The IMPACT project: how to preserve marine protected areas and their organisms

The IMPACT project, funded within the cross-border "Interreg Italy-France Maritime 2014-2020" Programme, aims at providing tools and guidelines to combine the conservation of the marine protected areas (MPAs) with the development of port activities in the transboundary areas, using Toulon, Bastia, La Spezia and Leghorn as case studies.

MPAs are vulnerable not only to pollution generated by spills due to maritime accidents, but also to contaminations caused by maintenance or enlargement works in the adjacent port areas. The objective of the **IMPACT (IMpact of Ports on marine protected areas: Cooperative Cross-Border Actions) project** is to find solutions and means for MPA best protection without preventing the necessary port activities from taking place.

IMPACT (2017-2020) is funded by the European Union and coordinated by the **Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - Istituto di Scienze Marine (CNR – ISMAR)**, based in Lerici, with the participation of the **Centro Interuniversitario di Biologia Marina ed Ecologia Applicata "G. Bacci" (CIBM)**, the **Consorzio Laboratorio di Monitoraggio e Modellistica Ambientale per lo sviluppo sostenibile (LaMMA)**, the **Institut Français de Recherche pour l'Exploitation de la Mer (IFREMER)**, the **Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA)**, the **Laboratoire d'Ecogéochimie des Environnements Benthiques (LECOB-CNRS)**, the **Regione-Toscana** and the **Université de Toulon**.
A sustainable management plan for the effective protection of MPAs will be drafted in harmony with the development of ports, thanks to the common effort of all partners.
The cross-border approach is crucial both for the commonality of problems in key and vulnerable areas and for ensuring the effectiveness of interventions, based on a network of infrastructures and shared best practices.
IMPACT is realizing a series of governance tools – geospatial datasets, dimensioning indications and optimal-monitoring guidelines – useful for the authorities in charge of MPA management, especially those located near port areas. A dedicated **Geographic Information System** (Web GIS) is being set up, whose information will be organized in datasets available online, including:

- transport of substances between ports and MPAs due to marine currents, based on oceanographic measures from coastal radars and special buoys called *drifters*;
- ecological retention properties within MPAs, calculated from ecological observations and numerical models;
- distribution of contaminants, based on historical data and dedicated measurements.

The approach is based on an innovative modeling and monitoring plan that requires studies and measurements in the MPAs of **Meloria**, **Cinque Terre**, **Port-Cros and Porquerolles**, and the recently-established **Marine park of Cap Corse and Agriates**, and in the nearby ports of **Leghorn**, **La Spezia**, **Toulon** and **Bastia**, respectively.

The results from the IMPACT project will allow measures of damage mitigation, both in terms of prevention identifying situations at risk, and in terms of targeted intervention following accidents, thanks to the possibility of foreseeing scenarios of pollutants dispersion. In addition, it will be possible to achieve a better understanding of larval dispersion and connectivity among the MPA organisms, and therefore to determine the optimal MPA dimensions.
These are all basic elements of the **Blue Growth**, the long term strategy, at European level, to support a sustainable growth in the marine and maritime fields.

IMPACT addresses the following questions:

- Can we estimate the correct dimensions of the MPAs?
- Can we identify the potential sources of pollution in the ports?
- Can we establish the distribution of contaminants?

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