



Conference Report

Promoting Fishing for Litter activities and the use of EMFAF support

21st September 2022, Brussels

Executive summary

The **'Promoting Fishing for Litter activities and the use of European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) support'** event took place in Brussels on 21st September 2022.

The event was about promoting the uptake of marine litter collection schemes to prevent and reduce pollution in the seas and ocean. It brought together stakeholders from many different countries, including the UK, Belgium, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Spain, Sweden, France, Germany and Finland to share their experiences as each of them have their own particular challenges.

The core overall challenge is that the amount of marine litter keeps growing, which is causing considerable damage to the environment, tourism and the economy. Plastic and fishing related items make up the bulk of the marine litter.

The European Commission has set a legal framework (e.g. via the Single Use Plastics and the Port Reception Facilities Directives) and is making funding available at the EU level to support activities for marine litter prevention and reduction (e.g. EMFAF, regional cohesion funds or via the research programme Horizon Europe).

The so-called Fishing for Litter (FFL) schemes revolve around the idea that fishers can help clean the seas by collecting litter caught up in their nets during normal fishing operations and bringing it back to shore

The objectives of the FFL scheme are

- Reduce marine litter from the marine environment through collection and proper disposal.
- Target behaviour by raising awareness of the socioeconomic and ecological impacts of marine litter.
- Change waste management processes within the fishing industry and in ports.

The detailed report below sets out many key pieces of information for stakeholders.

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Whilst this is all self-standing and useful/insightful information in its own right, which readers are encouraged to read in full, it is possible to highlight certain elements/recurring themes.

A key starting point is to **bring all the stakeholders together**. These might include (non-comprehensive list): the fishers and their associations; the ports (and the related infrastructure); gear manufacturers and suppliers; the different government departments (e.g. those dealing with transposition of EU legislation, funding, waste permits, extended producer responsibility schemes (EPR); waste managers. It is important for all of them to have clear roles in the process, a common ambition and objectives. The involvement and support of all stakeholders is crucial, including cooperation with authorities and experts.

A lack of **legislative and infrastructure tools is a major challenge**. Ensuring that an appropriate legislative framework (e.g. with clear and aligned definitions of terminology) is in place is important for all Member States. Adequate infrastructure with relevant logistics in ports also needs to be in place. It is also key to make sure that participation in FFL is made easy for fishers and to understand that the potential to actively involve fishers depends on the available reception facility and its accessibility (i.e. that the facility is near the boats).

The **lack of engagement from fishers and port authorities** plus the fact that it is hard to get people involved from scratch were identified as major challenges. In that context, the need for good training, communication and to set clear objectives from the start were underlined. Involving fishing communities via some form of compensation (financial or non-financial), potentially based on the value of marine litter, on good messages in the media for fishers, on merchandising or on specific awards was mentioned as solution to enhance their engagement.

The **implementation of measures set out in the EU legislation** on marine litter is ongoing. In this context, of the many ideas floated to support the implementation, engagement in capacity building (training in extended producer responsibility schemes for gear suppliers, fishers and the whole EPR organisation) or setting up of a national tax for marine waste to spread the costs among all the regions of a country (so that regions with coastlines and ports do not have to bear the cost alone) were highlighted.

Recommendations for governments included:

- Create clear guidelines and objectives for marine litter collection and communicate that clearly in public;
- Set up an EU/ international platform (with clear implementation guidelines) so that stakeholders can share and learn from each other's challenges and good practices;
- The need for EU/international alignment (e.g. regarding whether or not marine litter bags can be put on the quayside or not especially by ships of other countries with other FFL schemes);
- Create a space for pilot projects, start-ups and new business models (e.g. using the value created by marine litter) to help manage this waste and upcycle parts of it;
- The need for clarity with regard to legal and other terms and definitions regarding marine litter and passively fished waste;
- Set up a national roundtable and dialogue (given that the EU directives are now at the implementation phase) to clarify objectives, rules, responsibilities in the implementation of the measures and having a collective ambition;
- The need to classify marine litter in categories;
- The importance of supporting national monitoring and reporting programmes (there could possibly be more support in setting up frameworks for quality monitoring and reporting as required by the EC).

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Setting the scene

Kęstutis Sadauskas, the Deputy Director General of the European Commission's Directorate General for Maritime Affairs (DG MARE) set the scene by providing the stakeholders at the event with the essential context for the discussion. His key points included the following:

The issue of marine litter keeps growing. Regardless of efforts to rein in the flow of marine litter into the oceans, there is still plenty to be done. Marine litter is a major problem for our environment, seas and oceans but also for our economies, well-being or tourism. Valuable materials could be collected and put back into the economy, thereby promoting a circular economy.

The damage caused by marine litter is considerable and includes damage to our coasts, to tourism and to boats, running into hundreds of millions of euro (for annual clean-ups in the EU). Plastic is the main category of marine litter (80 to 85% of it), with single-use plastic accounting for half that figure. Around a quarter of marine litter is made up of fishing related items.

It is clear that something needs to be done or we will be complicit in this damage. Related EU legislative tools including the Single-Use Plastics and the Port Reception Facilities Directives constitute a solid basis in the fight against marine litter. The EU also plans to revise other pieces of legislation, such as the Packaging Directive.

There are other tools to catch the problem at source, which clearly starts on the land. "It is pretty complex as we have difficulties with our economic model/consumption. We do not recover value that we produce and throw it away with the waste. Consumer behaviour needs to be changed," he said.

The Plastics Strategy was adopted five years ago. An example of a positive development is that companies are putting on the market more sustainable products or items produced from recovered marine litter (e.g. recovered fishing nets specifically). There are more and more of these products, varying from textiles, furniture and other household goods.

Addressing the stakeholders at the event directly, he said: "What you do is essential. We will have streams into the sea for a long time. There are legal initiatives but we also have lots of funds for this at EU level (e.g. EMFAF, regional cohesion funds, international cooperation funds, Horizon Europe etc.). We need people to think creatively. We ask you to see if your projects are eligible to join us. I also encourage you to join the Charter for the Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030' and submit your ideas and pledges to the Commission. We will collectively join efforts to achieve the objectives of the Mission, go to root causes and come up with creative ideas."

More in-depth context

Michael Mannaart from KIMO International gave a rundown on the background to the FFL initiative from the start. KIMO is an association of municipalities working together to clean up the oceans and to protect coastal communities from the effects of pollution. It has 80 member municipalities from the following countries (Belgium, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK).

The objectives of the scheme (detailed background information on the FFL scheme is available in the article presented below¹):

- Reduce marine litter from the marine environment through removal.
- Target behaviour by raising awareness of the socioeconomic and ecological impacts of marine litter.

¹ Mannaart, M. & A. Bentley. (2022). Fishing for Litter: From the implementation of practical actions locally, to its spin-offs and the adoption of a new legally adopted waste type at continental scale, a success story. *Marine Policy* 145 (2022) 105256. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105256>

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- Change waste management processes within the fishing industry and in ports.

The initiative began with the ‘Vuilvis project’ [Waste fishing project], with 10 participating vessels in 3 ports in the Netherlands and there are now at least 800 vessels participating. To give a sense of its importance, FFL is now included as a voluntary policy measure in OSPAR’s Regional Action Plan on marine litter².

Key factors for a successful FFL scheme

Michael Mannaart also explained to stakeholders how the FFL process works and set out the key factors for success and raised a number of questions to help stakeholders find ways to successfully implement their FFL scheme.

The process is as follows:

Marine litter is collected in hardwearing bags that are provided to fishers to collect the litter during their normal fishing activities. The bags are then stored at port reception facilities. The waste needs to be sorted and cleaned, which is usually done before it is transported for waste processing. Some parts of the waste go to landfill or incineration while other parts are ‘upcycled’ (i.e. value is generated from the waste).

Elements to take into account:

Organisation aspects (there needs to be a clear division of tasks and responsibilities within the organisational framework): Here, good waste infrastructure is essential and funding is key. Monitoring of the types and amounts of waste and proper reporting are also important, including to comply with obligations under the EU legislation.

Cultural aspects are of the utmost importance. A key question is how to contact local fishers (in a formal or informal way, in a more personal way or in groups, as a democratic approach or more hierarchical). It is important to bear in mind that fishers do not tend to like long meetings with hierarchies.

Costs: Staffing coordinator (full or part time); waste storage (e.g. separate containers for passively fished waste and separate containers for waste fishing gear); potential pre-sorting / cleaning of waste; waste transport to waste management and processing facilities; events, publicity and merchandise (e.g. as a token of appreciation to fishers – e.g. flags, hats or sweaters, depending on the national culture). Costs are determined by national factors and thus differ from one country to another.

Waste storage and recycling: Questions include: Do you have port reception in all your ports (smaller ones may not have this whilst big ones probably do)? Is there a skip in port for waste disposal and storage? Is there a possibility to collect waste separately? What kind of litter and how much of it is delivered to ports and on what frequency? What kind of business model is behind it?

If stakeholders need more information, there is an FFL hub (www.fishingforlitter.org). This is a centralised and coordinated resource for all FFL projects. There are also meetings from time to time to exchange information.

² OSPAR is a mechanism by which 15 governments and the EU cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

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Norwegian case

Conclusions/recommendations for best practices set out by Hilde Rødås Johnsen (Salt, Norway) included:

- Use existing infrastructure in harbours.
- Determine criteria for selecting port receptions along the coast (e.g. amount of fishing activity, number of vessels and types, local interest and the availability of partners).
- Make participation in FFL easy for fishers, including easy delivery of waste in ports.
- Adapt systems accordingly (e.g. big bags for waste on board big trawlers and bags available on shore for smaller vessels).
- Cooperate with authorities and experts.
- Consider what information/data is needed to be collected from waste analysis (e.g. - whether waste has been in the sea for a long time).
 - Ensure sustainable funding for FFL schemes to remove unpredictability about their medium and long-term future.

Italian pilot project

Conclusions/recommendations for best practices set out by Francesca Ronchi (ISPRA, Italy) included:

- Involving and having the support of all stakeholders is crucial.
- The potential to persuade fishers to participate depends on the available reception facility and their accessibility (i.e. that the collection facility is near the boats). It is key to make it easy for fishers to participate.
- A lack of legislative and infrastructure tools can slow things down. For example, in 2013, marine litter was not mentioned in any Italian law, making it difficult to collect marine litter because there was no law to explain how to manage this type of waste and who was responsible for it.. The temporary solution for Italy was for municipalities to consider marine litter as urban waste. The situation has improved with the introduction of EU legislation (e.g. on waste and on the reception of port facilities) and an Italian decree in 2022.
- There are companies working on recycling marine litter but the laws are still not in place in Italy.
- Care needs to be taken with the numbers of actors involved. Since 2013, there have been a lot of FFL projects in Italy, with too many partners involved in the projects.
- Marine litter is now covered by a national tax for waste (in the Italian decree): A good way forward to spread the cost to all Italian regions and not just leave the costs with the regions with coastlines and ports.
- A programme to collect separately fishing gear is needed, with clear indications and easy delivery for fishers.

Irish case

Conclusions/recommendations for best practices set out by Catherine Barrett (BIM, Ireland) included:

- FFL was put under a Clean Oceans Initiative and was set up in 2015. There is a network of 12 ports, which covers most of the commercial fishing vessels. Ireland carried out a successful recruitment campaign to encourage people, including fishers, to sign up for it.
- Bringing all the stakeholders together is key. That means the fishers; the ports (critical for infrastructure); gear suppliers and producers; the Irish government department dealing with EPR schemes; the Irish Department of Transport (in charge of the Port Reception Facilities Directive); the Irish government Department for Waste Permits; and the Environmental Protection Agency (in charge of reporting). All need to have clear roles and need to have a common ambition and objectives.
- It is important to look at the cost structure.
- It is worth considering writing waste management handling plans with Commission funding to bring plans to life.

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- Capacity building: Preparation for EPR schemes is needed so that it is commercially focused for the sector. A pilot on EPR training (for gear suppliers, fishers and the whole EPR organisation) will be carried out.

Spanish case

Conclusions/recommendations for best practices set out by Marta Martínez-Gil Pardo de Vera (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Democratic Challenge, Spain) included:

- Given that fishers are not the only actors, there is a need to involve all the relevant stakeholders (including technical specialists, port administrations, and waste managers) and to hold discussions with them to get everyone on the same page in terms of marine litter collection and on everyone's roles. Common guidelines and a participation strategy may be a useful tool.
- Long-term sustainable initiatives need stable funding (e.g. opportunity to use the EMFAF support).
- Passive FFL can incorporate mechanisms to reward fishers (e.g. dissemination in media, tokens, clothes, specific awards).
- In terms of protecting the seas, characterisation of waste is a valuable source of information that may complement other reporting (e.g. marine strategy monitoring programmes).
- With regard to data, a decision is needed on who will characterise the collected litter and how. Options being considered are at the port or at the sorting plant or a mixture of the two. The Ministry of the Environment needs the data on collected marine litter to report to the Commission. A national database is being set up, with the aim for port authorities to add their data from 2023 onwards.
- Valorisation (i.e. creating value out of) of the marine waste needs to be taken into account. However, it is proving difficult to get waste managers interested as marine waste is so degraded and contaminated. In terms of doing something with the marine litter, links can be made with the national strategy for the circular economy.
- Spain is developing two actions (in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean) to test the schemes. It is starting now to finalise guidelines for marine litter collection in ports.

Plenary presentations of workshop sessions

Workshop session I

What is needed for running a Fishing For Litter (FFL) scheme

Participants were divided into two workshop groups. Below is a summary merging the key points covered by the two workshop groups.

Bringing together all the stakeholders and ensuring good coordination

Challenge

The basic stakeholders for FFL for the removal of marine litter are: fishers; port authorities; vessel owners; administrations dealing with funds and those dealing with directives (these may be different); waste management stakeholders (e.g. gear distributors), recyclers and waste managers; and the permitting office (they need to improve permits and track marine litter); research organisations (gathering scientific knowledge) and NGOs.

The challenge is to bring them together and to ensure good coordination and clear distribution of roles and responsibilities between them. There are many small ports in countries like Greece and Italy, making the problem of coordination more acute there.

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Solution

There was agreement on the need for national coordination in general and for coordination that can make use of people present directly at the port. For example, NGOs could be involved as they have good and established relationships with fishers. Day to day management is crucial to make the process run smoothly. Good training for fishers and port authorities was underlined (including the possibility of an employee with the port authority spending few hours per day to make it all possible).

Engagement of fishers and port authorities

Challenge

The need for the engagement of fishers was discussed. There were different views on whether fishers joining an FFL initiative should be remunerated with money or something else. Traditionally, these schemes are done on a voluntary basis. In practice, every country may need a different solution to improve the engagement of fishers.

Solution

Compensation (financial or non-financial) for fishing communities could be based on the value of marine litter, on good messages in the media for fishers, on merchandising and on specific awards. Given the lack of engagement from fishers and port authorities plus the fact that it is hard to get people involved from scratch, awareness raising, good training, communication and setting objectives are all important from the start. Participants recognised the importance of making fishers feel the importance of what they are doing and the importance of advertising and promoting their work as guardians of the sea.

Waste management/ recycling

Challenge

The fact that there is a wide variety of collected items and that they are at different levels of degradation makes them hard to manage and recycle. Technical limitations to recycling of such waste and a lack of generated value was noted, together with a lack of interest from waste managers to accept marine litter in general.

Solution

One way of managing this is to work with start-ups that can develop innovation. They would need funds for innovation and recycling solutions, which is where the support from the European funds could be useful. Another way is for the costs to be partly covered by generating value from the waste (e.g. nylon from the fishing nets).

Data collection and monitoring

Challenge

The challenge of having reliable providers of data (on the amounts of marine litter collected, on the different categories of waste, on the amounts of fishing gear related waste) was discussed.

Solution

The importance of having the same rules and terms for data collection requirements was noted. In Greece for example, when marine litter is delivered to the dock, it goes directly to landfill and therefore fishers are asked to take care of the monitoring of the marine litter collected – this may deserve some recognition (financial or not) for their extra work.

Other ideas

A link to the ‘green ship’ concept under PRF legislation was suggested in terms of including FFL within the good practices of a ship in managing its own waste.

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Separation of the waste at ports faces also practical problems. Decisions are needed on where to put the waste, who is responsible for its proper disposal and who ensures that it is not mixed with other waste. A suggestion was to give the port a specific role to oversee this and to define the containers for separate marine litter collection. There was disagreement as to whether end-of-life fishing gear should be considered as different from marine litter or not.

Workshop session II

How could the EU and national governments support starting up and running FFL schemes best?

Participants were divided into two workshop groups. Below is a summary merging the key points covered by the two workshop groups.

Proposal: An EU/ international platform

The starting point for the group was: If you are country x and have no FFL scheme, what do you need to start and get things going? It was agreed that what is missing is a shared knowledge/platform so that everyone can be on the same level and learn from each other's good practices and experienced challenges.

The key points in relation to such an EU/ international platform were:

- The need for clear implementation guidelines (what are the roles of involved stakeholders, how can they improve from what they have done and hit the ground running);
- The need for an international alignment. In some countries, it is free to put bags on the quayside while others impose fines for littering the quayside. Therefore, alignment of good FFL practices is important
- Fisheries advisory councils, the European Commission and Regional Sea Conventions (e.g. OSPAR or HELCOM) given their good level of knowledge and broad network should be part of the platform.

On national level, it is important that space is created for pilot projects), start-ups and new business models (e.g. using the value created by marine litter) to help manage this waste and upcycle parts of it.

What could government do to help? Create clear guidelines, boundaries and objectives for FFL and communicate that clearly to the public.

Spain recommended a national roundtable and dialogue with regard to clarifications of rules, responsibilities and having a collective ambition, given that the EU directives are now at the implementation phase.

Legal aspects

There is a need for better clarity with regard to legal and other terms and definitions (especially regarding waste categories). In this context, it was noted that there the EU Single-Use Plastics directive providing a legal basis for tackling the problem of marine litter in EU Member States and Member States now need to implement the measures and obligations under the legislation.

Funding

It was noted that the EMFAF provides for a possibility to support collection of marine litter by fishers, including fishing gear, as well as support for investment in port reception facilities to receive waste. There is also an obligation for the Member States under the EMFAF Regulation to contribute in their operational the programme to the reduction of marine litter, in accordance with the Single-Use Plastics Directive. This represents a strong commitment from the EU to underpin marine litter collection programmes in all coastal EU Member States. It is therefore now key to engage with national Managing Authorities responsible for the EMFAF operational programmes and to advocate to them the need to support such marine litter collection activities.

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In terms of funding, questions included: Is it possible to have private funding? What about protection from greenwashing? It was agreed that care should be taken with private funding as it may not lead to sustainable FFL schemes in long-term.

Waste aspects

In terms of waste aspects, marine litter, including passively fished waste and waste fishing gear are complex. They have different qualities, e.g. suffering UV damage, contamination, etc. The challenge is to classify some items, whether they are waste or still plastic. There could possibly be more support for monitoring and reporting purposes so that they are consistent and have the high quality required by Eurostat and the EU Commission. It is important to support national monitoring programmes.

Panel discussion and Q&A on what can be done

Recommendations on the effective recycling of litter

There are examples of effective marine litter recycling (e.g. a small start-up recycling company in Greece cleaned the algae off mixed marine waste and turned the plastic into pellets, which were used to make products such as tables). It is key to bear in mind that a lot of time needs to be spent with the company to convince them of the benefits.

Recommendations on how to engage fishers

The communication part of the project is important. Funds need to be dedicated to training and communication in any FFL project. The 'Clean Sea Life' project has done good work in engaging fishers, through dedicated communication, building trust of the communities, spending time going to ports, awareness raising and engaging local communities. FFL initiatives in ports involve discussing with fishers, sharing the objectives of these actions, providing training and sense of ownership. For example, positive storytelling or merchandise rewarding is a big motivation, especially local newspapers that devote headlines to the fishers.

Reporting recommendations

It was recommended that reporting requirements are aligned at EU and at the international level as organisations have to provide the same data to the European Commission and other organisations. National authorities might consider paying an employee (possible part-time) at the port to characterise the waste (i.e. provide a breakdown of its components in some way) or to agree with sorting plants to provide the data on different marine litter categories. For now, the only data that it is mandatory to collect regarding passively fished waste is the weight but other data may well be useful for developing policies. By understanding the type of waste and types of plastics in the seas via data collection, it may be possible to policies to prevent the plastic from entering the seas in the first place. Another recommendation was that the categories of marine litter should consider only the amounts of plastics and fishing gear in the waste.

Collection of marine litter on the quayside

In the medium to long term, the Regional Sea Conventions could be involved in finding ways to harmonise the approach to marine litter collection in different countries. For now, putting bags of marine litter on the quayside is accepted in some countries and fined in others. In the short term, it is up to vessels to ensure that where they land their passively fished waste there is some kind of service at the port to collect that litter.

The impact of rising energy prices on FFL schemes

It is clear that oil prices are a serious issue. For example, in Greece, nearly 30% of fishers are considering not going for fishing this year because they are not profitable any more.

Conclusions from the European Commission

Alena Petrikovicova from the European Commission's DG MARE concluded the event and thanked everyone for their input and expressed appreciation in terms of seeing how FFL is implemented on the ground. She stressed the importance of bringing everyone around the table and not working in silos.

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“Working with others from different countries/areas, we learn a lot of things. We want to see if we can go further with policies and be more ambitious as we want to keep up the momentum and align ourselves with future international and regional requirements to ensure that the EU is not lagging behind. Hopefully, with the right data provided to us from the reporting and monitoring requirements, we will be able to update our legislation with more ambitious targets. . Data is core for us as we cannot put forward new policies if do not have the data/basis for them (e.g. in terms of impacts). We also have the support under the EMFAF, which includes an opportunity to use the funding to prevent and reduce marine pollution and invest in port reception facilities. In the previous funding period, only few EU Member States allocated and used the money to fight marine litter prevention and reduction. We hope that now, with EU Member States finalising their operational programmes, there will be support allocated to marine litter collection schemes and linked activities (e.g. port reception facilities adapted for waste collection and awareness raising),” she concluded.