

# COMMON

Whatever you  
throw into the  
sea comes  
back to you  
- combatting  
plastic marine  
litter in the  
Mediterranean  
sea



## PROJECT TITLE

**COMMON - Coastal Management and Monitoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean sea**

## IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

03.09.2019 – 02.09.2022

## ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Legambiente Onlus (IT); National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (TUN); International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (IT); Amwaj of the Environment (LEB); University of Siena (IT); Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (LEB); High Institute of Agronomy of Sousse University (TUN)

## PROGRAMME

Mediterranean Sea Basin  
ENI CBC 2014-2020

## TOTAL BUDGET

2.223.421,48 €



The project aims at building a collaboration network between Italy, Tunisia and Lebanon, to support a correct management of marine litter. The project partners are applying the principles of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, a scientific approach to improve management of coastal areas by local administrations and other stakeholders, considering all activities and problems of a coastal area, like waste, tourism, commerce, and fishing. The final goal is to enhance the environmental performance of 5 pilot coastal areas. The project is also engaging local stakeholders: awareness campaigns calling for responsible actions target tourist operators, bathing establishments, tourists, and citizens. The final ambition is to test a model which can be transferable throughout the whole Mediterranean basin.



**MARINE AND COASTAL AREAS**

**ENVIRONMENT**



Project co-funded by  
the European Union



*“Marine litter is a serious problem in our region; unfortunately, this topic is still given little importance by policy makers. We have a common problem across the region and we need a common solution to it”.*

Dr. Nahed, Project Manager at the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Lebanon).

Marine litter (human-created waste deliberately or accidentally thrown into the sea) is rapidly becoming one of the main marine pollution sources, with serious negative consequences for living organisms, marine ecosystems, human health and coastal activities, including tourism and fisheries.

In the Mediterranean Sea, a semi-enclosed sea with a large concentration of population and massive exploitation of natural resources in coastal areas, the problem of marine litter is increasing. It is an issue best addressed by a cross-border, multi-institutional and multi-stakeholder approach at basin level. In this context, the ENI CBC MED Programme represents a unique opportunity to study and address adequate solutions, and it is doing so through the COMMON project. This initiative aims at enhancing the capacity of public authorities in monitoring and managing the marine litter problem in five coastal areas: Tyre (Lebanon), Maremma and Northern Puglia (Italy), Kuriat Island and Monastir (Tunisia). These areas are implementing an integrated coastal zones management (ICZM) approach, directly engaging citizens in marine litter removal activities, and exchanging good practices and experiences among local institutions at Mediterranean level. Partners are building a network of coastal cities, researchers and civil society organizations tackling marine litter under the slogan “WE ARE ALL MED”.

Many people are expected to profit from this project. Researchers and scientists will benefit from harmonised data collection schemes and analysis protocols related to marine litter. Policy makers and environmental protection agencies will have access to detailed data on the problem. The civil society will gain new perspectives on marine litter management, while fishermen will be supported in reducing the impact of human-created sea waste on their livelihoods.

COMMON is now in the first phase of implementation, and there is still a lot to be done. Marine litter comes to a great extent from land sources, but also from fishery itself, for example when fishing

gear is discarded or lost, the so called “ghost nets”, thus endangering non-commercial fish species, like sea turtles, and big marine mammals like dolphins and seals. The work under this project includes the collection of marine litter and fish samples, to be analysed in quality and quantity. The toxicological analysis of certain wild fish life as well as edible species (the so called “indicator species”), can provide evidence of the degree of impact of litter both on the marine environment and on human health: the extent to which food chains are affected will also be analysed.

But marine litter is not the only focus of COMMON. During the World Turtle Day (on 23 May 2020), after weeks of care and assistance, two turtles which were victim of accidental capture were returned to the sea in Monastir by the Tunisian partner (INSTM). As part of the event, the lead beneficiary launched the COMMON Turtle Quiz to test people’s knowledge of sea turtles’ world (A link to the quiz can be found here: [https://bit.ly/TurtleQuiz\\_Eng](https://bit.ly/TurtleQuiz_Eng)).

Needless to add that tourism, an important economic sector in the Mediterranean, is also both a source and a victim of marine litter. COMMON brings together tour operators, tourists and local authorities, confronting them with awareness campaigns about a “Good practices dec-

alogue”. Tour operators and service providers will be involved in country-specific contests to assess the sustainability of their services, such as the use of disposable plastic items. Last but not least, citizens, local associations and schools are engaged in the Citizen Science Activities. An online platform has already been made available: <https://volontaripernatura.greenproject.info/common/site/>

As the project is still in its early stages, the COVID-19 outbreak has fortunately had only limited impact on its activities. However, the pandemic countermeasures might have a significant negative effect on marine ecosystems; millions of disposable protective items, such as masks and gloves, might end up in the Mediterranean Sea. And, unfortunately, the first cases were already recorded: COMMON awareness campaigns are including development in their topics.

Marine litter reduction and removal is almost a Sisyphean task that will need decades of hard work. Yet the COMMON project has laid down some initial stepping stones in a long path of coordinated actions all over the Mediterranean.

According to Ms. Sana Ben Ismail from the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (Tunisia), “COMMON is a very interesting project because it gives me the opportunity, as a researcher, to leave my laboratory and to go to the field and to contact people. This communication link between scientists and local communities is sometimes missing. In the future, emphasis should be given not only on research and innovation, but also on start-ups, small enterprises and plastic recycling units, attacking the marine litter problem through different angles”.

