

OSPAR Riverine and Marine Litter Work Session

27 and 28 June 2017, Bonn, Germany

On the 27th and 28th of June, 2017, the OSPAR Riverine and Marine Litter Work Session took place. Colleagues of international river basin commissions, OSPAR, HELCOM, environment ministries, governmental agencies, scientific institutions and several NGO's, came together to exchange knowledge and best practices and to strengthen the cooperation.

Main conclusions

During this informative and energetic meeting participants agreed that riverine litter as source of marine litter is a problem which should be addressed with monitoring and prevention actions. Setting up a harmonized monitoring system for microplastics and for macrolitter is necessary for closing knowledge gaps and for generating the necessary awareness and political support for addressing the issue. Strengthening the cooperation between the riverine and marine communities (i.e. river commissions and regional sea conventions such as OSPAR) contributes to avoiding double work and to increasing effectiveness (working together from the start, prevents that repair actions should be taken in the future).

A first step for implementing harmonized monitoring of macrolitter could be the consideration of supporting and/or participation in the riverine monitoring project from the North Sea Foundation. For monitoring microplastics, experts from the riverine and marine communities could be brought together in order to identify the best monitoring method and focus. The participants of the workshop also support considering taking prevention actions.

Background

The session was organized in the context of the OSPAR Marine Litter Regional Action Plan ([link](#)), which includes an action (no 41) on riverine litter and the need to cooperate with the (international) river basin commissions. Prior to the work session, OSPAR sent a questionnaire to the river basin commissions in order to find out their (policy) approach to reduce riverine litter in the European rivers. The results of the questionnaire were summarized in a report ([link](#)).

Results first day

OSPAR presented the background of the meeting including the key message that the problem of marine litter cannot be solved without addressing a major pathway of litter: the rivers. A quick overview of the results of the questionnaire was given, as well as the results of the European Conference on Plastics in Freshwater Environments (Berlin, June 2016). The beach litter monitoring system of OSPAR was presented, which contained valuable lessons learned and practical recommendations for the riverine community that is just at the beginning of setting up monitoring activities or networks. Also, the JRC Riverine Litter Monitoring Report of the MSFD Technical Group on Marine Litter and the JRC RIMMEL project were presented, which gave the participants an overview of the options and recommendations for riverine litter monitoring.

Participants exchanged their own ideas and thoughts in plenary and in group sessions. There was overall consensus that monitoring, research and prevention are all essential to tackle this problem and that lack of data is a major challenge. Identification of most important sources, quantifying the contribution of litter entering the sea from rivers and the pathways of litter are the main open questions that should be focused on. Harmonized data are essential in the policy and decision making process. If efforts are jointed, the wheel is not re-invented again, which saves costs and time. Furthermore harmonized monitoring leads to comparable data across river basins and regions, which is needed for good trend analysis and overall understanding of the problem. Together with good communication strategies, this contributes to wider public awareness.

Results second day

A presentation was given on monitoring activities of microplastics in freshwater environments in South and West Germany. Reports on the results are expected in the coming months. After that, the participants had their turn to pitch about their own best practices, which gave a very interesting, broad and inspiring overview of the different activities that are already taking place.

During the plenary and group sessions, participants discussed about how we could bring this issue to the next level: what could be the next steps in the process, who should take them and which stakeholders should be involved? Participants were also asked to discuss what we should have achieved by 2021 and beyond. The degree to which the various ideas and conclusions shall be implemented depends on various factors, such as finding an appropriate organisation to lead on

them and identifying the necessary financial means. This led to the following main conclusions and ideas:

What could be done now?

- Keep the network alive. Share initiatives, events and results. Set up core-group and send two-monthly newsletter.
- Take the measures that can already be taken. Cooperate with regional sea conventions that already work on prevention actions such as actions on the issues of microplastics, storm and sewage water discharges and single use items.
- River basin commissions can start pilots, in order to work towards a harmonized monitoring method for macrolitter, based on the OSPAR beach litter monitoring protocol. An option can be to support or participate in the North Sea Foundation project. This project focuses on monitoring macrolitter on the river shores and is based on the OSPAR beach litter monitoring methodology. River commissions will be approached with more information on this project.
- The river basin commissions serve as independent platforms to exchange knowledge and to advance and coordinate the process. They can collect the available data and compare methods and systematically exchange and cooperate with each other and the regional sea conventions.
- Identify and communicate risks of plastics in the environment (work together on different levels).
- Form groups to apply for research funding (scoping studies etc.) and funding for pilots for preventive measures.

What could be done on the short term?

- 2017/2018: Macrolitter riverine monitoring. Make use of the OSPAR expertise. Link country and NGO initiatives. One of the options can be to support or participate in the North Sea Foundation project.
- 2018: organize workshop
 - On EU level on sampling macro + micro litter in rivers, possibly linked to Technical Subgroup Marine Litter (with the idea to establish a TG Riverine Litter) and/or
 - on microplastics monitoring, organized by river commissions or countries in order to
 - define fundamentals of monitoring system
 - and do this in cooperation with relevant stakeholders and regional sea conventions (OSPAR has already several litter indicators and is working on an indicator for monitoring microplastics in sediments)
- Make use of the already existing technical groups and processes on this subject. A possibility may be to integrate a Riverine Litter technical group with the Technical Group on Marine Litter, or to start a separate Technical Group on Riverine Litter. Such a group serves as a platform to share results of research, to exchange knowledge and to develop monitoring protocols.
- 2018/2019: organize a high profile conference (150-300 participants). Invite:
 - Industry, science, administrations, NGO's, IGO's, international financial institutions, regional sea conventions etc.
- Create public and political awareness by good communication and use of social media, in order to ensure funding.

What could we have achieved by 2021?

- Harmonized monitoring methodology is established for macro- and microplastics and agreed upon by the river commissions
- Common measures to reduce plastics in the environment
- Good estimation of riverine input into the sea
- Strong network of experts and stakeholders

And beyond 2050?

- Circular economy
- Zero inputs of macro- and primary microplastics into the environment
- Inclusion of macro- and microplastics in EU legislation for the river environment (WFD)