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**COASTAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT
MARINE POLLUTION**

STRONG SEA LIFE (Survey and Treatment ON Ghost Nets Sea LIFE)

Submitted by Italy

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document presents an overview of the European Union funded project STRONG SEA LIFE aimed at the protection and the improvement of the conservation status of the Habitats Directive priority habitat "Posidonia beds (*Posidonia oceanica*)" and the habitat "Reefs", threatened by the presence of ALDFG

Action to be taken: Paragraph 11

Related documents: None

Introduction

1 STRONG SEA LIFE (Survey and Treatment ON Ghost Nets Sea LIFE) is a project funded under the LIFE EU Programme, priority area "Nature and Biodiversity". The project formally started in December 2021 and has a duration of five years. ISPRA is the lead partner of the project.

2 The purpose of STRONG SEA LIFE project is to protect and improve conservation of *Posidonia oceanica meadows* and Coralligenous Reef, protected habitats according to the EU Habitats Directive.

3 *Posidonia oceanica* L. Delile, is an endemic species of the Mediterranean Sea; it forms dense meadows that may extend over km-wide areas, from surface to about 40m depth. *P. oceanica* meadows represent very complex and well-structured biocenoses, characterized by great biological variability of their plant and animal communities. They are recognized as one of the essential components of the balance and richness of the Mediterranean coastal environment.

4 Coralligenous Reef is a hard substratum of biogenic origin produced by accumulation of calcareous encrusting algae growing in sciaphilous conditions. It forms a seascape very complex in structure and relations and develops several animal facies and vegetal associations. It is one of the most sensitive benthic environments and among the most endangered Mediterranean habitats.

5 Several anthropogenic impacts affect these ecosystems stability such as realization of coastal defence and ports, pollution, trawling, uncontrolled anchoring, increasing pressure of fishing activities. Among stress factors threatening sensitive habitats, Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) is of increasing concern: the global estimate of fishing gear lost each year in the marine environment is of 78,000 km² of purse seine nets and gillnets, 215 km² of trawl nets, 740,000km of main long lines, 13 billion long line hooks, 25 million traps and pots. ALDFG are a very persistent source of marine litter degrading in microplastics, impacting fish stocks and benthic environments and affecting food security (www.acu.ac.uk).

6 The ALDFG produce smothering and abrasion effects, plucking of organisms, and mechanical damage to biological structures. Other significative impacts are related to continue catching of target and non-target species (such as turtles, seabirds and marine mammals), navigational hazards, marine litter, introduction of synthetic material into the marine food web and introduction of alien species transported by ALDFG.

7 The issue of ALDFG has been raised at the United Nations General Assembly. Extensive use of gillnets, trammel nets and traps in many Mediterranean fisheries, plus a large number of small-scale vessels involved in fishing in Greece and Italy in particular, makes ALDFG an important problem in the Mediterranean, according to FAO and UNEP.

Project overview

8 The project study area is the Gulf of Asinara, including Asinara National Park (Site of Community Importance- SIC ITB010082), and North Western Sardinia coast (Mare di Fuori). Western Mediterranean Sea. In this area four additional SIC are also included: SIC ITB010002 "Stagno di Pilo e Casaraccio" SIC ITB010003 "Stagno e ginepreto di Platamona" SIC ITB0100034 "Foci del Coghinas" SIC ITB012211 "Isola Rossa - Costa Paradiso.

9 The aims of the project are:

- Preserving, conserving and enhancing *P. oceanica* meadows and coralligenous habitats threatened by the ALDFG;
- Investigating on biodiversity and impacts of marine litter at a local level;
- Increasing the socio-economic value associated with *P. oceanica* meadows and coralligenous habitats and the species-habitat related both of conservation and fishery interest;
- Assessing of the presence of the ALDFG through survey and mapping of abandoned fishing gear in areas not yet investigated;
- Assessing and identifying the suitable techniques for recovery or deactivation of ALDFG, assessing of the potential damages on ecosystems;
- Updating cartographies and database related to the distribution of *P. oceanica* meadows and coralligenous habitats;

- Creating and developing a virtuous supply chain, from recovery and selection of the type of gear material, till to appropriate disposal and, whereas is possible, recycling;
- Implementing and promoting a mobile app, that allows to easily report the loss or recovery of ALDFG;
- Drafting of guidelines on monitoring and recovery or deactivation of ALDFG in order to improve the conservation of *P. oceanica* meadows and coralligenous habitats;
- Definition of specific conservation measures;
- Promoting the dissemination and communication at national and international level;
- Promoting the replicability at national and international level, to actively transfer the knowledge developed within the project;
- Enhancing the growth of awareness in fishermen and citizens aiming at environmental marine protection; and
- Ensuring the sustainability of project also for the after-LIFE actions.

10 Further information and details of the project can be found at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/project/details/5764> and <https://www.strongsealife.eu/>.

Action requested of the Scientific Groups

11 The Scientific Groups are invited to take note of the information provided, and to comment, as they deem appropriate.
