the project. Other stakeholders were reached through direct bilateral contacts, through participation of CleanSea partners in a multitude of marine litter events, symposia, guest lectures, conferences, marine litter fora, both locally and internationally. Careful planning is of paramount importance to stakeholder engagement, but also an extended project time (e.g. four years instead of three years) and a more individualistic approach to various stakeholders could be beneficial to engage more deeply and extensively with stakeholders.

Besides the discussions on the scientific content, the purpose of the CleanSea stakeholder engagement activities was also to promote the formation of a network of stakeholders in the field of marine litter management. Despite the limited time and budget, this goal was mostly reached. In the Netherlands and Germany, where already an active stakeholder community exists, CleanSea could re-inforce these activities. In Spain, the CleanSea workshops even led to the consolidation of the Spanish Association on Marine Litter. In Bulgaria, the stakeholder engagement process contributed to the establishment of a foundation for future interactions and discussions between stakeholders as part of the MSFD implementation.