

Press release: Ten European countries invest €7.5 million into research on microplastics in the ocean

Four research projects investigating the impact of plastic particles on the marine environment are selected for funding from ten member countries of the Joint Programming Initiative Healthy and productive Seas and Oceans (JPI Oceans)

The projects intend to increase the knowledge about microplastics in the sea. Several studies have shown that microplastic particles are taken up by marine organisms. However, in spite of the growing public awareness of the potential risks of micro-plastics, their distribution, fate and possible environmental impacts have not been investigated in detail and are far from being understood. Therefore, the four projects will work towards harmonising methods for monitoring, extracting and analysing microplastic particles in this relatively new and challenging field. Furthermore, the projects will focus in particular on the ecotoxicological effects of the particles on marine life.

The accumulation of plastic litter in the environment and especially the world oceans has become a growing concern ever since the rise in plastics production. Larger persistent plastics are in most cases not degradable but fragment over the course of time. Various studies have demonstrated the presence of micro-plastics in the ocean as well as the uptake of micro-plastics by various organisms in the sea. Thus, micro-plastics are entering marine food webs and could end up in human food as well.

Marine litter was recently also highlighted as a priority at the latest G7 Leaders' Summit in June in Germany. The Leader's Declaration acknowledged the global risks posed by marine litter, particularly plastics, to marine and coastal life, ecosystems and potentially human health. The statement called for actions and solutions to combat litter, stressing the need to address the sources and its removal, as well as education, research and outreach.

Funding for the research projects was awarded through a competitive call process, organised by Project Management Jülich (PtJ) in Germany, in which 21 joint proposals requested more than €26 million. Based on the evaluations by an expert panel, member countries selected four proposals for funding from December 2015 subject to completion of national arrangements and conclusion of grant agreements:

- **BASEMAN** - Defining the baselines and standards for microplastics analyses in European waters
- **EPHEMARE** - Ecotoxicological effects of microplastics in marine ecosystems
- **PLASTOX** - Direct and indirect ecotoxicological impacts of microplastics on marine organisms
- **WEATHER-MIC** - How microplastic weathering changes its transport, fate and toxicity in the marine environment

The funding of the research is made available by Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, member countries of JPI Oceans. The Joint Programming Initiative Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans (JPI Oceans) is a coordinating and integrating platform, open to all EU Member States and Associated Countries. In its role as a coordination platform, JPI Oceans focuses on making better and more efficient use of national research budgets, which represent 88% of the research funding within Europe. One of JPI Oceans' goals is to develop joint research programmes in which countries can be involved on a voluntary basis.

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