



Strict protection, restoration and co-management of Marine Protected Areas (BLUE CONNECT)



**BLUE
CONNECT**

Official site:

<https://blueconnect-project.eu/>

Project Duration: 2024-2028

Funded under: EU Blue Parks project funded by the Commission under the Mission Ocean topic - HORIZON-MISS-2023OCEAN-01

Coordinated by: SUBMARINER Network

NIMRD Project Coordinator: dr. Alina Spînu

The Blue Connect project aims to enhance the protection and restoration of marine habitats and ecosystems in line with the EU's biodiversity targets for 2030. It brings together Marine Protected Area (MPA) managers, authorities, industries, and local communities across 12 demonstration sites to co-develop and test effective strategies for marine conservation. The ultimate goal is to deliver a practical and scalable Blueprint that supports the creation of science-based conservation objectives, the development of targeted actions, and the monitoring of their effectiveness.

The project applies an integrated modeling framework that combines ecological, social, and economic data to guide MPA planning and management. It emphasizes expanding and designating new MPAs, restoring ecosystems, improving ecological connectivity, and promoting co-management with stakeholders. Blue Connect also strongly supports participatory approaches, including stakeholder engagement and citizen science, to foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for marine conservation efforts.

The project focuses on:

- Science-Based Conservation Objectives
- Co-definition of conservation measures
- Showcasing of effective co-ownership and co-management
- Ensuring effective conservation
- Blueprint development and upscaling strategy
- Contributing to Mission Ocean

Partnerships

Belgium (Center for Coastal and Marine Studies – CCMS, Federal Public Service, Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Flanders Marine Institute – VLIZ, Ghent University, Institute of Natural Sciences – RBINS); Bulgaria (The Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation); Cabo Verde (Fundação Maio Biodiversidade – FMB); Croatia (WWF Adria); Estonia (University of Tartu); Finland (The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – HELCOM); Germany (SUBMARINER NETWORK); Italy (World Wide Fund for Nature – Italy; World Wide Fund for Nature – Mediterranean); Luxembourg (Jan De Nul Group); Netherlands (Deltares); Norway (NIVA, SALT Lofoten); Portugal (University of the Azores); Romania (National Institute for Marine Research and Development “Grigore Antipa” – NIMRD); Scotland (UHI Shetland); Spain (Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge; SUBMON, Universidad de Málaga, World Wide Fund for Nature – Spain)

- 18 full partners
- 4 associated partners
- 3 affiliated entities
- 12 demonstration sites

DEMONSTRATION SITES



PASSIVE RESTORATION

- New MPA designation/ expansion
- Shift to strict protection

- 2- Reserva marina de interes Pesquero de Cabo Roche, Cadiz, Spain
- 3- Pitiusas Islands, Balearic, Spain
- 6- Italian Northern Adriatic, Italy
- 7- Burgas Bay, Bulgaria
- 8- Central Romanian Coast (Midia Cape - Aurora Cape)
- 9- Raef, Norway



INNOVATIVE MONITORING TECHNIQUES

To be defined (candidates: 9, 10, 11)



STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

- 12- SAIS EBSA (transboundary)
- upscaling
- ALL PILOTS



ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY

- 1- Macaronesia
- 4- Cetacean Migration Corridor, Spain
- 11- Scottish MPA Network



ACTIVE RESTORATION

- 5- Albera, Spain
- 10- Vlaamse Banken MPA: Hinderbanks, Belgium



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