

Official opening of the Mediterranean Marine Litter Week, 12-15 May 2014, Athens Greece

Key note address on the MARLISCO's main lines of activity and achieved results

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Honourable Commissioner Mr. Potocnik

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished Guests

Good afternoon!

On behalf of MIO-ECSE, a Federation of about 130 Environmental NGOs from all Mediterranean countries, I would like to thank you all for being here today! Your presence is an honour and also an encouragement and a valuable source of inspiration as we perceive your presence a clear demonstration of your interest and commitment in joining our efforts to combat marine litter!

We are extremely fortunate to be members of a highly motivated team, the MARLISCO team, who has taken up the challenge to raise public awareness, facilitate dialogue and promote co-responsibility among the different actors towards a joint vision for the sustainable management of marine litter across all European seas.

Together with eighteen other leading organizations from the EU, among which we have here with us today the University of Cork (IRELAND), CEFAS (UK), ISOTECH (CYPRUS), Plastics Europe (BELGIUM), Honkytonk Films (FRANCE), we have joined our forces to implement a series of activities within the framework of this FP7 project.

Within MARLISCO we are working on the Science-Society interface focusing on developing, implementing and evaluating mechanisms to enable society to understand the impacts of litter, engage and empower stakeholders into identifying the viable solutions and eventually to trigger and facilitate concerted actions to address this complex issue.

It is a fact that there are still uncertainties and knowledge gaps related to marine litter, specifically on amounts, their fate in the marine environment, as well as their impacts. However, despite the variations in methodologies and discrepancies on specific results, it is widely accepted that both the levels of marine litter and the rate of input into the oceans are rising overtime. This is enough evidence to trigger concern and a call for action!

Having said that, I would like to stress that the past few years there have been circulated in the media some statements about quantities of debris and effects that are completely misleading and are not supported by scientific evidence.

Within MARLISCO we have been committed to deliver and communicate clear messages to society based on sound scientific evidence and findings! In this sense, one of the key activities of MARLISCO was to set a clear picture regarding marine litter in each of the European Regional Seas through a comprehensive scoping study.



Understanding how people perceive the problem of marine litter is crucial to address it effectively. MARLISCO has conducted an extensive survey in 16 European MSs, targeting ~ 3800 key stakeholders from designers and manufacturers to retailers, industry users of coastal and marine waters; waste management actors, decision makers, media, educators, and the general public, providing a baseline report/ "snapshot" on individuals' perceptions about the quantity, causes and consequences of marine litter, the perceived risk and responsibility, and behavioural intentions to engage in solutions.

In order to inspire action and enhance the notion of co-responsibility of different actors through concrete examples and feasible measures, MARLISCO's activities focused on the identification of best practices related to prevention, reduction, removal and sustainable management of marine litter. A pool of over 70 practices was developed and evaluated through a comprehensive methodology taking into account criteria such as effectiveness, sustainability (environmentally, economically and socially) and replicability and tomorrow you will have the opportunity to hear more about this in our conference!

Another key cluster of MARLISCO activities has been the development of 12 national fora (the first already having being held successfully in Dublin) providing a platform for a structured dialogue between the key stakeholders, on developing solutions together.

Enhanced awareness and deepened understanding of the issue of marine litter is crucial for catalyzing change in the perceptions and attitude of the people and the key prerequisite for more informed decisions and responsible individual behaviour.

In this respect one of the main target groups of MARLISCO is youth as powerful agents of change in society, not only because they represent the next generation of consumers and decision-makers but often they can inspire and influence directly the behaviour of their families and even their close communities.

A series of activities have been undertaken including a cutting-edge educational material on marine litter 'translating' sound scientific evidence and findings into key messages and information, which are to be produced in more than 10 EU languages, an attractive/engaging (hopefully) exhibition, an interactive web-based game and web-documentary and so many others.

Furthermore, in 2013 a MARLISCO Video Contest was launched in 14 Countries, seeking to foster a sense of European citizenship and ownership in the younger generation, giving them an active voice! The MARLISCO Video Contest had great out-reach results with a total of 380 videos submitted, with the direct involvement of about 2123 youngsters. The winners will get to travel to Bremen and participate at the EMD where they will be awarded their prize.

As you can see, the MARLISCO project is very ambitious, however, we are even more ambitious and we strongly believe that due to the quality and diversification of its outputs adapted to the regional/national specificities as well as the highly committed and skilful members of our team, the MARLISCO tools and mechanisms will continue to serve the aims of the project even beyond its lifespan and why not, be replicated elsewhere....

