



Closing the plastic tap in the Mediterranean

Plastic has **revolutionised** our lives and among many other uses, it is an ideal material for manufacturing many things, for making our homes more energy-efficient or enhancing the safety and hygiene of medicine. But its **misuse** and abuse has led to the very concerning **environmental pollution** we are facing nowadays. The Mediterranean basin is particularly vulnerable to plastics, which is affecting wildlife, ecosystems and humans.

The situation

Macro, micro and nano plastics **threaten Mediterranean species, ecosystems and human health.**

The Mediterranean sea is the **6^o greatest accumulation zone** for marine litter: this sea holds only **1%** of the world's waters, **but concentrates 7%** of all global microplastics.

Mismanagement of plastics causes **1000-3000 tonnes of plastics** floating on the surface of sea.



In terms of marine litter floating in the sea, plastics account for **more than 85%** as for litter on the sea-floor.

The solution

Reducing waste is more efficient than **clearing up.**

Tourism, agriculture, waste disposal and other sectors could play an important role in contributing to the solution.

If consumed and managed correctly, plastic can bring about several benefits, by improving **health, safety and energy savings.**

Moving towards a more **circular economy,** in which waste is designed out of the production and use cycle, and society adopts more sustainable consumption patterns.

Why is it important to urgently tackle it?

Impact on land environment: Plastic pollution can have a long-term negative impact on **terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity.** Much of it ends up in landfills, where it may take up to 1,000 years to decompose, leaching potentially toxic substances into the **soil, sediments and rivers.**

Impact on marine environment: The most visible impacts on **marine biodiversity** are the ingestion, suffocation and entanglement of marine species⁵. The **deep-sea** acts as a sink for plastic pollution.

Impact on economy: The ways in which plastic waste affects people's quality of life include reduced recreational opportunities, loss of aesthetic value, and loss of non-use value. All this can have an indirect economic impact in many sectors and lead to a loss of tourism and related revenues.

Impact on human health: Microplastics deriving from mismanaged agri-plastics waste and from the fragmentation of larger plastic items at sea threaten human health.

What can be done?

Collaboration:

Governments, private sector, research institutions and other industries need to work collaboratively to redesign processes and supply chains and invest in innovation.

Improved waste management:

Intervention at this level will have the greatest impact in terms of reducing the quantity of plastic leakage into the environment.

Policy development and raising awareness:

Inform policies at international, regional and local level and raise public and private sector awareness.

What are the main objectives of the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation?

We aim to take action to turn these problems into solutions by:

1 BRING TOGETHER ACTORS to develop solutions to plastic waste management in the Mediterranean basin.

2 ENHANCE CAPACITIES OF COASTAL CITIES AND ISLANDS to reduce plastic leakage into the environment.

3 PROVIDE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE to policy-makers, manufacturers and consumers to spearhead appropriate technological, behavioural and policy solutions.



OUR GOALS AND PROJECTS

- **Enhancing the knowledge on the origins of marine plastics.**
Improve knowledge of the current status of plastic pollution through identifying plastic leakage hotspots and policy and economic assessments to provide recommendations based on results.
- **Engaging stakeholders to develop solutions to plastic leakage and reduce use.**
Develop a **network of enterprises** in the Mediterranean basin and foster **innovative business solutions** to accelerate the prevention of plastic pollution through the **initiative BeMed**.
- **Reducing plastic leakage in the Mediterranean basin.**
Tackle **plastic waste pollution deriving from agricultural practices** and affecting soil biodiversity.
Provide **science-based policy recommendations** about the micro-plastic pollution affecting the **deep-sea** ecosystem.

...by 2024

