LIFE Platform Meeting

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE NATURE RESTORATION REGULATION IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Valencia, Spain | 9–11 June 2026

FINAL REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3
SUMMARY FOR POLICY MAKERS 4
INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND TO AND AIM OF THE PLATFORM MEETING 6
STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING 7
SESSION SUMMARIES 9
KEY OUTCOMES 19
LESSONS LEARNT FOR FUTURE PLATFORMS 20
Annex 1 Policy Brief 23
Annex 2: Agenda 35
Annex 3: Participating Projects List 41
Annex 4: Participants Feedback Survey Summary 43
Annex 5: Event Photos 47
Annex 6: Accreditation 59
Annex 7: Post event communication & dissemination 60

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LIFE Marine Platform Meeting "Meeting the Challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation in the Marine Environment – Best Practice and Innovation in Marine Restoration in Europe" was held in Valencia, Spain, from 9–11 June 2026, at a pivotal moment for the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR). Organised by CINEA with the support of ELMEN and hosted by Fundación Biodiversidad and the LIFE INTEMARES project, the meeting brought together 84 participants from LIFE and Horizon Europe projects, public authorities and agencies, research and academic institutions, NGOs, EU institutions and other organisations involved in marine conservation and restoration, representing organisations from at least 15 European countries. The meeting provided a forum for exchanging knowledge and practical experience that can support the preparation and implementation of National Restoration Plans (NRPs).

The meeting was structured around four complementary themes reflecting the principal challenges of marine restoration under the NRR: Active Restoration – Deep Water, Active Restoration – Shallow Water, Addressing Habitats' Threats and Pressures (Passive Restoration) and Habitats for Species. Through plenary sessions, thematic workshops, a Knowledge Market, technical visits and field demonstrations, participants shared innovative restoration techniques, governance approaches, monitoring methods and stakeholder engagement practices developed through LIFE and Horizon Europe projects. The rotating workshop format encouraged participants to exchange experiences across restoration disciplines and identify common challenges and opportunities for scaling up marine restoration across Europe.

Across all thematic discussions, a number of consistent messages emerged. Participants agreed that successful marine restoration requires the integration of restoration objectives across existing EU policy frameworks, with priority given to reducing pressures and enabling natural recovery before undertaking active restoration. They also highlighted the importance of robust scientific evidence, harmonised monitoring approaches, adaptive management, stakeholder participation, effective governance and long-term financing. These common conclusions are further developed in the Summary for Policy Makers and have also informed the Policy Brief and thematic briefs (Annex 1), which provide more detailed recommendations to support implementation of the NRR and the preparation of Member States' NRPs.

The meeting also reaffirmed the strategic role of LIFE and Horizon Europe projects as testing grounds for innovative restoration methods and collaborative approaches that can inform European policy and implementation. Participants' feedback confirmed the success of the event, with 92% of respondents rating the meeting as "Very good", recognising in particular the relevance of the discussions, the high quality of speakers and projects, the opportunities for networking and the practical value of the technical visits. Key lessons from the organisation and implementation of the meeting are presented in Part III – Lessons Learnt for Future Platforms, with detailed participant feedback provided in the relevant annex.

SUMMARY FOR POLICY MAKERS

The LIFE Marine Platform Meeting demonstrated that LIFE and Horizon Europe projects are already generating many of the practical methods, scientific evidence and governance approaches needed to support implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) in the marine environment. Across the four thematic workstreams — Active Restoration–Deep Water, Active Restoration–Shallow Water, Addressing Habitats' Threats and Pressures (Passive Restoration), and Habitats for Species — a number of common priorities emerged for the preparation and implementation of National Restoration Plans (NRPs). These are complemented by important considerations arising from the different ecological and management contexts addressed by each workstream and are presented below:

Apply a clear restoration hierarchy, starting with protection and pressure reduction. Preventing further deterioration and reducing or removing the causes of degradation should be the starting point for restoration. Passive recovery should be enabled wherever ecological conditions allow, while targeted active restoration should be used where natural recovery is insufficient or where ecological priorities justify intervention. Restoration should complement, rather than substitute for, effective conservation and management measures. This hierarchy emerged particularly strongly from the deep- and shallow-water discussions and the work on addressing habitats threats and pressures.

Plan restoration at ecosystem scale and for long-term resilience. Restoration should aim to recover ecosystem structure, functions and ecological processes rather than focus only on individual interventions or short-term measurable outputs. NRPs should combine pressure reduction, passive and active restoration, long-term monitoring and adaptive management, while taking account of climate change and the different recovery times and ecological characteristics of marine ecosystems.

Strengthen policy coherence and turn coordination into practical delivery. Marine restoration requires coordinated implementation across the NRR, Habitats and Birds Directives, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Protected Area management. NRPs should clearly identify how competent authorities and relevant sectors will cooperate, particularly where fisheries, spatial planning or other regulatory measures are necessary to achieve restoration outcomes.

Improve coherence for species conservation across European and regional frameworks. For habitats supporting marine species, restoration planning should address important areas and sensitive periods and improve coordination for highly mobile species. Protected-species priorities should also be better aligned between the Habitats and Birds Directives and the relevant regional sea conventions — including the Helsinki, OSPAR, Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions — to minimize protection gaps and inconsistencies.

Strengthen the evidence base, but do not allow knowledge gaps to prevent action. Better habitat mapping, ecological reference conditions, harmonized restoration indicators and cost-

effective monitoring technologies are needed. At the same time, remaining uncertainty should be addressed through risk-based decision-making, modelling, expert judgement and the precautionary principle, combined with adaptive management so that measures can be revised as knowledge improves.

Monitor ecological recovery as well as the implementation of measures. Long-term monitoring is essential to determine whether reduced pressures and restoration interventions are actually producing ecological recovery. Greater alignment of monitoring and reporting approaches under the NRR, MSFD and relevant regional frameworks would improve comparability, reduce duplication and support adaptive management.

Embed stakeholder participation throughout restoration planning and delivery. Fishers, coastal communities, scientists, NGOs, resource managers and relevant economic sectors should be involved from an early stage in designing and implementing restoration measures. Local knowledge and practical expertise can improve the feasibility, legitimacy and effectiveness of measures, while durable participation structures can strengthen long-term ownership and compliance.

Move from short-term projects towards long-term programmes, financing and governance. Marine restoration frequently requires recovery over long timescales. Financing should therefore support not only initial restoration interventions but also pressure reduction, management, enforcement, monitoring, stakeholder participation and adaptive management. Active techniques should be tested and evaluated before being replicated at larger scales, while successful approaches developed through LIFE and Horizon Europe projects should be consolidated and made accessible to Member States rather than repeatedly reinvented.

Strengthen transboundary and regional cooperation. Many marine ecosystems and species extend across national jurisdictions. Deep-sea restoration and the conservation of mobile species therefore require sustained cooperation between Member States, neighboring non-EU countries where relevant, and regional sea conventions, supported by appropriate long-term EU and national financing.

Taken together, the discussions point to a shift from isolated restoration actions towards integrated, long-term restoration programmes that combine effective pressure reduction, ecological recovery, coherent governance, robust monitoring and sustained participation. LIFE and Horizon Europe projects provide an important evidence base for this transition, offering tested approaches, methodologies and lessons that can support Member States as they develop and implement their NRPs. **The accompanying Policy Brief and four thematic briefs in Annex 1 provide more detailed recommendations arising from the Platform Meeting.**

INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND TO AND AIM OF THE PLATFORM MEETING

The Nature Restoration Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2024/1991) establishes, for the first time, legally binding restoration targets for ecosystems across the European Union, including marine habitats and species. For the marine environment, the Regulation requires Member States to progressively improve the condition of habitats protected under the Habitats Directive and other marine ecosystems by restoring degraded areas, removing or reducing pressures, and ensuring that restoration contributes to the recovery of biodiversity and ecosystem functions. The Regulation also requires Member States to prepare National Restoration Plans (NRPs), with the final plans to be submitted to the European Commission by September 2027, setting out the measures that will deliver the restoration objectives over the coming decades. As part of this process, Member States must identify restoration needs, prioritise restoration actions, establish monitoring systems and address important knowledge gaps regarding the distribution and condition of marine habitats.

The successful implementation of the NRR depends on the availability of robust scientific evidence, tested restoration methodologies, effective governance arrangements and close cooperation between public authorities, researchers and practitioners. LIFE and Horizon Europe projects have played, and continue to play, a central role in developing this knowledge and demonstrating practical restoration solutions across Europe's seas. Their experience contributes directly to the implementation of several key European policy frameworks, including the Nature Restoration Regulation, the Birds and Habitats Directives, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the European Green Deal. At a time when Member States are preparing their National Restoration Plans, there is a clear need to synthesise the knowledge generated by these projects, facilitate exchanges of experience and identify good practices that can support restoration planning and implementation.

The LIFE Marine Platform Meeting "*Meeting the Challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation in the Marine Environment – Best Practice and Innovation in Marine Restoration in Europe*" was organised to address this need. Hosted by Fundación Biodiversidad, with the opportunity of the closing conference of the LIFE INTEMARES project that followed, and organised by CINEA with the support of ELMEN, the meeting aimed to bring together beneficiaries of LIFE and Horizon Europe projects, representatives of the European Commission, national authorities, researchers and other stakeholders to exchange knowledge and practical experience on marine restoration.

To reflect the main restoration challenges identified under the Regulation, the meeting was organised around four thematic pillars: Active Restoration – Deep Water, Active Restoration – Shallow Water, Addressing Habitats' Threats and Pressures (Passive Restoration), and Habitats for Species. Through plenary sessions, thematic workshops, a Knowledge Market networking space and two technical visits, participants explored innovative restoration methods, governance approaches and practical experiences, while identifying common challenges, opportunities for collaboration and recommendations for scaling up marine restoration across Europe.

STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

The LIFE Marine Platform event was designed using a thematic rotation model combined with plenary integration. This structure was chosen to ensure comprehensive knowledge transfer across diverse marine restoration specialties while maintaining a cohesive narrative for all attendees.

Plenary Sessions (Common Ground)

The event commenced and concluded with collective sessions in the main stage. These segments provided the strategic framework for the meeting:

- **Opening Plenary**: Established the regulatory context, specifically focusing on the NRR and its implications for marine habitats and species.
- **Closing Plenary**: Featured a keynote on scaling marine restoration and a synthesis of the key takeaways from each of the four thematic streams.

Thematic Breakout Streams (Specialised Focus)

The core of the technical exchange was organized into four distinct thematic pillars:

- **Active Restoration - Deep Water**: Focusing on cold-water coral reefs and coral gardens and on mixed rock-soft sediment habitats.
- **Active Restoration - Shallow Water**: Covering seagrass mariculture, macroalgal forests, and coastal lagoon restoration.
- **Addressing Habitats Threats and Pressures (Passive restoration)**: Focusing on the reduction or removal of pressures affecting marine habitats and ecosystems, including through MPA management, spatial conservation planning, fisheries management and marine litter removal.
- **Habitats for Species**: Highlighting targeted efforts for seabirds, sharks, and specific marine invertebrates.

Rotating Workshop Methodology (Cross-Pollination)

To maximise interdisciplinary learning, the meeting utilised a circulatory participant flow. Participants were divided into cohorts and rotated through the four themes across four dedicated sessions. This "Carousel" approach ensured:

- **Full Coverage**: Every participant engaged with at least one session from each of the four themes, preventing "siloed" learning.
- **Balanced Perspective**: Attendees who began with deep-sea restoration eventually moved through shallow-water, threat mitigation, and species-specific habitat sessions.
- **Expert Continuity**: While the audience rotated, thematic facilitators remained within their designated areas, allowing them to build upon the discussions from previous groups and refine the key takeaways for the final report.

Knowledge Market and Field Application

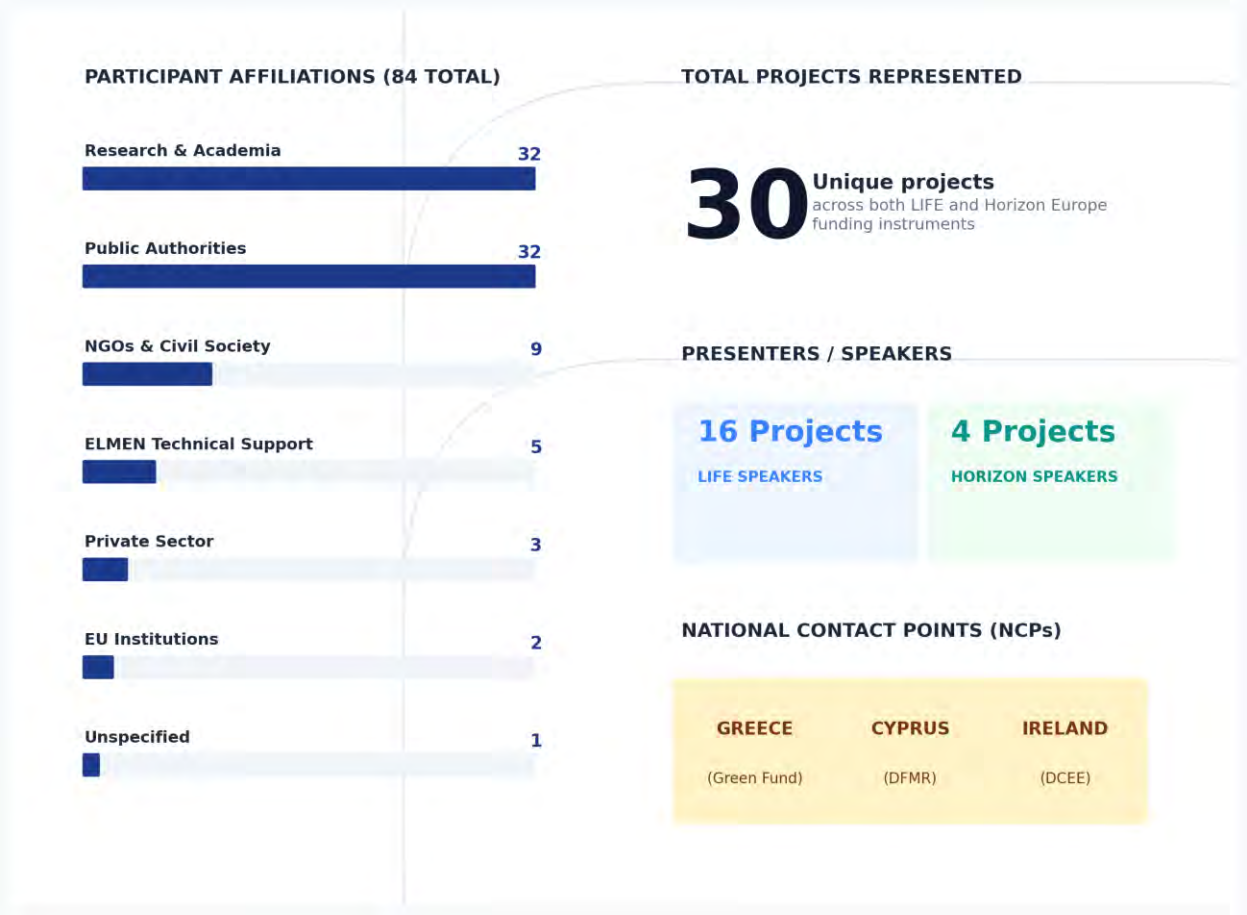
Complementing the formal sessions, the Knowledge Market provided an informal networking space on the mezzanine floor where projects showcased their results using roll-up banners, communication materials and examples of restoration methods. Two Knowledge Market sessions were held, one at the end of Day 1 and another at the end of Day 2, immediately before the technical visit to Oceanogràfic València. The Knowledge Market featured banners and informative materials from CINEA/LIFE, LIFE BIODIVERSEA, LIFE ADAPTS, LIFE DREAM, LIFE INTEMARES, LIFE MAPPER, LIFE MareNatura, LIFE MARHA, LIFE EU SHARKS, LIFE ECOREST, LIFE AdaptaBlues, LIFE NatConnect2030, LIFE PINNARCA and Horizon Europe REDRESS.

The theoretical and technical discussions were then grounded in reality through a site visit to the Oceanogràfic València on Day 2 and a field trip to the Marina Alta SAC/SPA on Day 3, allowing participants to observe restoration challenges and successes in a Mediterranean context.

The ELMEN team collected video footage from several of the participating projects and put together a 23-minute video compilation that played in between the various sessions, during the breaks and attracted a considerable amount of attention.

Participation and Project Representation

The Platform Meeting brought together 84 participants, representing public authorities and agencies, research institutions and universities, NGOs, EU institutions (CINEA & DG ENV), LIFE and Horizon Europe projects, and other organisations involved in marine conservation and restoration. Participants represented organisations from at least 15 European countries, alongside EU-level and pan-European organisations, reflecting a broad geographical and institutional reach. Public authorities included national and regional administrations and LIFE National Contact Points from Cyprus, Greece and Ireland. The meeting also included direct participation from three EU Outermost Regions: the Canary Islands (Spain), Guadeloupe (France) and the Azores (Portugal), bringing perspectives from geographically remote marine regions into the discussions. Overall, the diversity of participants provided a strong basis for exchange between policy, science and practical restoration experience.



SESSION SUMMARIES

Day 1 – Welcome Addresses and Opening Plenary
The event opened with welcome addresses from key figures representing the host institutions and European bodies:

Fernando Magdaleno, representing the **Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge of Spain**, delivered the welcome address and opening presentation, outlining the Spanish perspective on marine restoration and the preparation of the National Restoration Plan for marine areas.

Maddalena Visser from the **European Commission, DG ENV.D3 – Nature Conservation**, provided a detailed explanation of the Nature Restoration Regulation, focusing on its implications for Member States in delivering restoration objectives for marine habitats and species.

The welcoming remarks emphasised:

- The historic significance of the NRR as the first EU law with binding restoration targets
- The critical role of LIFE projects in generating evidence, tools, and methodologies transferable to national restoration plans
- The importance of cross-project collaboration and data sharing

- Valencia’s role as a Mediterranean hub for marine conservation

Day 1 - Plenary Session

The plenary session on Day 1 set the scene for the entire meeting. The opening presentations provided an excellent overview of the NRR and its implementation framework for marine ecosystems, explaining the restoration targets, planning requirements and timelines for National Restoration Plans (NRPs). Drawing on Spain's experience, they highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of implementation, emphasising the need for robust scientific knowledge, coordinated governance, stakeholder engagement and the contribution of LIFE projects in supporting Member States to deliver effective marine restoration. The presentations started by reminding the relevance of the NRR, by delivering an integrated, holistic vision of restoration contrary to previous fragmented efforts. They provided a complete overview of the restoration requirements in general, as apply to the preparation of the NRPs and, in particular, for the marine environment. Both Spain and DG ENV demonstrated that significant progress is being made in developing and systematizing the scientific knowledge, creating a favourable and binding legal framework, promoting the removal of pressures so as to support passive restoration, integrating nature-based solutions, and establishing methodologies and practical tools needed to support NRPs.

However, they also highlighted that important challenges remain, particularly in habitat mapping, condition assessment, closing knowledge gaps and establishing common methodologies. Further challenges regard the need to strengthen governance (in particular, inter-institutional cooperation e.g. in Spain, and the participation of stakeholders), and funding. In Spain, in view of the relevant knowledge gaps regarding marine habitats, the first planning cycle will focus on knowledge gathering and setting the foundations for later stages while concentrating active works in already existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the better-known habitats (e.g. Posidonia). Overall, as stated by Maddalena Visser, the main challenge raised by the NRR is the need to upscale the restoration efforts.

Important data collection on unmapped Annex II habitats listed in the NRR and comprehensive guidelines and tools for restoring degraded marine habitats, including developing consistent indicators, or filling the relevant knowledge gaps in deep-water habitats were presented via the Horizon Europe BioAgora and LIFE-MAPPER projects, The Finnish perspective and how LIFE-IP BIODIVERSEA helps provide the knowledge, tools, governance, and pilot actions needed to support NRR implementation was also presented.

All of the presentations set the scene about the challenges existing for marine restoration and the relevant contribution of LIFE and Horizon Europe projects to addressing these challenges and supporting Member States in preparing their restoration plans.

Day 1 – Thematic Sessions

Relevant project presentations for each one of the four themes were given during two sessions on Day 1. Participants were invited to discuss at the end of each presentation.

Active Restoration - Deep Water

The experience of projects LIFE LOPHELIA, in Sweden, and LIFE ECOREST, in Spain, were presented during Day 1.

Key topics covered and discussed:

- Ecology, threats and restoration of deep-water coral reefs and hard- and soft-bottom benthic marine habitats.
- In some areas, in particular those subject to trawling, passive restoration has limitations. These projects adopt an active approach, including the development of artificial reefs, an in-depth study of biological processes of the target species, in particular their larval settlement, and transplantation of up to 30 habitat-forming species using the badminton method.
- Site selection is based on the pre-existence of some protected status of the area (Natura 2000 sites and fishing no-take areas, respectively) but also, to the extent possible, in the acquired knowledge of the features of the area. Active restoration is performed in "thickets", denser nuclei, forming stepping stones.
- Monitoring and evaluation of restoration outcomes use underwater survey techniques, which are expensive. Hence, the projects try to develop cost-effective methodologies and tools. Monitoring should make a cost-efficient use of existing tools such as acoustic location, AUVs and ROVs and automated image processing.
- Social and governance aspects are crucial: the success of both projects is founded on the active involvement from early stages of relevant authorities and fishers, respectively. Social communication is important, to increase social understanding and support. The potential for job creation, in the case of tasks linked to the work with fishers, was also highlighted.
- Deep-water restoration is still very new and knowledge gaps and uncertainties, which also include those linked to the impacts of climate change, are even more relevant than for other marine ecosystems. These projects recommend building on basic science and don't be afraid of trying out new things.



Active Restoration - Shallow Water

The experience of projects LIFE SeaGrassRIAwild, in Portugal, and LIFE REEForest, in Italy, were presented during Day 1.

Key topics covered and discussed:

- Large-scale restoration of marine forests and seagrass meadows, including restoration planning, implementation and scaling up under the NRR.
- Development and application of restoration techniques, including ex situ cultivation, mariculture, seagrass nurseries, outplanting methods and large-scale deployment.
- Monitoring restoration success and ecological recovery, including environmental monitoring, assessment of restoration outcomes and indicators of functional ecosystem recovery.
- Biological constraints and challenges to restoration, including species-specific recovery, donor availability, reproductive biology, climate impacts and factors affecting long-term restoration success.
- Stakeholder engagement, citizen science and participatory restoration, including Living Labs, volunteer programmes, co-creation and awareness-raising to support restoration actions.
- Lessons learned for scaling up marine habitat restoration, including integration of scientific knowledge, practical experience and restoration planning to support implementation of the NRR.



Addressing Habitats' Threats and Pressures (Passive Restoration)

The experience of projects LIFE MPA-LIFE-IRELAND, in Ireland, and LIFE MareNatura & Horizon Europe MarinePlan, in Greece, were presented during Day 1.

Key topics covered and discussed:

- Development and implementation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including ecological sensitivity analyses, conservation prioritisation and spatial planning to support marine biodiversity protection and achievement of the EU 30×30 target.
- Passive restoration through the reduction of human pressures, including the role of MPAs, marine spatial planning and management measures to restore ecosystem health by addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and cumulative impacts.

- Biodiversity mapping, monitoring and evidence-based conservation planning, including ecological sensitivity assessments, species and habitat surveys, eDNA, telemetry, bioacoustics and integration of spatial datasets to support conservation decisions.
- Balancing conservation objectives with socio-economic activities, including assessment of fisheries, shipping, tourism and energy development to identify priority conservation areas while minimising conflicts between biodiversity protection and sustainable marine use.
- Stakeholder engagement and collaborative governance, including participatory conservation planning, public consultation and cross-sector collaboration to support the designation, management and long-term effectiveness of MPAs.



Habitats for Species

The experience of projects LIFE Mobile Marine Species, in France, and LIFE EU SHARKS, in Italy, were presented during Day 1.

Key topics covered and discussed:

- Restoration of intertidal mudflats to improve feeding habitats for migratory and wintering seabirds, including removal of invasive Pacific oyster reefs.
- Identification and protection of critical habitats for sharks, rays and seabirds, including Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and key feeding grounds.
- Compliance and enforcement of EU and regional regulations protecting sharks and rays, including protected species lists, bycatch provisions and release obligations.
- Reduction of pressures affecting species and habitats, including bycatch, recreational fishing impacts, ghost gear, marine litter and invasive species.
- Stakeholder engagement and behaviour change initiatives involving fishers, recreational users, divers, consumers and local communities to support species conservation.
- Monitoring, citizen science and restoration experimentation, including habitat mapping, long-term ecological monitoring, species tracking and testing innovative restoration and bycatch-reduction measures.



Day 2 – Thematic Sessions

Day 2 continued the four thematic tracks, with additional presentations in two more sessions.

Active Restoration - Deep Water

The experience of project Horizon Europe REDRESS, in the Atlantic Ocean from Iceland to the Bay of Biscay and the Azores, was presented during Day 2.

<u>Key topics covered and discussed:</u>

- Restoration of deep-sea habitats across European seas, including cold-water coral reefs and coral gardens.
- The Horizon project REDRESS addresses the identification of restoration priorities (including passive vs. active) and planning across multiple European case study sites, some of which were presented in this meeting.
- The cases presented during the meeting have used not only scientific data, but also historical sources and indirect evidence provided by old fishers for establishing the favourable reference areas (FRAs) of their target habitats, as required by the NRR.
- Active restoration approaches for cold-water coral habitats, largely based on the methods developed under LIFE LOPHELIA and ECOREST, such as the deployment of artificial restoration structures in thickets, and transplantation of ecosystem-forming species such as corals, sponges, gorgonians, etc. These examples also highlight the active collaboration with fishers for establishing restoration areas withing current MPAs. Fishers can make upscaling of the methods more cost efficient, while they can provide good quality data to support monitoring tasks.
- In view of the extremely large FRAs identified, and the related ambitious restoration targets, upscaling appears as a technical and financial challenge, calling for strengthened transboundary collaboration. Scaling up and demonstrating effective deep-sea restoration, including restoration protocols, low-cost monitoring systems and evidence to support future implementation. Monitoring obligations should be aligned both at EU and international level, to reduce the burden on member states.

- Linking science, policy and stakeholder engagement to support long-term restoration and implementation of European marine restoration objectives.



Active Restoration - Shallow Water

The experience of projects COASTal LIFE, in Denmark, and Horizon Europe CLIMAREST, were presented during Day 2.

Key topics covered:

- Integrated restoration of coastal ecosystems, including seagrass meadows, biogenic and stone reefs, salt marshes and lagoons to improve biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.
- Nature-based solutions to address multiple environmental pressures, including eutrophication, habitat degradation, climate change, sea-level rise and coastal squeeze through ecosystem restoration and managed coastal realignment.
- Development and application of restoration techniques and best practices, including eelgrass transplantation, restoration of shellfish reefs and implementation of scientifically based restoration protocols.
- Monitoring, restoration planning and site prioritisation, including restoration protocols, spatial prioritisation tools, ecological monitoring and decision-support tools for selecting restoration sites.
- Stakeholder engagement and socio-economic aspects of restoration, including citizen participation, ecosystem services, cost-benefit analyses and guidance to support large-scale restoration implementation.
- Knowledge sharing and scaling up restoration, through restoration toolboxes, digital platforms, scientific guidance and practical tools to support implementation of the NRR across Europe.



Addressing Habitats' Threats and Pressures (Passive Restoration)

The experience of projects LIFE DREAM, in Italy, Greece and Spain, and LIFE INTEMARES, in Spain, were presented during Day 2.

Key topics covered:

- Passive restoration through the removal of human pressures, including marine litter and ghost gear removal, fisheries management measures and other interventions to enable the natural recovery of deep-sea ecosystems.
- Innovative approaches for restoring vulnerable deep-sea reef habitats, combining artificial reef deployment, coral transplantation and habitat rehabilitation in Mediterranean canyon and seamount ecosystems.
- Integrated management of the Natura 2000 marine network, including protected area designation, management planning and implementation of conservation measures to support the EU Biodiversity Strategy and 30×30 target.
- Application of advanced technologies for marine conservation, including ROVs, underwater observation platforms, AI-assisted image processing, photogrammetry and remote sensing to support monitoring and restoration planning.
- Managing cumulative human impacts on marine ecosystems, including invasive species, recreational activities, seabed disturbance, pollution and fisheries interactions through targeted mitigation measures and adaptive management.
- Integrating science, governance and cross-sector collaboration into marine conservation, through coordinated action by public authorities, researchers, NGOs, fisheries organisations and other stakeholders to support evidence-based management of marine protected areas.



Habitats for Species

The experience of projects in the Mediterranean Sea was presented during day 2. Concretely, LIFE PINNARCA, LIFE PINNACARE in Spain, France, Italy and Greece, and LIFE OASIS in Spain, Italy and Malta, together with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

Key topics covered:

- Conservation and recovery of threatened marine species, focusing on the critically endangered Mediterranean Fan mussel (*Pinna nobilis)* and the Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta)* through targeted conservation and restoration actions.
- Monitoring and science-based management, including long-term population monitoring, identification of refuge populations, recruitment surveys, environmental monitoring, and the use of turtles as bioindicators to assess ecosystem health and emerging threats.
- Addressing major human-induced pressures on marine biodiversity, including disease outbreaks, habitat degradation, eutrophication, abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG/ghost gear), and other anthropogenic impacts requiring coordinated management responses.
- Development of conservation and restoration measures, such as ex situ conservation, captive breeding, translocation, biosecurity protocols, larval recruitment enhancement, retrieval of ghost fishing gear, and habitat management to support species recovery.
- Cross-border collaboration and stakeholder engagement, highlighting multinational partnerships and the active involvement of fishers, researchers, conservation organisations and local communities to implement restoration, improve monitoring, and promote sustainable marine management across the Mediterranean.



Final Session

The final session featured a keynote speech, delivered via a pre-recorded video, by Sahar Stevenson-Jones (European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, SER Europe), entitled “From Projects to Policy: The Role of SER Europe in Scaling Marine Restoration”. The keynote emphasised that delivering the NRR now depends on moving beyond successful demonstration projects towards large-scale implementation. The need to strengthen collaboration across restoration networks was highlighted. As was SER Europe’s role as a bridge between science, practice and policy, translating project evidence into coherent, actionable policy messages and ensuring that the knowledge generated by LIFE and Horizon projects informs NRPs and supports long-term marine ecosystem recovery.

This was followed by key takeaways from each breakout group and a closing statement by Maddalena Visser.

Day 2 - Visit to Oceanogràfic València

After the second Knowledge Market session, participants left Base One venue and took part in a technical visit to Oceanogràfic València, the largest aquarium in Europe and part of the striking architectural complex of the City of Arts and Sciences. Its impressive buildings, extensive aquaria and specialised facilities provided an exceptional setting in which to explore the links between marine conservation, scientific research, animal welfare and public engagement. The visit included the ARCA del Mar (Marine Animal Recovery and Conservation Area), the Oceanogràfic’s specialised facility for the veterinary care and rehabilitation of injured or stranded marine animals, particularly sea turtles and ray species, with the aim of returning them to the sea. Participants were introduced to the facilities and veterinary work supporting the rescue, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of marine fauna, as well as approaches for monitoring animals following their release. The visit also highlighted the use of satellite tracking of sea turtles, providing valuable information on post-release recovery, movements and habitat use and contributing to their long-term conservation.

Day 3 - Field Trip to Marina Alta

The third day of the event was dedicated to a field trip, with a catamaran, scheduled from 08:00 to 15:30, to the Natura 2000 site “Espacio Marino de la Marina Alta” (ESZZ16007), declared both

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive respectively.

The INTEMARES project representative provided participants with direct exposure to the natural values of the site and to practical conservation and restoration challenges in a Mediterranean coastal and marine protected-area context.

KEY OUTCOMES

The discussions across the four thematic workgroups identified a number of common conclusions for the implementation of marine restoration under the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) and the preparation of National Restoration Plans (NRPs). While the ecological contexts and restoration approaches differed between deep-water habitats, shallow-water habitats, passive restoration and habitats for species, several recurring messages emerged from the projects and discussions.

- **Address pressures before resorting to active restoration.** Across all four workgroups, participants stressed that preventing further degradation and reducing or removing the principal pressures should be the starting point for restoration. Natural recovery should be enabled wherever feasible, with active restoration used where pressures have been addressed and natural recovery alone is insufficient.
- **Combine passive and active restoration according to ecological need and feasibility.** The meeting demonstrated that these approaches should not be considered alternatives but complementary elements of a restoration strategy. Large-scale pressure reduction, effectively managed MPAs and fisheries measures can provide the conditions for natural recovery, while targeted active interventions may be necessary in priority locations or for habitats and species where recovery is unlikely without assistance.
- **Plan restoration at ecosystem scale and for long-term resilience.** Restoration should aim to recover ecological structure, functions, processes and connectivity rather than focus only on individual sites or short-term outputs. For habitats supporting species, this also requires identifying important areas and sensitive periods, considering the needs of mobile and data-deficient species, and incorporating climate-change risks into restoration and protected-area planning.
- **Strengthen the evidence base while allowing action under uncertainty**. Common ecological baselines, restoration indicators and harmonized monitoring approaches are needed to assess progress and improve comparability. At the same time, knowledge gaps should not automatically delay action where pressures and risks are sufficiently understood; precautionary and risk-based approaches, combined with adaptive management, can allow measures to be refined as new evidence becomes available.
- **Monitor both restoration measures and ecological recovery over the long term.** Participants highlighted that monitoring pressures alone cannot generally demonstrate successful restoration: ecological responses must also be assessed, since reducing a

pressure does not necessarily lead to the expected recovery and new threats may emerge. Monitoring therefore needs to be sufficiently frequent and linked to adaptive management and decision-making.

- **Improve policy coherence and coordination across sectors and borders.** Marine restoration cannot be delivered through environmental policy alone. Effective implementation requires coordination between biodiversity conservation, fisheries, marine spatial planning and other relevant sectors, as well as operational cooperation between national, regional and local authorities. Transboundary cooperation is particularly important for deep-sea ecosystems and highly mobile species, including coordination through relevant regional sea conventions.
- **Embed stakeholder participation throughout the restoration process.** The workgroups repeatedly highlighted the value of involving fishers, local communities, scientists, managers and other users from an early stage. Co-design and sustained participation can provide ecological and practical knowledge, improve legitimacy and implementation, and build longer-term ownership of restoration measures.
- **Restoration requires long-term governance and financing, not only short-term projects.** The experience presented by LIFE and Horizon Europe projects showed that restoration outcomes often develop over timescales extending beyond individual project cycles. Sustainable financing is therefore needed not only for active interventions, but also for management, enforcement, monitoring, stakeholder structures, research and continued adaptation.

Taken together, the discussions highlighted that successful marine restoration is not simply a matter of applying individual restoration techniques. It requires a long-term, ecosystem-based approach combining pressure reduction, targeted intervention where necessary, sound science and monitoring, adaptive governance, sustained financing and meaningful stakeholder participation. These elements will be important for translating the ambitions of the NRR into practical and measurable restoration measures through National Restoration Plans. This is particularly timely as Member States prepare their draft NRPs for submission by 1 September 2026.

The principal policy implications arising from these conclusions are synthesised in the Policy Brief (Annex 1), accompanied by four thematic briefs covering Deep-Sea Restoration, Shallow-Water Restoration, Addressing Habitats' Pressures/Natural Recovery and Restoring Habitats for Species.

LESSONS LEARNT FOR FUTURE PLATFORMS

The LIFE Marine Platform Meeting provided several useful lessons for the organization and implementation of future LIFE Platform Meetings. Overall, the combination of high-level policy input, practical project experience, thematic discussions, networking opportunities and technical

visits proved particularly effective in facilitating exchange between projects, policy-makers, scientists and practitioners.

Close cooperation between CINEA, ELMEN and the host project is essential. A key factor in the successful preparation and delivery of the meeting was the excellent collaboration between Fundación Biodiversidad, as coordinator of the host project LIFE INTEMARES, CINEA and ELMEN. Early planning, clear allocation of responsibilities and regular communication helped ensure smooth logistics, a coherent programme and effective facilitation. This collaborative approach provides a useful model for future Platform Meetings.

Allow sufficient time for discussion and peer exchange. While the breadth and quality of the programme were appreciated, the ambitious agenda sometimes limited the time available for questions and discussion. Future meetings should therefore seek an appropriate balance between presentations and interactive exchange, with sufficient time for participants to discuss common challenges, practical experiences and potential collaboration.

Build dedicated networking opportunities into the programme. Informal exchange was one of the most valued aspects of the meeting. The Knowledge Market provided a useful setting for project-to-project interaction, while the rotating thematic format encouraged exchange across different areas of marine restoration. Future meetings could further strengthen networking through dedicated and, where appropriate, facilitated formats such as thematic roundtables or small-group exchanges.

Maintain the link between policy discussion and practical experience. The combination of policy-oriented plenary sessions, project case studies and technical visits was a particular strength. The visits to Oceanogràfic València and the Marina Alta SAC/SPA provided opportunities to connect the discussions with practical conservation and restoration experience. Maintaining a strong field or technical component should therefore remain an important consideration when designing future Platform Meetings.

Facilitate preparation and knowledge exchange before and after the meeting. Where feasible, presentations and relevant supporting materials should be shared with participants in advance and made available following the meeting. This can help participants prepare for discussions, facilitate follow-up exchanges and increase the longer-term value of the knowledge generated during the event. This was also identified by participants as an area where future meetings could be strengthened.

Enhance communication and dissemination before, during and after the event. Giving visibility to Platform Meetings, informing on participants, themes addressed, presentations and conclusions is crucial to catch the attention of the general public and to provide information on the objectives addressed.

Strengthen participant commitment following registration. Platform Meetings require the host and organizers to commit financial and human resources in advance, particularly for catering and

technical visits. Last-minute cancellations and no-shows can therefore result in unnecessary costs and organizational difficulties. Future invitations and registration procedures should make clearer that registration represents a commitment to participate and that late withdrawals have practical and financial implications for the organizers. Where appropriate, additional mechanisms to encourage timely confirmation or cancellation could also be considered.

Participant feedback confirmed the overall success of the meeting and provides additional information for the organization of future events. Detailed results of the post-event satisfaction survey are presented in **Annex 5 – Participants Feedback Survey Summary**.

Annex 1 Policy Brief

Delivering effective marine restoration across EU policies

Common messages and policy implications from four thematic briefs on deep-sea restoration, shallow-water restoration, habitats' pressure reduction and species-focused restoration

CORE MESSAGE

Marine restoration is primarily a governance and pressure-management challenge, supported by ecological intervention. National Restoration Plans (NRR) will deliver only if they translate EU objectives into coordinated, enforceable, financed and adaptively managed action across environmental and maritime sectors.

Purpose and strategic context

This brief consolidates the recurring conclusions of four marine restoration workgroups held under the auspices of the LIFE Marine Platform Meeting in Valencia, Spain June 2026. Despite their different ecological focus, the workgroups point to a common delivery model for implementing the NRR and preparing effective National Restoration Plans (NRPs). The findings are particularly relevant to DG Environment's coordination with the Member States MS. More detailed briefs for each separate workgroup are appended to this document.

Ten common messages

1. Reduce pressures first	Restoration cannot succeed while the drivers of degradation continue. Common pressures across all four groups include damaging fishing practices, anchoring, pollution, sediment disturbance, coastal development and invasive alien species. While not possible to remove all pressures entirely, reduction to acceptable levels is possible in many cases. In some instances, identifying and addressing the main pressure may be sufficient and using valuable resources to address all the pressures affecting a habitat or species.
2. Allow natural recovery	Natural recovery, enabled by protection and pressure reduction, should be the default. MPAs, fisheries restrictions, closures, no-take areas and other spatial measures are restoration tools. Restoration should be embedded in effective site protection and management. Designation alone is insufficient: management plans need enforceable zoning, use restrictions, surveillance and measures capable of preventing or reducing damaging activities.
3. Active restoration	Active intervention is justified where passive recovery is unlikely, too slow or demonstrably insufficient. Establishing clusters of restored habitats ('stepping stones') can accelerate the recovery of ecosystem functions while maximising ecological benefits from limited resources.

4. Plan at ecosystem scale	Measures should reflect ecological connectivity, habitat–species relationships, sensitive seasons, migration routes and ecosystem functions. Long-term restoration success depends on rebuilding ecosystem structure, function and resilience rather than restoring individual species or habitats. Restoration should therefore focus on ecological processes that create self-sustaining marine ecosystems that can be implemented efficiently at larger spatial scales.
5. Act with the best available evidence	Better baselines, mapping and condition data are needed, but imperfect knowledge should not delay precautionary action. Modelling, expert judgement and adaptive revision can address uncertainty. Promote the use of adaptive management to respond to ecological changes as they happen and allow for data gaps and modelling inaccuracies. All the data will never be available.
6. Monitor and adapt	Restoration needs measurable objectives, suitable indicators and monitoring frequent enough to guide decisions. Plans should change when evidence shows that recovery is not occurring.
7. Build climate resilience	Planning must account for warming, sea-level rise, deoxygenation, species redistribution and changing ecosystem conditions. Future viability and ecological function matter alongside historic reference conditions. Recognise that some deep-sea environments may provide refugia for key species as a mechanism to build resilience to climate change.
8. Strengthen governance	Delivery depends on cooperation between environment, fisheries, maritime, port, tourism and planning authorities, with cross-border coordination for shared ecosystems and mobile species. Establish operational coordination across competent authorities and improve coordination between Commission services so biodiversity needs are reflected in related directives, strategies and plans.
9. Co-design with stakeholders	Fishers, coastal communities, ports, tourism operators, scientists and NGOs should help shape and deliver measures, improving legitimacy, practicability and compliance. Restoration should be developed *with* the people and *for* the people, ensuring that local knowledge, needs, and socio-economic realities are incorporated into decision-making processes from start to finish.
10. Fund long-term delivery	Finance must cover pressure reduction, enforcement, monitoring, participation and continuing management—not only initial restoration interventions or short-lived pilots. Future funding mechanisms should recognise the higher costs and longer timescales associated with restoring habitats and species of high conservation value, while encouraging innovative financing models that leverage both public and private investment.

Priority policy implications for DG Environment

- **Make pressure reduction the entry point for NRPs.** Require systematic pressure assessments and explicit regulatory, fisheries-management and spatial measures capable of creating the conditions for recovery.
- **Apply a clear restoration hierarchy.** Frame EU guidance around preventing deterioration, reducing pressures, enabling passive recovery and using active restoration only where ecological need and feasibility justify it.
- **Integrate implementation across EU instruments.** Align restoration with the Habitats and Birds Directives, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water Framework Directive, Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Protected Area management. Avoid parallel processes, inconsistent objectives and conflicting measures.
- **Deepen delivery arrangements across DGs.** Develop aligned objectives, evidence standards, timetables and implementation pathways where fisheries and other measures are necessary to achieve restoration outcomes.
- **Enable decisions under uncertainty.** Clarify acceptable evidence standards and the use of modelling, expert judgement and the precautionary principle, combined with formal mechanisms for adaptive revision.
- **Develop coherent monitoring and indicators.** Promote common EU principles while allowing indicators and recovery timelines to reflect the ecological differences between shallow waters, deep-sea habitats and species-supporting habitats.
- **Consolidate and reuse knowledge.** Create an accessible EU system for restoration results, methods and tools so Member States can build on previous projects and avoid repeated testing of the same approaches.
- **Shift finance towards continuity and scale.** Prioritise long-term programmes and scalable measures. Require active techniques to be piloted, evaluated and shown to be effective before wider replication.
- **Link targets to enforcement.** Ensure that restoration targets are accompanied by effective control of damaging activities. Designation, planning and restoration expenditure alone will not secure ecological recovery.

CONCLUSION

Effective marine restoration requires a shift from stand-alone projects towards integrated programmes that reduce pressures, protect ecological processes and sustain recovery over time. The European Commission should drive this shift by ensuring that National Restoration Plans combine ecological ambition with coherent governance, enforceable measures, adequate finance and adaptive management.

DEEP-SEA RESTORATION

Workshop conclusions translated into priorities for EU and national restoration policy

PURPOSE

To inform the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the preparation of National Restoration Plans, with particular attention to deep sea habitats.

Key messages

- **Prevent degradation before restoring.** Limited resources should first remove pressures. Active restoration should only be used where natural recovery is insufficient.
- **Combine passive and active restoration.** Large protected areas and fisheries closures should be complemented by targeted restoration 'stepping stones' to maximise ecological recovery.
- **Invest in science, innovation and monitoring.** Develop harmonised restoration indicators and cost-effective monitoring technologies to support implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation and Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- **Strengthen collaboration with fishers and stakeholders.** Ecological knowledge, spatial information and practical expertise from the fishing sector are essential for successful restoration.
- **Support long-term EU cooperation and financing.** Deep-sea ecosystems require sustained investment, transboundary coordination and collaboration with regional sea conventions.
- **Communicate responsibly.** Restoration complements, but does not replace, effective conservation because recovery is slow, uncertain and costly.

Policy implications

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
Develop an EU strategic framework	Integrating conservation, restoration and monitoring. Improve the spatial resolution of mandatory reporting data from trawlers to map deep sea habitats more accurately. Parts of the deep sea (e.g. sea mounts) may provide refugia for some species in the light of climate change.
Strong partnerships	Long-term success depends on strong partnerships between scientists, fishers, authorities and other stakeholders. Fishers provide valuable ecological knowledge, practical expertise and spatial data, while investment in research, monitoring technologies and harmonised restoration indicators is essential to support implementation of both the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).
Restoration hierarchy	Prioritise protection and pressure reduction before active restoration. The most effective model combines large-scale passive restoration through Marine Protected Areas and

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
	fisheries closures with targeted active restoration in priority locations. Establishing clusters of restored habitat ('stepping stones') can accelerate the recovery of ecosystem functions while maximising ecological benefits from limited resource
Evidence and monitoring	Invest in common monitoring methods, restoration indicators and innovative technologies to reduce costs and improve effectiveness. Align monitoring and reporting requirements across the NRR, MSFD and regional sea conventions to reduce administrative burden and improve comparability. Consider developing restoration indicators that can be used for both Good Environmental Status (GES) and NRR condition assessment.
Transboundary cooperation	Because many deep-sea ecosystems extend across national jurisdictions and into international waters, effective restoration requires sustained EU financing, strengthened transboundary cooperation and alignment with regional sea conventions (Helsinki Convention, Ospar Convention, Barcelona Convention, and Bucharest Convention).
Finance and participation	Invest in common monitoring methods, restoration indicators and innovative technologies to reduce costs and improve effectiveness. Recognise deep-sea restoration as a long-term strategic investment contributing to EU biodiversity, climate resilience and sustainable blue economy objectives.

Conclusion

Effective restoration of deep-sea habitats requires investment and bold decision making. It depends on preventing degradation, reducing pressures and, where appropriate, targeted active restoration. It should be supported by strong collaboration between science, fisheries and stakeholders, and sustaining long-term investment in restoration, monitoring and international cooperation.

SHALLOW WATER RESTORATION

Workshop conclusions translated into priorities for EU and national restoration policy

PURPOSE

To inform the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the preparation of National Restoration Plans, with particular attention to shallow water marine habitats.

Key messages

- **Remove pressures before restoring.** Site-specific ecological assessments should identify and mitigate the causes of degradation before active restoration is undertaken.
- **Integrate passive and active restoration.** Long-term restoration programmes should combine pressure reduction, active interventions and sustained monitoring within adaptive management frameworks.
- **Prioritise ecological value alongside feasibility**. Restoration should not focus solely on habitats that deliver rapid, measurable success but also those of highest conservation importance.
- **Restore resilient ecosystems.** Restoration should recover ecosystem structure, function and ecological processes rather than individual species alone.
- **Improve reference conditions and monitoring.** Harmonised ecological baselines and restoration indicators are essential.
- **Strengthen governance, finance and participation.** Long-term success depends on sustainable funding, effective coordination and stakeholder engagement.

Policy implications

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
National Restoration Plans	Integrate pressure reduction, passive and active restoration, long-term monitoring and adaptive management into restoration programmes. The European Commission should continue supporting the development of common guidance on restoration planning, ecological reference conditions and monitoring methodologies to promote consistent implementation across Member States.
Evidence and monitoring	Develop common ecological reference conditions, restoration indicators and monitoring methodologies across Member States. Conduct long term monitoring within adaptive management frameworks.
Restoration priorities	Balance ecological urgency, feasibility and conservation value when selecting habitats and species for restoration. Policy and funding frameworks should avoid favouring only habitats that deliver rapid or easily measurable results and instead support the recovery of species and habitats of greatest conservation concern.
Governance	Strengthened cooperation between competent authorities, scientists, stakeholders and local communities will be essential to accelerate permitting, improve implementation and build long-term ownership of

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
	restoration actions. Effective implementation depends upon adaptive governance, streamlined regulatory processes, sustainable long-term financing and meaningful stakeholder engagement to secure public support and maximise environmental and socio-economic benefits.
Finance	Support long-term public funding while encouraging complementary private investment. Future funding mechanisms should recognise the higher costs and longer timescales associated with restoring habitats and species of high conservation value, while encouraging innovative financing models that leverage both public and private investment.
Delivering at scale	Scaling up restoration under the Nature Restoration Regulation will require improved ecological reference conditions, practical assessment frameworks and innovative restoration techniques that can be implemented efficiently at larger spatial scales.
Ecosystem approach	Long-term restoration success depends on rebuilding ecosystem structure, function and resilience rather than simply restoring individual species. Restoration should therefore focus on ecological processes that create self-sustaining marine ecosystems.

Conclusion

Successful shallow water restoration is fundamentally a governance challenge as well as an ecological one. Delivering the ambitions of the Nature Restoration Regulation will require restoration strategies that are science-based, adaptive and adequately financed, while embedding stakeholder participation throughout the restoration process. Long-term success will depend not only on restoring habitats, but on creating resilient marine ecosystems capable of sustaining biodiversity and the ecosystem services on which coastal communities and marine economies depend. Restoration should be developed *with* the people and *for* the people, ensuring that local knowledge, needs, and socio-economic realities are incorporated into decision-making processes from start to finish.

ADDRESSING HABITATS' PRESSURES/NATURAL RECOVERY

Workshop conclusions translated into priorities for EU and national restoration policy

PURPOSE

To inform the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the preparation of National Restoration Plans, with particular attention to addressing threats and pressures leading to natural recovery.

Key messages

- **Reduce pressures before restoring.** Address the principal drivers of degradation first and use active restoration only where natural recovery is insufficient.
- **Manage Marine Protected Areas effectively.** Designation alone is not enough; management, enforcement and compliance are essential to enable recovery.
- **Apply precautionary, risk-based decision making.** Data gaps should not delay action where pressures are well understood.
- **Embed adaptive management.** Restoration measures should evolve as monitoring improves understanding of ecological responses and emerging threats.
- **Monitor pressures and ecological recovery.** Both are required to demonstrate progress and evaluate restoration effectiveness.
- **Strengthen governance and participation**. Long-term stakeholder engagement, coordinated management and sustainable funding underpin successful passive restoration.

Policy implications

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
Restoration hierarchy	Make pressure reduction the entry point for restoration. EU implementation guidance and funding should reinforce the sequence of pressure reduction, natural recovery and, only where necessary, active enhancement. Addressing the threats followed by natural recovery is the only viable approach across much of Europe's marine area and should therefore be treated as a central delivery mechanism for EU biodiversity, climate and restoration objectives
Marine protected areas	Use effectively managed MPAs as a principal natural recovery tool. Designation alone is insufficient: management plans need enforceable zoning, use restrictions, surveillance and measures capable of preventing or reducing damaging activities.
Evidence base	Data gaps should not become a reason for delay. Apply precautionary, risk-based decisions, use modelling to fill priority gaps—particularly for strictly protected areas—and improve data harmonisation while recognising uncertainty and possible false results derived from models. Promote risk-based decision making,

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
	precautionary action and harmonised monitoring despite remaining data gaps.
Adaptive management	Measures should be based on the best available evidence and revised as new information emerges, including through NRR and MSFD review cycles. This is particularly important for migratory species, invasive species and climate-driven ecological change. Develop guidance linking NRR, MSFD and CFP implementation with periodic review and adjustment.
Finance	Prioritise long-term investment in management, monitoring and governance, alongside targeted active restoration where required. EU and national finance should support long-term MPA management, enforcement, stakeholder structures, targeted evidence gaps and ecological monitoring—not only short-term active-restoration projects.
Stakeholder participation	Invest in durable participation and governance. Early co-design with users and managers improves legitimacy and implementation. Permanent stakeholder forums can reduce transaction costs, but proportionate top-down action may still be needed where engagement fails or urgent biodiversity risks persist. Youth perspectives should be included. Maintain permanent stakeholder structures and community engagement to improve legitimacy and delivery.
Policy coherence	Strengthen coordination across biodiversity, fisheries and marine policies to support large-scale ecosystem recovery. EC should provide coherent guidance on pressure thresholds, ecological condition and adaptive management across the NRR, MSFD and CFP frameworks, including approaches suitable for EUNIS level 3/4/5 habitats and cumulative impacts.
Governance	Concrete conservation actions should be supported by effective governance, adaptive management, long-term monitoring and sustained stakeholder participation, this approach offers the most scalable and cost-effective pathway for achieving the objectives of the Nature Restoration Regulation.
Monitoring	Monitor both pressures and ecological response. Pressure monitoring may be the only practicable option in remote or high-seas areas, but it cannot generally replace habitat and species monitoring: reduced

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
	pressure does not always produce the expected recovery, and ecological monitoring can reveal emerging threats such as disease.

Conclusion

Effective restoration depends less on isolated interventions than on sustained pressure reduction and functioning governance. Complete removal of pressures is rarely realistic; authorities should identify and prioritise the dominant pressures in each place—such as fishing impacts, sediment disturbance, anchoring or vessel collisions—and reduce them sufficiently to permit recovery. This requires practical thresholds, management plans and long-term monitoring, aligned with the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and EU protected-area commitments.

RESTORING HABITATS FOR SPECIES

Workshop conclusions translated into priorities for EU and national restoration policy

PURPOSE

To inform the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the preparation of National Restoration Plans, with particular attention to marine species' requirements.

Key messages

- **Remove pressures before restoring.** Limited resources should first address the causes of degradation. Active restoration should be added only where passive recovery is demonstrably insufficient.
- **Plan for species as well as habitats.** Map important areas and sensitive seasons, prioritise habitats that benefit multiple species, and use umbrella-species approaches where they deliver wider ecological gains.
- **Embed climate resilience throughout.** Climate-change adaptation should inform restoration design, marine protected-area management and delivery, especially for vulnerable coastal and shore ecosystems.
- **Turn coordination into concrete action.** National Restoration Plans should specify detail how environmental, fisheries, ports, tourism and local authorities will collaborate, while strengthening transboundary action for highly mobile species.
- **Prevent invasive alien species at source.** Biosecurity, pathway controls and sector awareness are more feasible and cost-effective than attempting eradication after establishment in the marine environment.
- **Build durable knowledge and participation.** Results and tools from past projects should be publicly accessible; monitoring should be regular; and stakeholder engagement should continue beyond short project cycles.

Policy implications

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
National Restoration Plans	Include pressure-removal measures, temporary or permanent no-take areas where justified, climate-adaptation provisions, sensitive periods, and spatially explicit areas important for species.
Coherent governance	Establish operational coordination across competent authorities and improve coordination between Commission services so biodiversity needs are reflected in related directives, strategies and plans across sectors.
Cross-border delivery	For mobile species, set detailed actions with EU and non-EU partners at the relevant biogeographical scale. Develop compatible biosecurity arrangements for the movement of specimens.

Priority	Implication for EU and national action
Evidence and monitoring	Create an accessible system for previous project results, methods and tools. Monitor often enough to support adaptive decisions rather than relying on widely spaced reporting cycles.
Species coverage	Address overlooked and data-deficient taxa, apply the precautionary principle while knowledge improves, and align protected-species priorities between Habitats and Birds Directives and regional sea conventions (Helsinki Convention, Ospar Convention, Barcelona Convention, and Bucharest Convention). to avoid protection gaps and inconsistencies.
Finance and participation	Value ecosystem services and communicate their contribution to economic sectors. Identify compensation and funding options and involve fishers, divers, ports, tourism operators, schools and local communities in delivery.
Methods and innovation	Coordinate restoration methods at EU level. Test innovative approaches at pilot scale and replicate only after effectiveness has been demonstrated.

Conclusion

Effective restoration of habitats for species requires more than isolated technical projects. It depends on tackling pressures first, integrating species needs and climate risks into spatial planning, coordinating policies and authorities, and maintaining long-term monitoring and community partnerships. National Restoration Plans should translate these principles into funded, time-bound and measurable actions, supported by coherent EU methods and cross-border cooperation.

Annex 2: Agenda

LIFE Platform Meeting: Meeting the Challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation
Best Practice and Innovation in Marine Restoration in Europe

Base One La Marina, 46024 València, Spain
9 - 11 June 2026

Day 1		
8:30 – 9:00	**Registration**	
9:00 – 11:00 **P** **lenary Session: Meeting the challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation**		
Main Stage	**Event Opening**	**Welcome**
	Welcome from the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge of Spain Presentation: Marine restoration and preparation of the National Restoration Plan in marine areas in Spain	*Speaker:* Fernando Magdaleno (Deputy Directorate of Terrestrial and Marine Biodiversity - Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, Spain)
	Nature Restoration Regulation explained for marine habitats and species	*Speaker:* Maddalena Visser (European Commission, DG.ENV.D3 – Nature Conservation)
	Project Presentation: **Horizon Europe BioAgora:** The Gap Map: Overview of unmapped Annex II habitats listed in the Nature Restoration Regulation	*Speaker*: Ute Jacob (Helmholtz Institute for Functional Marine Biodiversity at the University of Oldenburg, Germany)
	Project Presentation: **LIFE-MAPPER:** Addressing the challenges of marine habitat degradation by creating comprehensive guidelines and tools for restoration	*Speaker*: Federica Foglini (Institute of Marine Sciences, National Research Council of Italy (CNR-ISMAR))
	Project Presentation: **LIFE-IP BIODIVERSEA**: Building Finland's capacity by creating the knowledge, planning tools, governance models, and practical measures	*Speakers*: Sanni Turunen & Anu Riihimäki (Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland)
11:00 – 11:30	**Coffee Break**	

11:30 – 13:00 **Session 1**		
Main Stage	**Active Restoration: Deep Water** **LIFE LOPHELIA**: Method development for cold-water coral reef habitat restoration with implementation in Kosterfjord-Väderöfjord, Sweden	*Speaker*: Ann Larsson (University of Gothenburg, Tjärnö Marine Laboratory, Sweden) *Facilitator*: Sara Barcelo
Block 1	**Active Restoration: Shallow Water** **LIFE SeaGrassRIAwild**: development of seagrass mariculture to support large scale restoration of *Zostera marina*	*Speaker*: João Pedro Coelho (Centre for Marine and Environmental Sciences (CESAM) and University of Aveiro, Portugal) *Facilitator*: Vasiliki Markantonatou
Block 2	**Passive Restoration – Identifying and Removing the Threats** **MPA-LIFE-IRELAND:** establishing a network of MPAs by reducing threats and pressures – achieving GES under the MSFD	*Speaker*: Oliver Ó'Cadhla (Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, Ireland) *Facilitator:* Lynne Barratt
Pergola	**Restoring Habitats for Species** **LIFE Mobile Marine Species**: Restoring intertidal mudflats to improve seabirds feeding sites	*Speakers*: Dimitri Dupres & Ségolène Fabre (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) and Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) France) *Facilitator:* María-José Aramburu
13:00 - 14:00	**Lunch Break**	

14:00 – 15:30 **Session 2**		
Main Stage	**Active Restoration: Deep Water** Scaling Up Deep-Sea Restoration Through Participatory Multispecific Approaches: Lessons from the **LIFE ECOREST** Project.	*Speaker*: Jordi Grinyò (Institute of Marine Sciences, Spanish National Research Council (ICM-CSIC), Spain) *Facilitator*: Sara Barcelo
Block 1	**Active Restoration: Shallow Water** **LIFE REEForest**: Restoration of *Cystoseira* macroalgal forests to enhance biodiversity along Mediterranean rocky reefs	*Speaker*: Annalisa Falace (University of Trieste, Italy) *Facilitator*: Vasiliki Markantonatou
Block 2	**Passive Restoration – Removing the Threats** **LIFE MareNatura & Horizon Europe MarinePlan**: Systematic conservation planning for effective protection of biodiversity	*Speaker*: Stelios Katsanevakis (University of Aegean, Greece) *Facilitator:* Lynne Barratt
Pergola	**Restoring Habitats for Species** **LIFE EU SHARKS**: Compliance and Enforcement for sharks: extending benefits beyond flagship	*Speakers*: Eleonora De Sabata & Francesco Colloca (MedSharks) & (Stazione Zoologica A. Dohrn, Italy) *Facilitator:* María-José Aramburu
15.30	**Coffee Break**	

15:30 – 17:00 **Knowledge Market 1**	
Finger Area Networking space	Roll up Banners, displays of restoration methods
	End of proceedings of Day 1

Day 2		
09:00 – 10:30 **Session 3**		
Main Stage	**Active Restoration: Deep Water** **Horizon Europe REDRESS:** restoration of **Atlantic** cold water coral habitats from Iceland to the Bay of Biscay (establishing a network of deep-sea artificial structures to restore deep water reefs).	*Speakers*: Anthony Grehan & Stefan Ragnasson (University of Galway, Ireland & Marine and Freshwater Research Institute of Iceland/EU REDRESS project) *Facilitator*: Sara Barcelo
Block 1	**Active Restoration: Shallow Water** **COASTal LIFE**: Restoring Biogenic and Stone Reefs, Seagrasses, Lagoons and Saltmarshes in shallow coastal waters in Denmark.	*Speaker*: Torben Jørgensen (Aalborg Municipality, Limfjord Council, Denmark) *Facilitator*: Vasiliki Markantonatou
Block 2	**Passive Restoration – Removing the Threats** **LIFE DREAM**: Deep Reef Restoration and Litter Removal in the Mediterranean Sea	*Speaker*: Federica Foglini (CNR, Institute of Marine Science, Italy) *Facilitator:* Lynne Barratt
Pergola	**Restoring Habitats for Species** **LIFE PINNARCA** and **LIFE PINNACARE**: more than five years of experience in the conservation of *Pinna nobilis*	*Speakers*: José Rafael García March & Jose Tena Medialdea (Institute for Research in Environment and Marine Science (IMEDMAR), Universidad Católica de Valencia (UCV)) *Facilitator:* María-José Aramburu
10:30 – 11:00	**Coffee Break**	

11:00 – 12:30 **Session 4**		
Main Stage	**Active Restoration: Deep Water** **Horizon Europe REDRESS**: Restoring cold-water coral gardens in the Azores in collaboration with fishermen	*Speaker*: Marina Parra Carreiro e Silva (University of the Azores, Institute of Marine Sciences – OKEANOS) *Facilitator*: Sara Barcelo
Block 1	**Active Restoration: Shallow Water** **Horizon Europe CLIMAREST**: preservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems for increased climate resilience (an EU Ocean Mission project)	*Speaker*: Simonetta Fraschetti (University of Naples, Federico II, Italy) *Facilitator*: Vasiliki Markantonatou
Block 2	**Passive Restoration – Identifying and Removing the Threats** **LIFE INTEMARES**: Integrated, Innovative and Participatory Management for the marine Natura 2000 Network in Spain	*Speaker*: Victoria Gonzalez (Biodiversity Foundation, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, Spain) *Facilitator:* Lynne Barratt
Pergola	**Restoring Habitats for Species** **LIFE OASIS:** Mitigating the negative interactions of protected species with marine litter and pelagic fisheries of the Mediterranean	*Speaker*: Ric Sagarminaga van Buiten (Alnitak) *Facilitator:* María-José Aramburu
12.30 - 13.30 **Final Session**		
Main Stage	**Keynote speech** "From Projects to Policy: The Role of SER Europe in Scaling Marine Restoration"	*Speaker*: Sahar Stevenson-Jones (European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration International, SER Europe). *Pre-recorded video*
	Key takeaways from the breakout groups	*Deep Sea:* Sara Barcelo *Shallow Water:* Vasiliki Markantonatou *Removing the Threats:* Lynne Barratt *Habitats for Species:* María-José Aramburu
	Closing Statement	Maddalena Visser (European Commission, DG.ENV.D3 – Nature Conservation)
13.30 - 14.30	**Lunch Break**	

14:30 – 16:00 **Knowledge Market 2**	
Finger Area	Roll up Banners, displays of restoration methods

Networking Space	
	End of proceedings

16:00 – 18:30
Visit to the Oceanographic Institute (https://www.oceanografic.org/en/)

Day 3
08:00 – 15:30 Field Trip to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) of Marina Alta to discover their natural treasures: *Posidonia oceanica* seagrass beds, reefs, caves, seabirds

Annex 3: Participating Projects List

LIFE projects as presenters - speakers:

1. INTEMARES
2. MAPPER
3. IP BIODIVERSEA
4. LOPHELIA
5. SeaGrassRIAwild
6. MPA-LIFE-IRELAND
7. Mobile Marine Species
8. ECOREST
9. REEForest
10. MareNatura
11. EU SHARKS
12. COASTal LIFE
13. DREAM
14. PINNARCA
15. PINNACARE
16. OASIS

LIFE projects as audience – work group participants:

17. IMPROVE Aquatic LIFE
18. TURTLENEST
19. CONVIVE
20. REEF
21. RESTORESEAGRASS
22. SEADETECT
23. AdaptaBlues
24. ADAPTS
25. B4B
26. NatConnect2030
27. ADAPT'ISLAND
28. BioAgora
29. NGO Oceana Europe
30. IFE24-FPA-NL-SBE

The following LIFE NCPs also participated in the event: Cyprus, Greece & Ireland

Horizon Europe projects as presenters-speakers:

1. BioAgora
2. MarinePlan
3. REDRESS
4. CLIMAREST

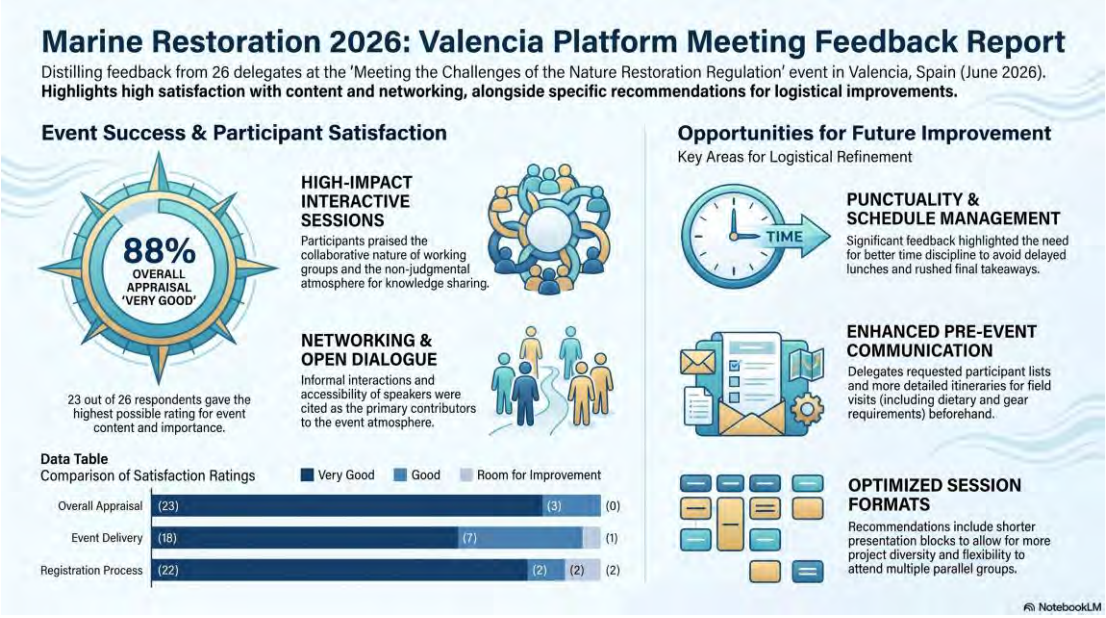
Project participation in Knowledge Market with informative materials such as roll ups, posters, flyers:

- CINEA/ LIFE
- LIFE BIODIVERSEA
- LIFE ADAPTS

- LIFE DREAM
- LIFE INTEMARES
- LIFE MAPPER
- LIFE MareNatura
- LIFE MARHA
- LIFE EU SHARKS
- LIFE ECOREST
- LIFE AdaptaBlues
- LIFE NatConnect2030
- LIFE PINNARCA
- HORIZON REDRESS

Annex 4: Participants Feedback Survey Summary

A post-event satisfaction survey link (https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/SatisfactionSurveyPMMarine) to the form (see below) was sent to participants following the LIFE Marine Platform Meeting. A total of 26 responses were received. Overall feedback was highly positive, with participants particularly valuing the relevance of the meeting to the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation, the quality of the speakers and discussions, and the opportunities for exchange with other projects, authorities and European Commission representatives.



Participants particularly appreciated the timely focus on the Nature Restoration Regulation and National Restoration Plans, the high level of expertise represented at the meeting, and the opportunity to exchange directly with European Commission representatives, National Contact Points and other marine restoration projects. The rotating thematic sessions, Knowledge Market and technical visits were also frequently identified as strengths.

Suggestions for improvement focused mainly on allowing more time for questions, discussion and peer exchange, and on providing more structured networking opportunities. Participants also recommended maintaining a balance between strategic policy discussions and practical implementation topics, including restoration methodologies, monitoring and reporting, financing and the implementation of National Restoration Plans.

Satisfaction survey form

Platform Meeting

Meeting the Challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation: Best Practice and Innovation in Marine Restoration in Europe

Valencia, Spain 9 – 11 June 2026

We hope you enjoyed the event, and we have one last request. To help us improve please respond to our survey. All your comments/suggestions/complaints will be very welcome!
The Marine Restoration platform team

You have attended the Platform Meeting as a member / representative of

- ☐ EC/CINEA staff

- ☐ Host (FB) staff
- ☐ LIFE beneficiary (including LIFE Operating Grants)
- ☐ Beneficiary of other projects than LIFE
- ☐ Governmental organisation / National Contact Point
- ☐ NGO
- ☐ Other

Overall satisfaction

What is your overall appraisal of the Platform Meeting (content and importance)?

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Room for improvement

Comments/suggestions:

Did you enjoy the way we delivered the event (i.e. facilitation, timeliness, appropriateness of the interactive sessions)?

- ☐ Very good / optimal
- ☐ Good / suitable
- ☐ Room for improvement

Comments/suggestions:

Content and group discussions

Please rate the usefulness and information relevance of the Platform sessions, topics & project representation

Using the scale 1-5 (1 = least useful, 5 = most useful)

Day 1 (9th June) Please choose n/a in case you didn't attend the respective session	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**n/a**
Plenary 1: Meeting the challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation						
Welcome & Presentations						
Sessions 1 & 2 Work Groups						
Active Restoration: Deep Water						
Active Restoration: Shallow Water						
Passive Restoration – Identifying and Removing the Threats						
Restoring Habitats for Species						
Knowledge Market 1 Networking Space						

Day 2 (10th June) Please choose n/a in case you didn't attend the respective session	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**n/a**

Sessions 3 & 4 Work Groups						
Active Restoration: Deep Water						
Active Restoration: Shallow Water						
Passive Restoration – Removing the Threats						
Restoring Habitats for Species						
Final Session						
Keynote speech "From Projects to Policy: The Role of SER Europe in Scaling Marine Restoration"						
Key Takeaways from workgroups, Q & A panel & Closing Statement						
Knowledge Market 2 Networking Space						
Visit – Oceanographic Institute						

Day 3 (11th June) Please choose n/a in case you didn't attend	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**n/a**
Field Visit: Special Area of Conservation (SAC) & Special Protection Area (SPA) of Marina Alta						

What aspects of the event atmosphere contributed most to your experience? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Informal and friendly interactions
- ☐ Open discussions and exchange of ideas
- ☐ Accessibility of speakers and organisers
- ☐ Opportunities for networking
- ☐ Collaborative working groups
- ☐ Other_____

Did the Platform Meeting help you identify concrete ideas, tools or contacts that you expect to use in your work on marine restoration?

- ☐ Very much
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ Only a little
- ☐ Not at all

What did you particularly like in the working group sessions?

Suggestions to improve the format and organisation of the working groups in future Platform Meetings

Overall organisation

How was the information and assistance received before and during the event?

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Room for improvement

How was the registration process?

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Room for improvement

How was the quality of the catering services provided for the Platform?

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Room for improvement

How would you rate the venue and facilities (rooms, equipment, Wi-Fi)?

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Room for improvement

Please write your suggestions for improvement of the organisation

Other recommendations

Other suggestions and recommendations for improvement in future LIFE Platform Meetings

Annex 5: Event Photos

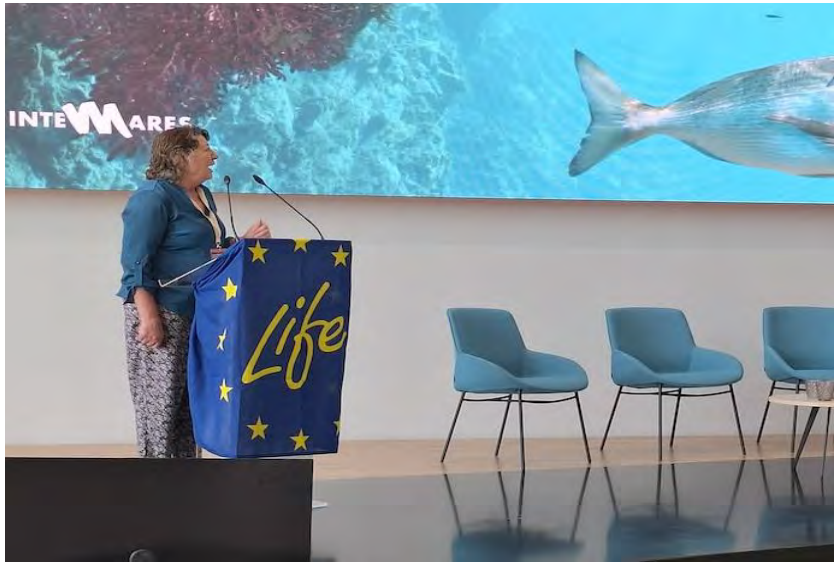







LIFE PLATFORM MEETING:
MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE NATURE RESTORATION REGULATION IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT
9 - 11 JUNE 2026
VALENCIA, SPAIN
Life


European Commission, DG Environment
Life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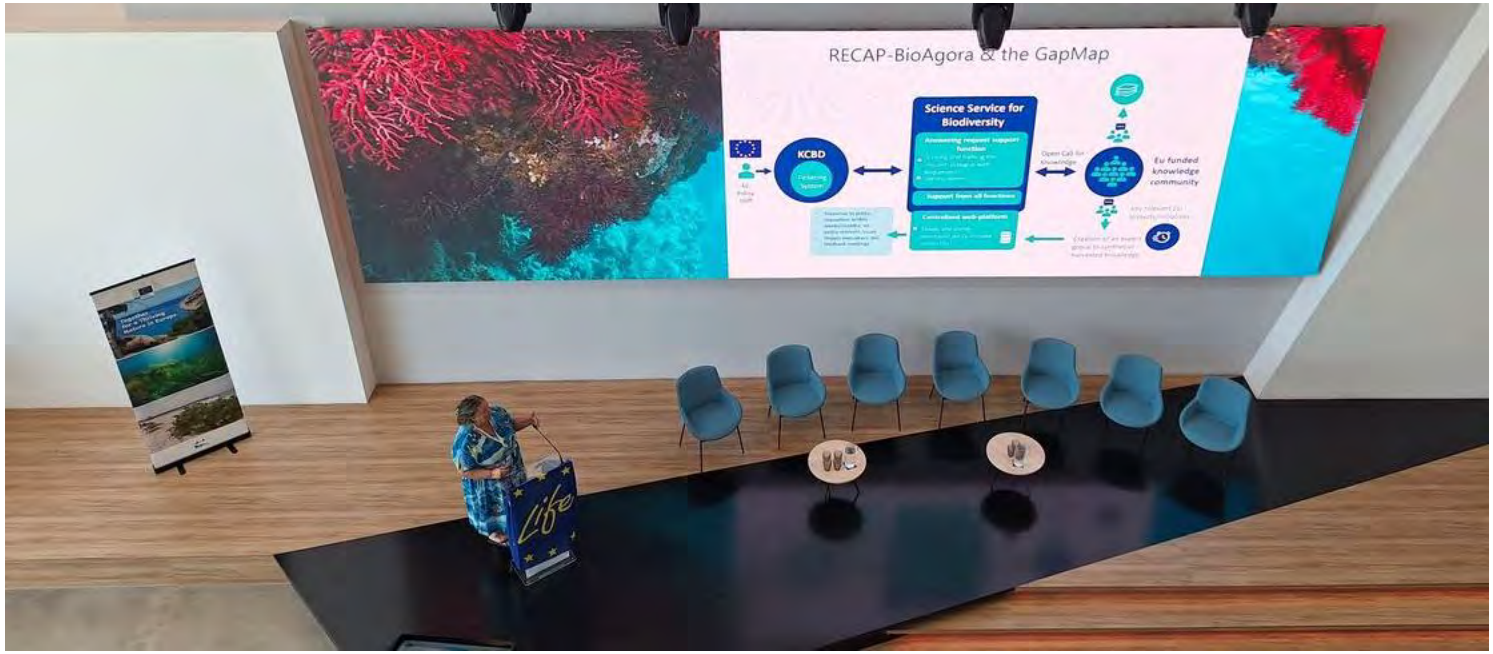

RECAP-BioAgora & the GapMap
Science Service for Biodiversity
KCBD
Eu funded knowledge community
Life


• Shared at sea infrastructures
Transboundary Financing
• LIFE
• Industry including habitat compensation measu
• Other
OSPAR/EU
• Feed into EU obligations
• Contribute to OSPAR MPAs
• Align monitoring with reporting cycles – Status
Life


LIFE Lophelia
Method development for cold-water coral reef habitat restoration with implementation in Kosterfjord-Väderöfjord, Sweden 2019–2025
Life






RESTORING INTERTIDAL MUDFLATS






Assessing the distribution of biodiversity
Available datasets









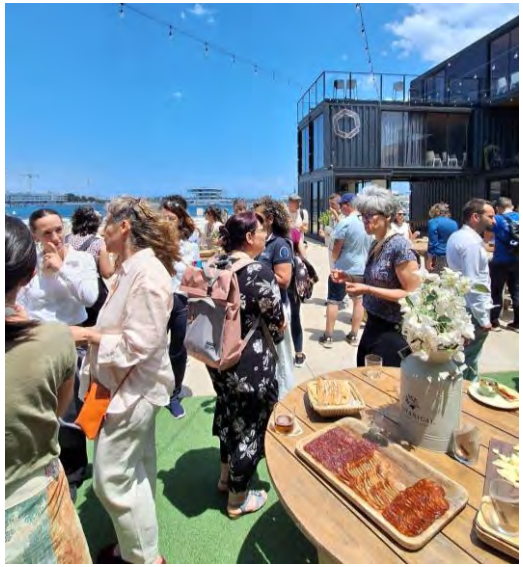


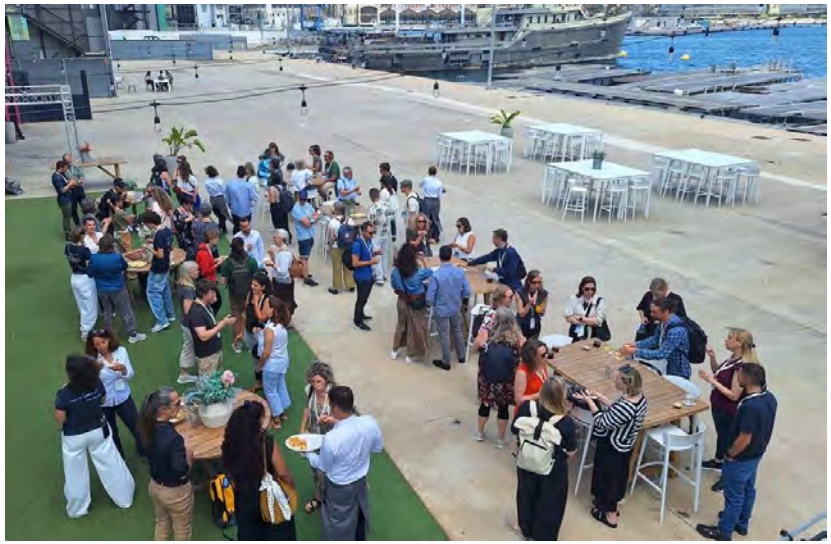

REDRESS
RESTORING EUROPEAN
DEEP-SEA ECOSYSTEMS





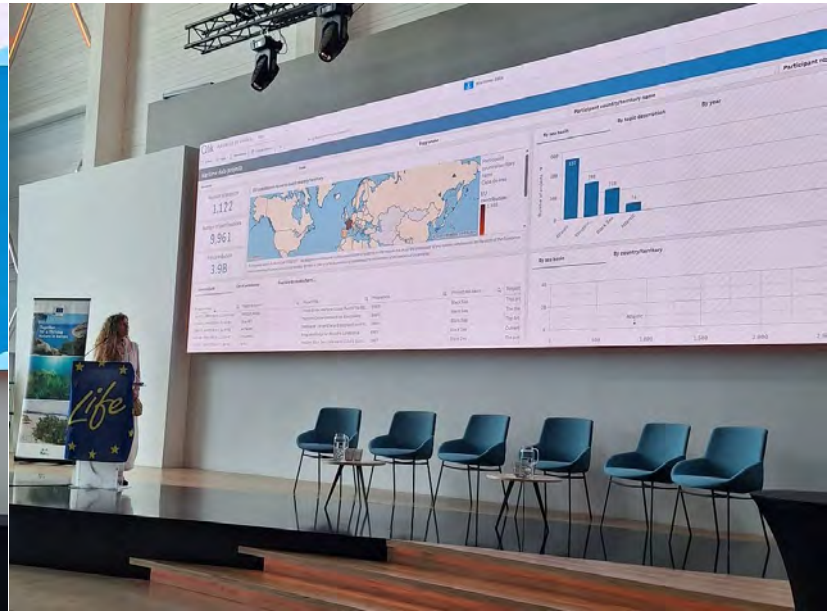







Life


Visit to the Oceanogràfic 10th june
OCEANOGRÀFIC
Life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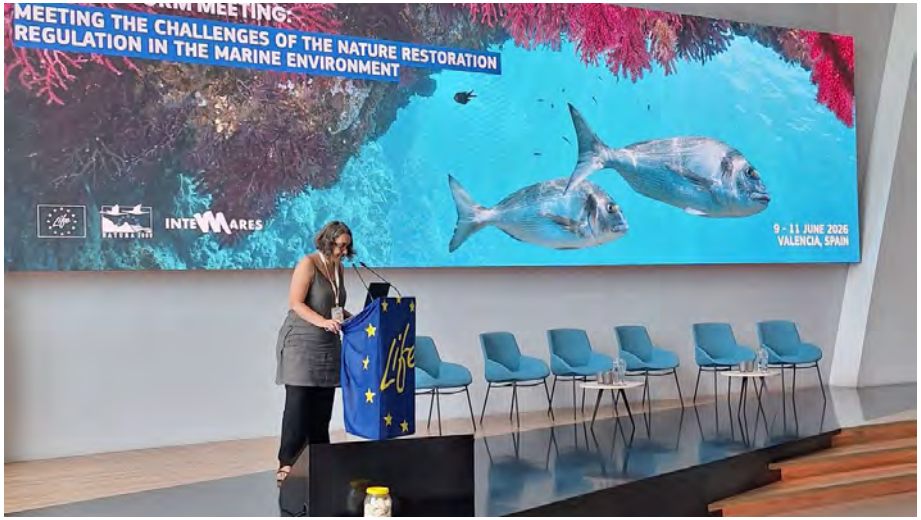
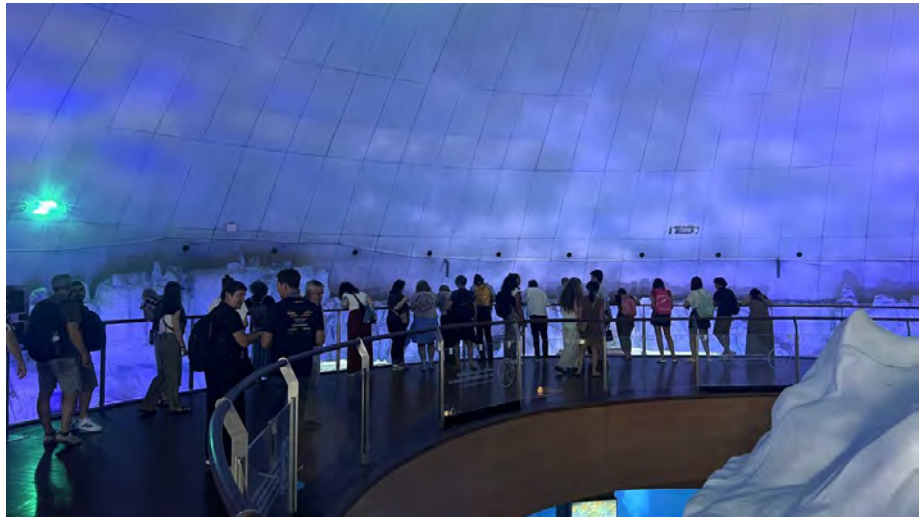

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF THE NATURE RESTORATION
REGULATION IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT
INTEMARES
9 - 11 JUNE 2026
VALENCIA, SPAIN
Life


Together for a Thriving Nature in Europe
Life
INTEMARES


OCEANOGRÀFIC
VALENCIA






Life
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Life






LIFE PLATFORM MEETING:
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REGULATION IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT
9 - 11 JUNE 2026
VALENCIA, SPAIN

Annex 6: Accreditation





Annex 7: Post event communication & dissemination

The event team shared information and footage of the event with Lot 2 during the proceeding. This resulted in two media posts:

1) https://x.com/LIFEprogramme/status/2065077158540685451?s=20



2) https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7470843940158623745

LIFE Programme + Follow ···
3w •

Marine restoration in action – this week in Valencia, Spain.

The **#LIFEProjects** Platform Meeting brings together experts, policymakers, and practitioners to explore how the EU Nature Restoration Regulation can be effectively translated into practice for marine ecosystems.

Discussions are focusing on how to move from ambition to implementatio on:
- restoring coastal and offshore habitats,
- improving ecosystem connectivity, and
- supporting resilient marine biodiversity.

More insights coming up next week in a post-event article, until then you can learn more about the event here: LIFE Platform Meeting: Meeting the Challenges of the Nature Restoration Regulation in the Marine Environment

Thanks to **Fundación Biodiversidad** and project LIFE Intemares for hosting us.

#LIFEProgramme
Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico



113 4 7

A news article was prepared by ELMEN, post event and published on CINEA's website.
https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/life-platform-meeting-explores-solutions-restore-eu-marine-ecosystems-2026-07-16_en

All the presentations are available for download by the participants on the INTEMARES website.
https://intemares.es/en/recursos-de-divulgacion/#platform