



LIFE A-MAR NATURA 2000

Layman's Report

Knowing and loving Natura 2000 marine sites to protect them



LIFE A-MAR helped people discover the value of marine Natura 2000 sites in Italy and Spain. Through sailing campaigns, communication tools, training, citizen science and visual storytelling, the project turned a little-known European network into a living story about sea, biodiversity and responsible behaviour.



Project reference:
LIFE20 GIE/IT/001352



Project duration:
2021–2026



Countries:
Italy and Spain



Coordinating beneficiary:
Federparchi



Photo: Scorpionfish (*Scorpaena scrofa*)
— Giorgio Carrada, LIFE A-MAR Photo Contest



Co-funded by the European Union



The project LIFE20 GIE/IT/001352 "Knowing and loving the Natura 2000 marine sites to protect them" is co-funded by the LIFE programme of the European Union.

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How to read this report

A visual journey from understanding Natura 2000 to action, impact and long-term legacy.



The report starts with the network and its biodiversity, follows the project's actions, shows how people participated, and closes with measured results, transfer and legacy.



UNDERSTAND THE NETWORK

What Natura 2000 is, what marine sites protect and where LIFE A-MAR worked.

Pages 3-5



FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

Foundations, sailing campaigns and communication tools.

Pages 6-8



PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION

Capacity building, citizen science, Natura 2000 Day, good practices and visual storytelling.

Pages 9-16



IMPACT, TRANSFER AND LEGACY

Replication, monitoring, overall results, lessons learned and what remains after the project.

Pages 17-21



KNOW • EXPERIENCE • PARTICIPATE • MEASURE • TRANSFER • CONTINUE

1. What is Natura 2000?

Natura 2000 is Europe's largest coordinated network of protected areas. It was created to safeguard habitats and species of European importance while allowing compatible human activities. LIFE A-MAR focuses on its marine dimension.



	EU	ITALY	SPAIN
WHOLE NATURA 2000 NETWORK (terrestrial + marine)	27,000+ protected sites	2,649 sites	1,863 sites
	almost 20% of EU land	19.4% of land	27.4% of land
MARINE NATURA 2000 (at sea)	10.5% of EU seas covered	6.5% of national marine waters covered	18.3% of marine waters covered



SCI = Site of Community Importance • SAC = Special Area of Conservation • SPA = Special Protection Area

Figures rounded from European Commission / EEA Natura 2000 Barometer. Marine values refer to coverage of marine waters.



Photo: Common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) — Giorgio Carrada, LIFE A-MAR Photo Contest

2. What do marine Natura 2000 sites protect?

Marine Natura 2000 sites protect habitats, species and ecological functions that make the Mediterranean alive, productive and resilient.



Habitats we protect



Posidonia oceanica meadows

Oxygen production, nursery grounds, coastal protection and carbon storage.



Reefs and coralligenous habitats

Rich underwater biodiversity hotspots.



Sea caves

Rare and fragile environments for peculiar marine life.



Sandbanks and shallow seabeds

Essential habitats for fish, invertebrates and coastal biodiversity.

Flagship species



Loggerhead turtle



Bottlenose dolphin



Seahorses



Seabirds such as Kentish plover and Eleonora's falcon



Posidonia oceanica meadows are vital for marine life and coastal health.



Coralligenous habitats host exceptional biodiversity in the Mediterranean.



Simple rules for visitors



Get informed before entering the site



Respect local restrictions and sensitive areas



Avoid anchoring on seagrass meadows



Do not disturb wildlife or collect organisms



Reduce waste and choose responsible operators



3. Where LIFE A-MAR worked

The project brought Natura 2000 closer to coastal communities in Italy and Spain, connecting ports, marine protected areas, schools, visitors and sea users.



Italy

From Liguria to Sicily, Tuscany, Sardinia, Lazio and Campania, LIFE A-MAR worked across marine protected areas and marine Natura 2000 sites, also supporting 15 Italian information panels placed in the territories reached by the sailing campaign.



Spain

The Spanish route reached Mediterranean Natura 2000 areas in Murcia, Valencia/Xàbia, Formentera, Ibiza, Mallorca, Girona, Tarragona and Almería, supported by 5 public information panels.



Photo: Capo Caccia, Sardinia (Italy) — Giorgio Carrada, LIFE A-MAR Photo Contest

Why it mattered



bringing Natura 2000 out of technical documents



speaking directly to local communities



linking conservation with daily life at sea and on the coast



4. The foundations of the project

The preparatory actions that built the strategic, relational and operational basis of LIFE A-MAR NATURA2000



Actions A launched the project by creating a shared vision, defining the communication strategy, mapping stakeholders and strengthening the capacities of partners and key actors.



A.1 Communication plan

This action defined objectives, key messages, target groups, tools and project identity, making communication a real tool for conservation.



A.2 Initial activities

The initial activities created a common base of knowledge and skills among the partners, fostering coordination, mutual learning and coherence at project start-up.

What it delivered



General communication strategy



Stakeholder mapping and database



Set-up of tools, channels and key messages

Stakeholders involved



Civil society organisations



Public authorities



Research institutions



Sector operators



Citizens and volunteers



29,858 contacts in Italy

about 800 Italian stakeholders
+ 27,543 LIPU members
+ 1,515 LIPU volunteers



906 contacts in Spain

database developed with the support of the LIFE INTEMARES experience



8

training sessions



December 2022 – March 2023



184

total attendances

The 4 topics addressed



The marine Natura 2000 Network in the project countries



Communication and awareness raising



Participatory governance and stakeholder engagement



Innovative tools and methodologies for training



Why they were decisive



They defined a common direction for the project



They built a network of relationships and contacts



They prepared the subsequent actions on communication, training and citizen science



They turned general objectives into concrete operational tools

“ Actions A were the initial engine of LIFE A-MAR NATURA2000: without a solid strategy, an active stakeholder network and shared capacities, it would not have been possible to effectively develop all the subsequent actions of the project.

5. When the project took to the sea



The sailing campaigns were the project's most dynamic outreach action. They turned the sea into an open classroom and each port into an opportunity to explain Natura 2000 in a simple, direct and memorable way.

Italy sailing campaign

- 6** weeks at sea
- 6** coastal regions
- 50+** marine Natura 2000 sites told along the route
- 17** participatory events
- 14** guided visits
- 2** press conferences

Spain sailing campaign

- 8** Mediterranean stages
- local meetings, guided visits and public outreach
- marine Natura 2000 sites explained on board and in port

In Italy, boats confiscated from organised crime and made available by Lega Navale Italiana became tools for legality, education and sea conservation.



Photo: LIFE A-MAR sailing campaign

6. Turning complex science into public communication

LIFE A-MAR translated codes, habitats and conservation rules into tools that people could actually read, use and remember.



15 Italian information panels

installed in the sites reached by the sailing campaign.



5 Spanish panels

explaining habitats, species, benefits and responsible practices.



A-MAR Sea Life app

a free digital guide to marine Natura 2000 sites and biodiversity.



“

The panels left the project in the territories: after the boats moved on, the information stayed.



Website and social media

stories, updates, educational content and visual campaigns.



25 newsletters

3,362 cumulative sends.



19,500 brochures and printed materials

simple information for visitors and local communities.



Information point and outreach team in a marine Natura 2000 site in Italy.



10 panels and roll-ups as a travelling exhibition to disseminate project results in Italy.



9,020 gadgets

produced in Italy and Spain including T-shirts, caps, pins, keychains and tote bags/shoppers.



7. Training, citizen science and Natura 2000 Day

The project did not only inform people: it involved them. Training, field events and citizen science helped turn curiosity into participation.



1. Capacity building



51
seminars delivered
on 24 that was
the project target



12
Italy:
training meetings,
400+ attendances



39
Spain:
training actions,
917 participants



2. Citizen science

Sea users, divers, coastal communities and visitors took part in field activities to observe, report and learn from marine biodiversity.



31
events
overall



270
participants
in Spain



164
participants
in Italy



434
participants
overall



3. Natura 2000 Day



17
events



21
marine and
coastal Natura
2000 sites



10
Italian
regions



544
participants

7.1 Capacity building in Italy

Training people who protect, manage and explain marine Natura 2000 sites

Action B.3 strengthened the skills of site managers, educators, guides, technicians and local stakeholders, turning technical knowledge into practical tools for communication, conservation and day-to-day management.



12
Italian training meetings

429
attendances recorded

23
experts involved

250
minimum target exceeded

Who took part

- ✓ managers of Marine Natura 2000 sites
- ✓ technical staff
- ✓ environmental educators
- ✓ guides
- ✓ tourism operators
- ✓ local stakeholders



What the pathway covered

- Management and conservation
- Communication and promotion
- Formats and forms
- Training of trainers

Where it happened

General sessions + local sessions in Asinara, Cinque Terre and Tuscan Archipelago.

Why it mattered

- shared language on Natura 2000
- better communication with visitors
- practical tools for local management
- stronger links between experts and territories

Outputs

reports, support materials, Mentimeter sessions, and a good-practices guide for capacity development.

“ Training did not simply transfer information: it helped build a shared capacity to protect and communicate the sea. ”

7.2 Capacity building in Spain

Training the people who manage, protect and explain marine Natura 2000 sites

Action B.3 in Spain strengthened the capacities of managers and key sea users through a structured training pathway based on the Capacity Building Strategy developed under LIFE IP INTEMARES. The programme turned technical knowledge into practical tools for governance, conservation, communication and the sustainable use of the sea.



39
training actions carried out

917
participants trained

7
key sectors involved

250
minimum target exceeded

8 of 21 training programmes in the strategy were implemented.

Who took part

- managers of marine protected areas
- law enforcement bodies
- Spanish Navy
- Maritime Rescue services
- tourism operators
- fishing and shellfish sector
- educational community



What the pathway covered

- Governance
- Applied management
- Education and awareness
- Communication
- Marine Natura 2000 fundamentals

Training areas at a glance

Governance	7 actions	113 participants
Applied management	8 actions	227 participants
Education and awareness	6 actions	157 participants
Communication	12 actions	176 participants
Marine Natura 2000 fundamentals	6 actions	244 participants

Why it mattered

- stronger governance and better application of rules
- better skills to identify species, habitats and impacts
- clearer communication with visitors and sea users
- stronger links between institutions, professionals and coastal communities

Outputs

- Deliverable B3.2: Guide to Good Capacity-Building Practices
- training materials and session reports
- educational resources for schools
- communication tools for tourism operators and sea users

In summary

“ In Spain, capacity building proved to be a strategic action: it strengthened governance, improved technical skills and helped make marine Natura 2000 easier to understand, explain and protect. ”



7.3 Citizen science in action

From awareness to observation: involving citizens in the knowledge and protection of marine Natura 2000 sites

Action B.2 combined communication, field experience and data collection. Tourists, residents, divers and sea users were trained to observe habitats, species and pressures, turning participation into useful knowledge for marine Natura 2000 sites.



30

workshops planned in Italy and Spain



16

workshops in Italy



16

activities in Spain



434

participants trained overall

(164 Italy + 270 Spain)



646

validated records / observations and species data

Italy: 575 validated records; Spain: 71 observations and 45 species identified.



Italy



16 workshops completed



164 participants



14 protected areas / site clusters involved



9 coastal regions reached



575 validated records consolidated in the LIFE A-MAR database



Audiences: divers, sea users, residents, visitors.



Spain



16 training activities



270 people trained



480 local agents identified



270 contacts activated; **118** responses



71 observations recorded



45 species identified



115 kg of waste collected



How it worked



Introductory briefing on LIFE A-MAR and the local Natura 2000 site



Training on habitats, species and pressures



Field observation and documentation



Expert review and data validation



Consolidation in the project database



Main tools

Minka

platform for reporting marine observations.



Observadores del Mar citizen science community for marine biodiversity.

Marnoba

app for recording marine species and habitats.



Project database secure system to store, manage and analyse all data collected.



Why citizen science mattered



it made biodiversity visible



it connected people with local sites



it generated useful records



it strengthened collaboration with protected areas and local partners

“ Citizen science made Natura 2000 something people could experience, observe and help protect. ”



7.4 Natura 2000 Day

Celebrating marine biodiversity with local communities

Natura 2000 Day transformed the European celebration into a coastal programme of walks, meetings and public events, helping residents, tourists, schools and local associations discover the value of marine Natura 2000 sites.




17
events realised



21
marine and coastal Natura 2000 sites involved



10
Italian regions reached



544
participants



10
events originally planned
results exceeded expectations



Who took part

- residents
- tourists
- students
- local authorities
- associations and volunteers

What happened during the events

- guided visits and coastal discovery walks
- talks on habitats, species and conservation
- responsible behaviour messages for visitors
- distribution of brochures and project gadgets
- local partnerships and community outreach

Why it mattered


- it celebrated the Natura 2000 network in public spaces
- it brought conservation closer to everyday life
- it promoted responsible enjoyment of marine sites
- it created local visibility for the project

A network along the coast

The events ran from 17 to 29 May and involved sites distributed across 10 Italian regions and 21 marine/coastal Natura 2000 sites.




schools and communities engaged



coastal biodiversity explained in simple language



European Natura 2000 Day celebrated on the ground

“ Celebrating Natura 2000 means turning protected sites into shared places of knowledge, care and participation. ”

8. Good practices in action



Photo: LIFE A-MAR stakeholder activities

Through the Good Practices Stakeholder Contest, LIFE A-MAR rewarded and showcased real examples of sustainable work linked to marine Natura 2000 sites. The contest turned local experiences into visible, replicable stories for fishers, tourism operators, educators and coastal communities.



1 Why this action mattered



rewarding real stakeholders already protecting the sea



making good practices visible and replicable



linking Natura 2000 with local economies and everyday work

2 How the contest worked

1



Public call

2



Applications and support

3



Transparent evaluation

4



Online award ceremonies

5



Personalised technical prizes

3 Two editions, one shared goal

2024

28 applications

562 people represented

3 winners

Award ceremony: 24 May 2024

Prize value: EUR 7,302.01

2025

15 applications

262 people represented

3 winners

Award ceremony: 18 July 2025

Prize value: EUR 8,064.74

4 Categories awarded



Artisanal fishing
low-impact fishing, selectivity, safety and care for marine resources



Sustainable tourism
visitor experiences compatible with marine ecosystems



Environmental education
learning activities that help people understand marine Natura 2000 sites



Photo: LIFE A-MAR stakeholder activities

5 Overall results

43 applications

824 people directly represented

6 winning good practices

331 fisheries-sector entities reached in 2025

6,600 fishers reached through targeted dissemination

6,862 total people reached / informed / involved in 2025

6 Winners in brief

2024 WINNERS

Vivere il Mare Soc. Coop.
— artisanal fishing

Coop. Pesca Pontillo
— sustainable tourism

Ichthia Savage
— environmental education

2025 WINNERS

COPEGA
— artisanal fishing

Sporting Club Cavo Diving
— sustainable tourism

Cooperativa RSTA
— environmental education

“ The contest showed that Natura 2000 is not only a network of protected sites, but also a network of people, skills and responsible practices. ”



9. A sea seen through people's eyes

Photo Contest and documentary

Through the 'Life above and below the sea' photo contest, LIFE A-MAR invited people to become visual storytellers of marine Biodiversity. The documentary 'Invisible Guardians: Routes for Biodiversity' added voices, places and stories to this collective portrait of Natura 2000.



2023 winner

Moonfish and Veleva — Gabriella Motta
Shot in the Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean Marine Mammals (Santuario dei Cetacei Pelagos).



2024 winner — Alessia, Vendicari

Shot in Riserva Naturale Orientata Oasi Faunistica di Vendicari, Sicilia.



2025 winner

Polmone di mare (Rhizostoma pulmo) — Filippo Fistarol
Shot at Monte Conero, Marche.



2026 winner — Marco Corda Eleonora's falcons

Shot on Isola di San Pietro, Sardegna.

Why the contest mattered



it made biodiversity visible



it engaged citizens through emotion



it created an image archive for communication and education



Invisible Guardians: Routes for Biodiversity

A visual story about people, places and species connected by the sea.



10. Replication and transfer across the Mediterranean

Action B.4 tested how LIFE A-MAR tools and methods can be reused beyond the original project areas.

The project transformed its experience in communication, training and stakeholder engagement into a transferable model for other marine Natura 2000 contexts. Through Mediterranean exchange sessions, the plan for replicability and the cost-benefit assessment, LIFE A-MAR showed how good practices can travel, adapt and last.

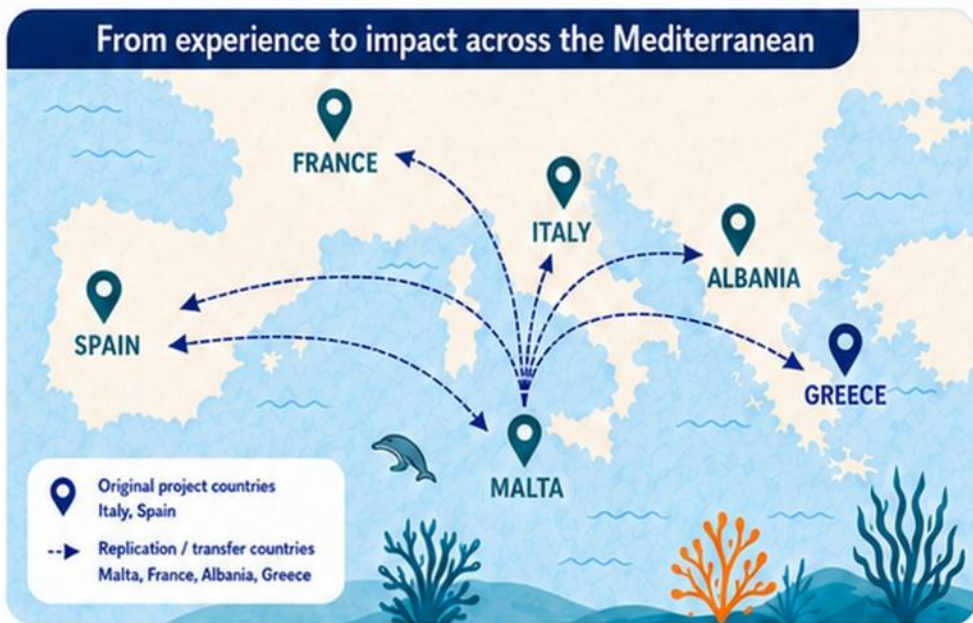


4
Mediterranean exchange sessions

93
participants overall

6
countries connected
Italy, Spain, Malta, France, Albania, Greece

2
key outputs
Replicability & Transfer Plan + Cost-benefit report



Where the exchange happened

- Malta — 7–8 May 2025
- Nice, France — 24–25 September 2025
- Tirana, Albania — 4–5 November 2025
- Heraklion, Greece — 29 January 2026
co-organised with LIFE MareNatura

What was transferred

- stakeholder mapping
- communication strategy
- capacity-building methods
- AMAR Sea LIFE app and digital tools
- participatory governance for marine Natura 2000 sites
- awareness formats such as sailing campaigns, regattas and citizen engagement

The two main deliverables

- Replicability & Transfer Plan**
Defined priority areas, methods, tools, training paths and indicators for transferring the LIFE A-MAR model.
submitted March 2024
- Cost-benefit assessment**
Showed that the model is economically sustainable because reusable materials, communication tools and digital solution reduce the cost of replication in new contexts.
submitted March 2026

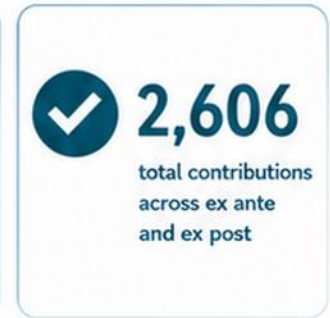
Why the model is replicable

- reusable training and communication materials lower start-up costs
- digital tools are scalable and can be updated for new territories
- high-impact actions work best with local partners and shared resources
- replication strengthens governance, skills and stakeholder networks
- a modular approach allows local adaptation without losing the project's core method

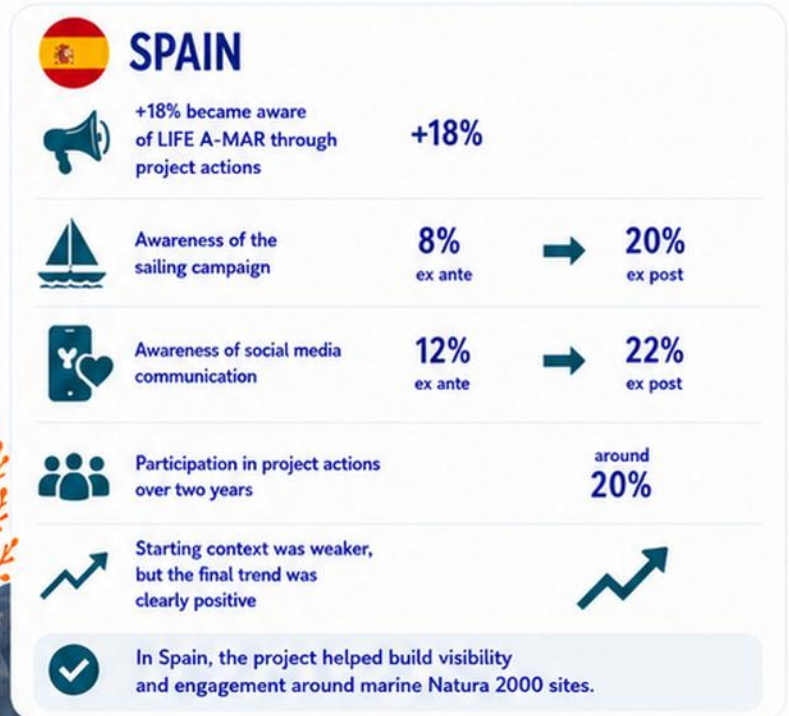
11. Monitoring change: from ex ante to ex post

Measuring how knowledge, awareness and participation evolved during LIFE A-MAR

Action C.1 monitored project impact by comparing baseline (ex ante) and final (ex post) evidence in Italy and Spain, using a coherent survey approach to understand what changed and what the project achieved.



Fieldwork for the ex post survey: 15 Aug – 30 Sep 2025



WHY IT MATTERED

- Evidence for final evaluation: Robust ex ante–ex post data to assess impact.
- Support for training and communication activities: Helps tailor messages and improve reach.
- Useful feedback for future conservation outreach: Identifies needs and opportunities.
- Proof that awareness-raising can change behaviour and perception: Stronger awareness, stronger action.
- Helped identify the main levers that increase environmental awareness in local communities.

Survey findings also supported Action B.3 by providing evidence and training.

“ Monitoring did more than count results: it showed that better communication and participation can make marine Natura 2000 sites more visible, understood and valued. **”**

12. Results that made Natura 2000 visible



LIFE A-MAR combined field actions and digital communication to make marine Natura 2000 sites far more visible to the public.



7.651.404
people reached



Project target: **6 million** people reached – achieved and exceeded.



4,068

communication products and events



Pinna nobilis, a symbol of marine biodiversity in Natura 2000 sites.



131
digital initiatives/products



64
on-site events and activities



857,460
people reached through territorial actions



2

sailing campaigns



30

panels, roll-ups and travelling photo exhibition



25

newsletters



1

app



1

documentary



9,020

gadgets



2

stakeholder good-practice contests



4

photo contests



2

regattas



In Italy, awareness of the project's actions increased



Sailing campaign:

19.3% → 30.7%



Social media, video and app:

22.7% → 36.6%



Regattas:

16.7% → 26.9%

13. What remains after the project

LIFE A-MAR ends, but its tools, relationships and knowledge continue to support marine Natura 2000 awareness and protection.



Website, app and repository

Still available to inform visitors and sea users.



Communication materials

Panels, brochures, newsletters, media content and the documentary continue to be reusable.



Training and good practices

Methods and learning materials remain available for managers, educators and stakeholders.



Replication and networking

The project opened connections with France, Greece, Albania and Malta for future transfer and cooperation.



Sea light over Posidonia meadows — a living heritage to protect.



Coordinating beneficiary:
Federparchi



Associated beneficiaries:
Triton Research, Lipu, Fundación Biodiversidad



Co-financing parks:
Asinara, Arcipelago Toscano, Cinque Terre



Website:
www.lifeamarnatura2000.eu

“

Knowing the sea is the first step to protecting it.



14. LESSONS LEARNED AND WHAT COMES NEXT

A policy-oriented conclusion for the future of marine Natura 2000

LIFE A-MAR showed that awareness, participation and practical tools can bring Natura 2000 closer to people. But long-term protection requires more than communication alone: it needs continuity, cooperation and public commitment.



1. WHAT WE LEARNED

1

People protect what they know

Clear communication makes marine Natura 2000 meaningful to citizens, visitors and sea users.

2

Local communities are essential

Protected areas work better when residents, guides, fishers, schools and stakeholders are involved.

3

Experience creates awareness

Sailing campaigns, field activities and citizen science turn abstract conservation into lived experience.

4

Simple tools make a difference

Panels, apps, brochures and visual storytelling help translate complex rules and science into everyday language.

5

Networks multiply impact

Cooperation between Italy and Spain showed that shared marine challenges need shared solutions.



2. WHAT MARINE NATURA 2000 NEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

1

Stable long-term funding

Awareness and conservation need continuity beyond project cycles.

2

Stronger site management capacity

Managers, educators and local operators need training, time and practical tools.

3

Better communication in every site

Interpretation and outreach should be considered part of conservation, not an extra.

4

Participation as a permanent method

Citizen science and stakeholder dialogue should remain active over time.

5

More integrated sea governance

Marine Natura 2000 needs coordination across biodiversity, tourism, fisheries, education and local development.

6

Shared Mediterranean cooperation

Cross-border exchange helps spread good practices and build a stronger culture of protection.



3. A SHARED SEA: WHY ACTING TOGETHER MATTERS

Italy:
2,649
Natura 2000 sites

Spain:
one of the EU countries with the largest protected Natura 2000 coverage

Both countries share Mediterranean habitats, pressures and opportunities

Working together means stronger messages, wider communities and more transferable solutions



LEGACY OF LIFE A-MAR

- ✓ reusable communication materials
- ✓ trained communities and professionals
- ✓ stronger links between protected areas and citizens
- ✓ a practical model for future

“ From **knowing** and **loving** marine Natura 2000 sites to **caring for them together.** ”

The future of Natura 2000 depends on informed communities.



LIFE A-MAR NATURA2000

From knowing and loving marine Natura 2000 sites to caring for them together.



The future of marine Natura 2000 depends on informed communities, practical tools, cooperation between Italy and Spain, and long-term commitment. Together, we can keep the Mediterranean rich in life, beauty and opportunities.



Know the sea

Understand habitats, species and the value of marine Natura 2000 sites.



Share responsibility

Everyone has a role in protecting the sea and using its resources sustainably.



Work together

Cooperation between communities, sectors and countries creates stronger results.



Protect for the future

Commitment today ensures healthy seas for the generations to come.



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Coordinating beneficiary
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Associated beneficiaries
Triton, LIPU,
Fundación Biodiversidad



Download the AMAR Sea Life app

Your guide to marine Natura 2000 sites, species and good practices.



Discover more about the project and explore our resources at www.lifeamarnatura2000.eu



Co-funded by the European Union



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