



Preparing the Research & Innovation Core for Mission Ocean, Seas & Waters

Guidance for establishing Mission Ocean and Waters National Hubs

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1 Introduction

The EU Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters’ (hereafter Mission Ocean and Waters) aims to protect and restore the health of our ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments. It supports regional cooperation through four regional lighthouses acting as pilot sites to demonstrate and implement Mission activities in the Atlantic-Arctic, Mediterranean Sea, Baltic-North Sea, and Danube-Black Sea. These lighthouses act as piloting sites to demonstrate and deploy mission activities.

The Prep4Blue project aims to support the deployment of the Mission Ocean and Waters by setting the foundations for its implementation in its first phase (2022-2025). It has developed concrete outputs such as communication tools, guidelines and methodologies to be used by Mission funded projects and stakeholders to achieve the Mission’s objectives.

The Mission Ocean and Waters national hubs serve as collaborative platforms designed to implement the objectives of the EU Mission Ocean and Waters. This guidance document aims to guide EU Member States in setting up a national hub for the Mission Ocean and Waters.

2 Existing Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hubs

2.1 What is a Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hub?

A Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hub is an initiative established at the national or regional level to integrate various stakeholders in a concerted effort to implement the activities and priorities of the Mission. Their role is to facilitate and support stakeholders wishing to contribute to these objectives.

These hubs serve as platforms for knowledge exchange and the development of innovative solutions to address critical marine challenges. They operate at both national and regional levels, connecting various stakeholders – including governmental agencies, researchers, private sector representatives, NGOs, and civil society – to align national efforts with broader European objectives.

They operate within a structured governance framework to facilitate collaboration among different sectors and create opportunities for strategic alignment with the EU Mission Ocean and Waters goals. The national hubs function as territorial multistakeholder communities that foster cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the practical application of innovative solutions to address issues such as marine pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate resilience.

Living labs, which refer to open-innovation entities where stakeholders collaborate to find solutions to sustainability challenges, can also act as hubs for the purpose of the EU Mission Ocean and Waters. They aim to bridge the gap between research and implementation by fostering an environment in which concepts can be tested and validated. The EcoDaLLi project for the Danube River Basin tested the Practices Living Labs system, a variant of living labs, as a framework for illustrating and strengthening the Mission’s objectives¹.

¹ EcoDaLLi, Design PLLS – Description of PLLS in the portal, M18. Available at: https://portal.ecodalli.eu/deliverables/MS4.4_MP_DD.pdf.

2.2 What are the functions and activities of a Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hub?

Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hubs perform various functions, mainly serving as interactive platforms for knowledge sharing and organising workshops and online forums where best practices and innovative solutions can be exchanged. Another critical function is the promotion of research, and the incubation of innovative solutions aimed at addressing marine and coastal challenges. Stakeholder engagement is a core aspect, with hubs facilitating dialogue across sectors to build partnerships and collaborative initiatives.

All existing hubs have organised workshops and events, dedicated to their identified national priorities and stakeholders. These workshops can address broad and overarching topics, such as the workshop on stakeholder engagement to implement solutions for the Mission organised by the Spanish, Tunisian and Maltese hubs in May 2024². They can also target more specific and targeted topics, such as the workshop organised by the Greek hub on waste management (December 2023)³ or the one organised by the Italian on the restoration of Lampedusa Island as a pilot action for the Mission (October 2024)⁴.

The activities of the hubs are meant to actively engage the community around their involvement in achieving the objectives of the Mission at their level, and to create a sense of ownership of these goals at the level of the community.

The hubs' activities should also aim to promote existing solutions in their national context, to identify funding opportunities and to create synergies with other national hubs on relevant topics.

² Spanish BlueMissionMed National HUB in action. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/spanish-bluemissionmed-national-hub-in-action-2/>.

Maltese BlueMissionMed National HUB in action. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/maltese-bluemissionmed-national-hub-in-action/>.

Tunisian BlueMissionMed National HUB in action. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/tunisian-bluemissionmed-national-hub-in-action-2/>.

³ Launch of the Greek BlueMissionMed HUB. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/launch-of-the-greek-bluemissionmed-hub/>.

⁴ BlueMissionMed Italian Hub drives innovation with two upcoming national events. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/bluemissionmed-italian-hub-drives-innovation-with-two-upcoming-national-events/>.

2.3 Where are existing Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hubs?

Mission Ocean & Waters National Hubs and Living Labs



Figure 1. Map of existing Mission Ocean and Waters National Hubs and Living Labs and their coordinators

1. **Spain** – Led by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO CSIC), focused waste elimination and the minimisation of marine pollution impacts.
Contact: spain.hub@bluemissionmed.eu
2. **France** – Coordinated by the French National Institute for Ocean Science and Technology (IFREMER), working on pollution reduction, circular economy, and governance strategies.
Contact: france.hub@bluemissionmed.eu
3. **Italy** – Managed by the National Research Council (CNR), supporting marine litter monitoring, removal, and sustainable solutions.
Contact: italy.hub@bluemissionmed.eu
4. **Greece** – Led by the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR), tackling marine pollution from fisheries, aquaculture, and waste management.
Contact: greece.hub@bluemissionmed.eu
5. **Malta** – Coordinated by the Malta Council for Science & Technology (MCST), aiming to engage local communities in marine conservation and blue economy initiatives.
Contact: malta.hub@bluemissionmed.eu

6. **Turkey** – Hosted by the Middle East Technical University (METU), focusing on the prevention and elimination of pollution (marine litter, urban wastewater, and industrial pollution solutions).

Contact: turkey.hub@bluemissionmed.eu

7. **Tunisia** – Led by BusinessMed, concentrating on reducing marine litter, industrial pollution, and developing innovative solutions.

Contact: tunisia.hub@bluemissionmed.eu

8. **Denmark** – Coordinated by the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), supporting climate resilience, knowledge exchange, and stakeholder engagement.

Contact: cep@sdu.dk

9. **Danube river** – Practice Living Labs System, coordinated by Steinbeis Europa Zentrum, focusing on wetland restoration, biodiversity conservation, water systems, and climate change.

Contact: portal@ecodalli.eu

2.4 Mission Ocean and Waters national hubs case studies

2.4.1 BlueMissionMed national hubs

Across Europe, seven national hubs have been established under the BlueMissionMed project, a Horizon Europe-funded Coordination and Support Action (CSA). Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Malta, Tunisia, and Turkey have developed their own hubs to address region-specific marine and aquatic challenges. Their main activities have focused on identifying and capitalising on innovative solutions to restore ocean and waters. These hubs have successfully hosted stakeholder workshops, developed platforms for sharing best practices, and connected national efforts with broader EU initiatives. For example, in Greece, a series of workshops have been held to discuss marine pollution mitigation strategies⁵, while the French hub has focused on circular economy applications for marine environments, including the fishing and boating industries⁶.

2.4.2 Danish Mission Ocean Hub

The Danish Mission Ocean Hub was established to serve as a national coordination and information platform supporting Denmark's involvement in the Mission. Hosted by the Danish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and facilitated by the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), the hub plays a key role in mobilising Danish stakeholders, disseminating information, and aligning national efforts with European initiatives. The Danish Hub operates as a help desk, offering guidance, resources, and networking opportunities to interested parties across sectors. It is open to all stakeholders, including citizens, academic institutions, NGOs, industry representatives, and government bodies, with engagement driven through social media and existing networks.

A central function of the hub is knowledge dissemination. It circulates quarterly newsletters and hosts two to three webinars annually, providing updates on Mission Ocean and Waters activities, funding

⁵ Greek BlueMissionMed HUB in action. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/greek-bluemissionmed-national-hub-in-action/>.

⁶ French BlueMissionMed HUB in action. Available at: <https://bluemissionmed.eu/french-bluemissionmed-national-hub-in-action/>.

opportunities, and emerging research in marine and maritime sectors. The hub is guided by an ad hoc planning team comprising representatives from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, SDU, DTU Aqua, and a regional EU office. National efforts are closely coordinated with the Danish Committee for the UN Ocean Decade, effectively strengthening synergies between international, EU, and national ocean initiatives.

The Danish Hub receives some funding through Horizon Europe Mission Ocean and Waters projects on national contact point and synergies, but its operations primarily rely on in-kind contributions from its planning team's organisations. The Hub could benefit from a formalised mandate and sustainable funding base to ensure long-term continuity and expansion, potentially through additional funding from Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Actions (CSA).

The hub is a valuable resource for Danish stakeholders, ensuring alignment with EU priorities and fostering a national dialogue on ocean sustainability.

2.5 What is the added value of Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-) national hubs?

The Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hubs enable a bottom-up and participative approach to implementing the Mission activities, by building a community behind the Mission at the (trans-)national level. Through its network, it allows an understand of their concerns at the (trans-)national level, which can be relevant and inform at the regional level. For example, in the event of a stakeholder consultation, they can be consulted as a community rather than in isolation and therefore increase their impact.

3 How to establish a Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-) national hub?

3.1 Identifying key stakeholders

The process of establishing a (trans-)national hub involves multiple steps, beginning with the identification of key stakeholders who will contribute to its development. National authorities, including ministries responsible for environmental and maritime affairs, must be engaged early on to ensure institutional support. Research institutions and universities provide scientific expertise, while private sector representatives from industries such as shipping, fisheries, and aquaculture contribute practical insights. NGOs, advocacy groups, and local communities play a vital role in ensuring that environmental and social concerns are taken into account.

3.2 Establishing the right governance structures

Once key stakeholders have been identified, a governance structure must be established. This typically involves appointing a National Coordinator to oversee operations, setting up a Steering Committee to represent key sectors, and forming Thematic Working Groups to address specific issues such as marine pollution mitigation, biodiversity conservation, *etc.* A Secretariat may also be established to handle administrative and logistical aspects.

Legal and financial frameworks must also be put in place to ensure the hub's sustainability. This may involve drafting formal agreements or memoranda of understanding among stakeholders, identifying

funding sources such as national government allocations, EU Horizon Europe funding and integrating the hub's activities into existing policy frameworks.

3.3 Consulting with national authorities

For a (trans-)national hub to be effective, it must work closely with national and regional authorities to align its activities with national and regional ocean and waters/aquatic governance frameworks. Engaging policymakers early in the process helps to secure official recognition and facilitates the integration of the hub into national and regional marine and aquatic conservation plans. Furthermore, clear reporting and evaluation mechanisms must be established to assess progress and measure the impact of the hub's activities.

3.4 Success factors for an effective (trans-)national hub

The success of a Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hub is largely determined by the following success factors:

- An inclusive and representative governance: ensuring all relevant stakeholders have a voice in decision-making processes.
- A clear strategic vision: aligning the hub's activities with EU Mission Ocean and Waters objectives.
- Stable funding mechanisms: diversifying funding sources for sustainability, such as government, regional and EU funding, as well as private sector contributions.
- Strong communication channels: using digital platforms and community engagement to inform and engage stakeholders.
- Adaptability and resilience: being able to react and evolve in line with new developments.

It is also important to consider the role of the hubs in ensuring the long-term sustainability and continuity of the Mission objectives when the Mission Lighthouses reach their conclusion. They may serve as permanent national coordination mechanisms, perpetuating momentum by fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder engagement. They will continue to act as bridges between different governance levels and initiatives, ensuring that best practices and funding opportunities continue to be shared and leveraged.

4 Lessons learned from other Mission hubs

The experience of other missions' hubs, such as those focused on Adaptation to Climate Change, Cancer and the Soil Deal for Europe, offers valuable insights into best practices for setting hubs as part of the Mission Ocean and Waters. Such lessons include the following:

- A bottom-up engagement approach that involves stakeholders from the outset helps to build trust and ensure meaningful participation.
- Cross-sector collaboration, which bridges different industries and disciplines, strengthens the hub's effectiveness.
- Integrating hub activities within existing policy frameworks enhances their sustainability.
- Avoiding the one-size-fits-all models and approaches, as each (trans-)national hubs may prefer adopting structures adapted to their national or regional contexts, while following the same overarching goal.

Case Studies: Cancer Mission Hubs & Cancer Mission Hub Norway

The ECHoS project aims to establish **Cancer Mission Hubs** in each Member State and Associated Country by providing them with the capacity to create these hubs and to engage stakeholders in policy dialogues at national, regional and local levels⁷. The project has mapped existing or newly created hub-like structures in all Member States and Associated Countries, assessing whether such structure exists and providing detailed recommendations on how to focus activities and to set up a future hub at the national level. A similar exercise would be beneficial for the Mission Ocean and Waters, to identify existing structures at country level and which resources would be required to set up the hubs.

The **Norwegian Cancer Mission Hub**, established in 2022, serves as a collaborative platform uniting key stakeholders under the EU Mission on Cancer and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP)⁸. The hub operates as a network rather than a formal decision-making body, allowing for flexibility and cross-sectoral collaboration. It is managed by the Norwegian Cancer Society (NCS) in partnership with the Research Council of Norway and Oslo Cancer Cluster, with additional contributions from other partners. The secretariat ensures strategic coordination and continuity and organises monthly strategic meetings with relevant stakeholders, including representatives from university hospitals, government authorities, research institutions, industry partners, and patient organisations.

A key strength of the Norwegian hub lies in its ability to bridge different sectors, fostering cooperation between public health institutions, research bodies, and policymakers. The hub has played a crucial role in mobilising stakeholders for joint initiatives, including citizen engagement programmes and research collaborations. It has also contributed to the national implementation of European cancer strategies, guiding discussions on prevention, screening, and personalised treatment.

The hub faces challenges linked to its informal structure and lack of dedicated budget or centralised authority, particularly in securing sustainable funding for expanding activities. Maintaining engagement and ensuring shared ownership among participants remain critical for long-term success.

5 Conclusions

Mission Ocean and Waters (trans-)national hubs are a key aspect of the achievement of the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters. By fostering collaboration, innovation, and strategic alignment, these hubs play a crucial role in accelerating progress toward sustainable marine ecosystems and resilient coastal communities. Their ability to connect diverse stakeholders, facilitate knowledge sharing, and implement transformative solutions positions them as vital components in the broader effort to protect and restore marine and freshwater environments. Ensuring their long-term success requires careful planning, adequate funding, and a commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation.

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⁷ Establishing of Cancer Mission Hubs: Networks and Synergies. Available at: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101104587>.

⁸ Cancer Mission Hub Norway. Available at: <https://www.cancermission.no/en/om-cancer-mission-hub-norway/>.