

Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)

Common Implementation Strategy

20th Meeting of the **Technical Group on Marine Litter (TG ML)**



Wednesday 21 and Thursday 22 June 2023, 09:00-18:30

Document:	Meeting Summary of MSFD Technical Group on Marine Litter annual meeting 2023
Title:	TG ML Annual Meeting 2023
Prepared by:	European Commission DG JRC, Luis Ruiz-Orejón, Eirini Martini, Georg Hanke
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MEETING SUMMARY

First Day, 21 June 2023

1. WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

The Commission welcomed the Members of the MSFD Technical Group on Marine Litter (TG ML) at DG ENV premises and online. Besides the longstanding and successful efforts on multiple topics, the importance and the mandate to develop Threshold Values were mentioned. The Commission thanked the group and provided the example of the Coastline litter TV, developed by the TG ML, as one of the first Threshold Values developed for the MSFD, emphasising the need to pursue the present work on Seafloor Macro Litter TVs. Threshold value must be based on evidence, but at the same time be simple to implement and to communicate, like the beach litter, seabed damage and noise threshold; it should also be “future-driven”, i.e., open to amendments, based on additional data and new information/methodologies.

TG ML chairs welcomed the Members of the TG ML and opened the 20th TG ML meeting.

2. PRESENTATION

TG ML members presented themselves in a table round. In total, 42 participants attended the meeting physically and 11 online, via Webex (some only on the first or second day). The Director of the Ukrainian Scientific Centre for Ecology of the Sea joined the meeting as technical expert, in remote connection from Odessa, Ukraine.

3. MSFD + PLASTICS STRATEGY + ZERO POLLUTION ACTION PLAN

The Commission provided an overview on recent policy developments, including Commission communication on biobased and biodegradable plastics and proposals to amend the Packaging Waste Directive. A package of initiatives and legislative measures is considered for microlitter used in products and for pellets but also addressing other sources such as textiles synthetic fibres and tyre particle. The Commission also informed on the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan (ZPAP) – monitoring and outlook report published in December 2022.

4. NEW GUIDANCE FOR THE MONITORING OF MARINE LITTER

JRC presented the new MSFD Guidance for the Monitoring of Marine Litter. An opportunity for final editorial comment by 29.06.2023 was given. The dissemination process was discussed; several comments suggested the use of social media tools. JRC asked the group to identify challenges and suggestions to further support the implementation process for the guidance.

Action points:

- TG ML to provide final editorial comments by 29.06.2023.
- JRC to publish the final document – expected beginning of July 2023 (postponed in line with a new dissemination strategy).
- TG ML to pursue a strategic approach for the full implementation of the new guidance.

5. TG ML WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

JRC and DG ENV introduced the draft TG ML work programme for 2024 – 2027 as a chapter of the MSCG work programme. Scope and objectives of the TG ML work programme include: baselines + TVs, implementation support on monitoring and measures, other MSFD implementation support, supporting the ZPAP implementation, interfacing science + policy, act as a communication platform for RSCs, international aspects beyond EU, and interim progress reports to GES + MSCG.

One participant suggested clarifying the structure of the document by, for example, identifying core business (monitoring and assessment) and additional business topics. Two participants indicated that the links between monitoring activities, other activities (e.g. assessment, measures) and policy should be strengthened. Another participant suggested to discuss aggregation methods for the assessments.

Action points:

- TG ML members to provide further comments from MS to the TG ML work programme by 15 September 2023.
- JRC + DG ENV to structure the document by core business and additional business activities, and set priorities, while clarifying links.

6. JOINT LIST OF LITTER CATEGORIES

In 2022, TG ML decided to postpone the review process of the Joint List of Litter Categories until 2023. While one main aim would be to reduce the number of rare items, there was no final conclusion on this review scope. TG ML suggested exploring a classification system based on their occurrence, considering regional specificities, to reduce the number of items on the list. The mechanism for identification of new litter items, not in the current Joint List, is still discussed.

The inclusion of category "J1" was suggested by JRC for cases in which the identification of the material of a litter item is not possible. A participant pointed out that this category should be used only in specific cases where the material cannot be identified and not as a category that avoids classification under the other categories of the Joint List. It was proposed that a group be formed to follow up on the revision of the list, initially composed by: JRC, Francesca Ronchi, Eva Blidberg, Pilar Zorzo, Thommais Vlachogianni and Jakob Strand.

JRC proposed the inclusion of RSCs logos on the Joint List flyer under development. One participant, asked for clarification about the objectives and uses of the flyer before the approval of the use of the logo; another said he should consult internally; the use of the OSPAR logo and the list was accepted by the OSPAR representative.

JRC thanked the individual contributors for the language translations of the list, which should be implemented on the TG ML website.

Action points:

- Review of the Joint List: JRC + Joint List core group to coordinate the review of the Joint List: explore the exclusion and inclusion of litter categories and/or items.
- Joint List flyer: RSC to confirm the use of their logos in the Joint List of Litter Categories flyer, once clarification about the objectives and uses of the flyer is provided.

9. SEAFLOOR MACRO LITTER TRAWLING BASELINES

JRC informed the TG ML on the progress of the seafloor macro litter trawling baseline data analysis. Following previous work by Ifremer, JRC has cleaned and normalised the dataset 2013-2021 collected through the EMODnet platform. The dataset analysis showed limitations and challenges in data comparability, including differences between gears and spatial coverage.

During the discussion, the limitations of seafloor trawling data were noted, including the non-quantitative capturing of litter by trawls, the differences in gear catching efficiency and the limited spatial coverage, leading to a high variability of the data.

The TG ML proposed to continue the baseline assessment within the seafloor core group and solve the residual problems, propose different scenarios for data use. Volunteers to contribute to the trawling data baseline assessment are: Jon Barry, Bavo de Witte, Willem van Loon, Anna Rindorf, Tomaso Fortibuoni, Patricia Pérez.

Action points:

- Seafloor core group will meet and finalise the trawling data baseline assessment for further consideration by TG ML. Baseline assessment and Seafloor TV proposal should be coordinated to provide a complete report by mid-September 2023.
- Seafloor core group + JRC to proceed with seafloor macro litter trawling data analysis.

10. SEAFLOOR MACRO LITTER TRAWLING TV SETTING METHODOLOGY OPTIONS

JRC proposed, as follow-up from discussions in the seafloor core group and a dedicated TG ML meeting (30.5.2023), three different TV setting methodology approaches: Absolute Value TV, Non-increase TV, and Combined TV approach. PROs and CONs for each of the options proposed were presented and discussed.

The “Combined TV” would be based on a combination of the other two, which would be related to trawling data (“No –increase”) and observation/imagery data (“Absolute Value”). Trawling data would be used where trawling is performed and longer term comparable datasets can be available, while the litter abundance threshold (“Absolute Value”) setting approach, would be implemented where direct observations or imagery-based data is available, e.g. non-trawling areas, vulnerable areas or shallow seafloor (< 20 m depth).

A tour-de-table showed general support to the combined approach, but many highlighted the challenges to solve, particularly for the non-trawling areas and use of data from trawling. One participant supported the combined approach as a temporal solution until the collection of proper data to define a fixed value is feasible. Two other participants supported the combined approach but arguing that there should be the ambition to reduce seafloor litter, at least in some areas where measures could be implemented (e.g., fishing-for-litter activities, clean-up activities in shallow waters). They also underlined that both the "No-increase TV" and "Combined TV" approaches are not in line with the approach adopted for setting the TV for coastline litter (percentile approach). The chair of the TG ML meeting questioned fishing-for-litter initiative as a measure to reduce litter on the seafloor.

Action points:

- JRC to coordinate a meeting with the seafloor core group in early September.
- A combined TV proposal document should be provided by mid-September 2023.

Second Day, 22 June 2023

13 MICROLITTER POSITION PAPER AND IMPLEMENTING OF MONITORING (INCL. REFERENCE MATERIALS)

TG ML is continuing to draft the TG ML Microlitter Position Paper, which is on hold since a while, as priority was given to the methodological guidance development, in order to provide a strategy for microlitter assessments linked to mitigation, also in relation to other policies, and to make background information available.

In its current version, background information on different sections and recommendations have been added. Different projects are developing reference materials and intercalibration exercises, but do not fulfil the needs of a QA/QC system for MSFD purposes. There is urgent need to formulate such a system, then to develop and implement it.

Action point:

- TG ML should develop and communicate the outline of a QA/QC system for MSFD microlitter measurements.
- JRC to communicate progress and next steps in the collaborative development of the TG ML Position Paper on Microlitter

14 MICROLITTER BASELINE DATASET AND DATA ANALYSIS

TG ML had decided to start collecting data on floating microlitter, following the analysis of microlitter data from the AWI Litterbase and a survey on microlitter data availability in EU. EMODnet provided now information on the microlitter data workflow, validation, and ingestion through EMODnet platform. In total 1810 measurements from 2015 -2021 are ingested. The discussion confirmed the need to analyse the dataset for the comparability of employed methods to check for the feasibility of developing a baseline dataset. JRC proposed a survey to obtain an overview of the status of the data and further submissions to EMODnet.

Action point:

- JRC to create a survey for microlitter data status overview. MS to fill the survey with the status of their microlitter dataset.

15 THRESHOLD VALUE DEVELOPMENT FOR FLOATING MACRO LITTER + MICROLITTER

JRC informed the TG ML that TV development for floating microlitter should be developed after the compilation of data in the coming months and the preparation of a baselines analysis. For floating macro litter, the baseline dataset needs to be prepared. The availability of such datasets will then enable an informed discussion about the methodology for Threshold Value setting.

11 FLOATING MACRO LITTER BASELINE

JRC briefly introduced the work done on the floating macro litter topic (e.g. FMML background paper, projects), and highlighted the scarcity of large-scale data to determine floating macro litter baselines. The JRC Floating Litter Monitoring app should support the collection of floating macro litter data at large scale and enable a baseline analysis, following the example in the Black Sea area, done through the EMBLAS project.

One participant informed that a new project continues the work of Medsealitter Project using ferries as a platform for the observation floating macro litter. Another participant confirmed that ES conducts annual surveys from 2007 with dedicated observers for marine litter and biodiversity (cetaceans), but data should be analysed before sharing.

12 JRC FLOATING LITTER MONITORING APP

JRC has developed a mobile computer application and a related website for data management, as a follow-up to the earlier RIMMEL approach. JRC provided the status of the JRC FLM app and informed of the upcoming test. JRC complemented the information about the use and the options included on the website for the collection of shallow seafloor data.

One participant asked for different aspects related to data storage, quality of data (scientific – monitoring purposes) and the availability of the data. JRC confirmed that the data will not be immediately publicly available, and that the data storage is linked to managers and administrators.

Action point:

- TG ML Members and others to inform about interest to participate in the JRC FLM app tests via mail to: JRC-FloatingLitterMonitoring@ec.europa.eu.

7 BEACH LITTER DATA COLLECTION 2021 + 2022

EMODnet informed TG ML on the beach litter data workflow and validation, including a data availability update up to May 2023. Data from France should be available in July 2023 for 2021 and 2022. HELCOM confirmed that data from 2021 are already available in EMODnet. TG ML is planning to conclude the data collection for 2021 by all MS, in order to proceed to trend analysis based on a consolidated dataset. EEA announced the update of the Marine Litter Watch App which should enable its use for the Beach/Coastline monitoring by EU MS, in line with the guidance and required data and metadata formats.

Action point:

- EEA to consult with TG ML and to inform about the availability of the MLW app for MSFD beach Litter monitoring.

8 TRENDS OF COASTLINE LITTER

JRC informed the TG ML that data collection and validation for the coastline litter trend analysis is crucial to comply with commitments made by MS under the Zero Pollution Action Plan. Discussions will continue, based on a consolidated dataset.

Action point:

- TG ML to confirm through EMODnet the MS data completeness for 2021.

16 EU BEACH PELLET DATASET (METHOD + BASELINE)

Cedre presented the method proposed for the monitoring of beach pellets and mesolitter fragments, included in a specific chapter in the MSFD Guidance for Monitoring Marine Litter. Monitoring surveys using the proposed protocol have started in DE/FR/NL. Policy actions on pellets require a baseline assessment for pellets on EU beaches. JRC offered to assist Cedre in setting up a small questionnaire to ask MS about the implementation of this method and the data available.

Action point:

- MS to implement the method and provide data for a baseline dataset.

17 MAPPING OF MARINE LITTER MEASURES

As an approach for linking monitoring data with the implementation of efficient measures, JRC introduced the work done on the collection and analysis of 2680 examples of measures against marine litter at national, regional, and EU level. JRC informed the TG ML on the categorisation process of the measures in 167 conceptual categories and on the development of a conceptual map of the measures. The conceptual map is considered a valuable input for the modelling activities and contributes to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures. The attribution of measures for efficiency against sea or land-based origin was discussed.

Action points:

- JRC to evaluate the potential distinction between measures for sea-based and land-based litter sources.
- JRC to coordinate a core group to discuss the mapping of marine litter measures: Thomais Vlachogianni, Marijke Boonstra, Stefanie Werner, Andreja Palatinus, Tomaso Fortibuoni, Frank Jensen.

18 MODELLING OF MARINE LITTER

JRC presented the Blue2 modelling framework (Blue2MF), a holistic model that allows to simulate the impact of policy (e.g. MSFD, WFD, ZPA, SUP, CFP) and management options on the conditions of European marine regions. One of the main topics on the Blue2MF is the analysis of the present status on distribution and accumulation of plastic macro litter and the development of scenario simulations. For the reference simulations, land-based and sea-based sources are considered; while for the scenario analysis, also climate change factors (e.g. wind, currents, etc.) and management options are considered.

19 INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES: GLOBAL TREATY ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Commission updated the TG ML on the negotiations for the Global Treaty on Plastic Pollution. A zero draft text on the UN Negotiations for a legally binding instrument against plastic pollution will be available in October 2023. The text is envisaged to consider monitoring activities in the coastal and marine environment. The scope and level of ambition were discussed in the last session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (May 2023). Negotiations will continue in November. The link between work of TG ML, regional work beyond EU and global work against litter was emphasised by JRC.

20 UPDATE ON MARINE LITTER RESEARCH PROJECTS

JRC informed the TG ML that the list of marine litter research projects has been updated since the last publication, on the TG ML wiki and the MCC website.

One participant presented the project Remedies which aims to restore our ocean and waters based on three pillars: monitoring and detection, collection and valorisation, prevention and reuse of marine litter.

Another participant presented the HORIZON project Inspire which aims to contribute to a reduction of litter (including microplastic) in the European rivers.

Action points:

- JRC to upload the updated list of marine litter research projects on the TG ML Wiki and on the MCC website.
- TG ML is invited to inform about new projects in order to keep the list up-to-date.

21 LINKS WITH ACTIVITIES ON RIVERINE LITTER

The topic of Riverine Litter, both as a pollution of inland waters and as a source of litter to the marine environment has been discussed, also in TG ML, since years. While this topic is not in the mandate of TG ML, Regional Sea Conventions and the European Commission JRC have discussed the way forward. UNEP MAP briefed the group on the status of a review of riverine litter monitoring for the Mediterranean Action Plan, which was kindly shared with the other RSCs and the EC. RSCs are working towards the organisation, in collaboration with EC JRC, of a workshop focused on Riverine Litter in 2024.

JRC expressed the added value of riverine litter information for MSFD and TG ML, linking riverine litter inputs to its dispersion in the marine environment, e.g. as input data for models supporting MSFD and the Zero Pollution Action Plan. JRC also highlighted the FLM App as a tool to monitor riverine litter, based on previous work done in the JRC RIMMEL project.

Action point:

- RSCs and JRC to keep TG ML informed about activities on Riverine Litter.

22 TG ML ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS

The next TG ML online meeting is scheduled for December 2023. The TG ML co-chair Spain proposed to host the 2024 TG ML annual meeting in Valencia (Spain), back-to-back with the MARLICE 2024 Forum. Some intermediate technical (online) meetings will be planned on specific topics.

JRC briefly informed about the results of the survey to explore problems in accessing the TG ML Wiki site. Access problems are usually related to the EUlogin, which may require two attempts, in few cases more.

Action point:

- JRC will further work on improving the wiki login procedure by interacting with DG Digit.

23 WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS

TG ML Work will continue, besides upcoming planned meetings, proceed through document drafting, posts on the TG ML wiki and ad hoc meetings for specific topics. While all current work items are already derived from a prioritisation process, the work on Seafloor Macro Litter Thresholds and baselines, as well as the Coastline Litter Trends are considered as particularly urgent. With the upcoming new TG ML work programme a better distribution of tasks and active participation of all will be much welcomed.

The direct interaction during the meeting in Brussels, for those who attended in person, was found to be crucial for the progress that was made on some key issues.

TG ML chair thanked DG ENV for the kind hospitality and all participants for their participation and contributions.

Annex I: List of participants.

				Organisation / Ministry
<i>Experts from MS</i>		<i>Presence</i>		
		<i>21st</i>	<i>22nd</i>	
BE	Belgium	Onsite	Onsite	Royal Belgium Institute of Natural Science
CY	Cyprus	Onsite	Onsite	Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, Department of Fisheries & Marine Research (DFMR)
DE	Germany	-	Online	German Environment Agency
DK	Denmark	Onsite	Onsite	Danish Ministry of the Environment
DK	Denmark	Onsite	Onsite	Aarhus University (AU/DCE)
EE	Estonia	Onsite	Onsite	Tallinn University of Technology – TalTech Department of Marine Systems
EL	Greece	Online	Online	Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR)
ES	Spain	Online	Online	Spanish Institute of Oceanography-Spanish National Research Council (IEO-CSIC)
ES	Spain	Online	Online	Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
ES	Spain	Online	-	Spanish Centre for Public Works Studies and Experimentation (CEDEX)
FI	Finland	Onsite	Onsite	Finnish Environment Institute
FR	France	Onsite	Onsite	Cedre
FR	France	-	Online	IFREMER
HR	Croatia	-	Onsite	Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries
IE	Ireland	Onsite	Onsite	Marine Environment Division, DHLGH (IzVRS)
IT	Italy	Onsite	Onsite	ISPRA
LT	Lithuania	Onsite	-	Environmental Protection Agency
NL	The Netherlands	Onsite	Onsite	Rijkwaterstaat
NL	The Netherlands	Onsite	Onsite	Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management
PL	Poland	Onsite	Onsite	Institute of Meteorology and Water Management - National Research Institute
PT	Portugal	Online	Online	Portuguese Environment Agency
PT	Portugal	Onsite	Onsite	DGRM - Directorate-General for Natural Resources, Maritime Safety and Maritime Transport
SE	Sweden	Online	Online	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
SE	Sweden	Online	Online	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
SI	Slovenia	Online	Online	Institute for water of the Republic of Slovenia
<i>International organisations and</i>				
RSC	HELCOM	Onsite	Onsite	Helsinki Commission Secretariat

				Organisation / Ministry
RSC	OSPAR	Onsite	-	The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
RSC	UNEP/MAP	Onsite	Onsite	UNEP/MAP
NGO	MIO-ECSDE	Onsite	Onsite	Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture, and Sustainable Development
	SINTEF ocean	-	Online	SINTEF ocean
	Universidad de Cádiz	Onsite	Onsite	Universidad de Cádiz
	ILVO	Onsite	Online	Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
	UkrSCES	Online	Online	Ukrainian Scientific Centre of Ecology of the Sea
NGO	Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation	Onsite	Onsite	Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation
NGO	Seas At Risk	Onsite	Onsite	Seas At Risk
	Vito	Onsite	Onsite	Flemish Institute for Technological Research
	National Institute of Chemistry	-	Onsite	National Institute of Chemistry - Slovenia
European Commission, European Environment Agency, European Topic Centre, Consultants				
EC	EC DG ENV	Onsite	Onsite	European Commission, DG ENV
EC	EC DG JRC	Onsite	Onsite	European Commission, DG JRC
EEA	EEA	Onsite	Onsite	European Environment Agency