



Policy Brief

14 regulatory changes that can make
marine litter removal and
reintroduction in the economy viable
at a large scale

30/06/2022

Introduction

This Policy Brief derives from the joint work of two main EU H2020-funded projects under the pilot action for the removal of marine plastics and litter, namely **INNOPLASTIC** (Innovative Approaches towards Prevention, Removal and Reuse of Marine Plastic Litter) and **MAELSTROM** (Smart technology for MARine Litter SusTainable RemOval and Management).

Our experience in projects aimed at tackling marine litter, supporting a circular economy and producing renewable energy has provided some valuable insights for policy and decision-makers. We are willing to reverse the damage being done and promote a regime shift in the management of plastic pollution. We are keen to change our relationship with the ocean, and with its natural and cultural assets and heritage, for good.

In our stances, we are committed to supporting the work of the United Nations Conference on the Ocean, as well as the follow-up work of the UN Resolution to “End Plastic Pollution: Towards an internationally legally binding instrument” with the ambition of completing a draft legally binding global agreement by the end of 2024.

We represent tech-based companies, research institutes, industries and NGOs committed to scientifically sound solutions in protecting the oceans from the growing inflow of plastic waste, and to establish it as an ally for energy generation.

We are a growing and coordinated movement willing to provide support to the current discussions on the global arena around the ocean.

We stand for effective commitments to removing marine litter and reintegrating it into the market, using sustainable energy in the process. Our experience shows the following aspects should be tackled:

1. Incorporate into the current national regulations a limit on the number of plastic items, including microplastics, present in water in the assessment of its quality and safety;
2. Establish mandatory frequent monitoring of plastic pollution in rivers and estuaries, especially those which most contribute to plastic pollution as indicated by scientific research;
3. The role of cities, especially those located close to waterways, harbours and estuaries, should be acknowledged and supported by the provision of institutional and financial means for the adoption of plastic removal technologies;
4. Current regulation should be reviewed to foster the adoption of autonomous plastic removal technologies in waterways, including on harbours and beaches;
5. Engagement of citizens in clean-ups should be supported by fostering organizations that have the capability to perform such activities with due respect to the environmental habitats as well as to applicable regulations, specially those related to nesting areas and vulnerable species, and dune areas.
6. Review current regulations on plastic recycling, especially by creating differentiated recycling schemes that acknowledge the difference among plastic types most commonly present in marine litter – i.e., plastic packaging and plastic from boats, fishing nets and floating materials;
7. Facilitate upcycling of marine litter by expressly including chemical recycling among recycling options and by not differentiating among the origin of the waste, as well as by including waste-derived fuels in regulations related to the use of fossil fuels; and
8. Support the adoption of innovative renewable energy to create conditions for the adoption of ML removal technologies in off-grid locations.
9. The water management authorities should set out structural and non-structural prevention and mitigation measures to reduce marine pollution caused by rivers. These measures should be sustainable and carbon neutral, and become part of their water management implementation plan.

10. River Basins authorities and any competent entity in the territorial management of rivers, including those of waste management, should cooperate to reduce the accumulation of waste and plastic material on the river banks or in the surrounding areas. Such locations could be prone to floods due to climatic changes and, if cleared, could prevent/reduce critical pollution load from spilling out into the river and the seas.
11. governments should set regulations that encourage the retrieval and treatment of marine debris that might be voluntarily picked by environmental groups in dedicated campaigns, or accidentally by fishermen and sea farmers in their work activities by whatever means or tools.
12. “Marine litter and plastic pickers” should not incur in any levies, administrative sanctions or penalties to deliver the marine litter to local waste management or the port authority. Normative provisions otherwise conceived should be revised or eliminated at any level of the domestic jurisdiction.
13. Decision-makers should devise suitable incentive schemes and reward measures to encourage the uptake of virtuous behaviors in retrieving marine litter, particularly from professional fishing operators and the blue economy sector.
14. Environmental NGOs, recreational fishermen, scuba diving organizations, and any other organized collective or single entity or individual wishing to practice marine litter clean-up and retrieval campaigns should operate in a conducive environment by the local authorities, particularly at a city level in a coordinated and effective way .