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# COMMUNICATING IDENTIFIED GAPS, SOLUTIONS AND FUTURE STEPS

**Deliverable D.2.3.1 Report "Recommendations  
for reaching efficiency in surveillance and  
enforcement"**

Split, December 2024

# Communicating identified gaps, solutions and future steps

## Deliverable D.2.3.1 Report "Recommendations for reaching efficiency in surveillance and enforcement"

### Report information

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## 1. BACKGROUND – EFFICIENTN2K project

In recent years, substantial efforts have been dedicated to creating new protected areas and formulating management plans in alignment with global and EU conservation strategies, especially through establishing the Natura 2000 network. Nevertheless, the primary challenge lies in enhancing on-site management effectiveness, where surveillance and enforcement play pivotal roles in achieving this goal. Because many different institutions have authority over the sea and coastal public maritime domain, coastal and marine protected zones are extremely difficult to manage.

The primary objective of the EFFICIENTN2K project is to enhance surveillance and enforcement within protected coastal and marine Natura 2000 sites in Italy and Croatia, ensuring the preservation of biodiversity and the protection of these vital natural assets. The project intends to improve collaboration between competent organisations in two countries in the field of environment conservation, as well as between individuals and civil society organisations. Because of the ability to share experiences, data, and information, as well as undertake joint measures, cross-border cooperation leads to more effective nature conservation.

The EFFICIENTN2K project is a small-scale project financed by the Interreg Italy-Croatia CBC Programme (Program Priority 5 – Integrated Governance for Stronger Cooperation), started on August 1, 2023 (duration 18 months). The project partners are the Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development Sunce (Sunce) as lead partner and the Municipality of Ugento.



## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REACHING EFFICIENCY IN COASTAL AND MARINE NATURA 2000 SURVEILLANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

The report "*Recommendations for reaching efficiency in coastal and marine Natura 2000 surveillance and enforcement*" (D.2.3.1) compiles and summarises all experiences and recommendations generated through project implementation to support other Natura 2000 sites in solving problems. It gives a short description of the mentioned activities and related recommendations. The report serves as a short policy document and a basis for communicating gaps, solutions and future steps the key stakeholders should take. The developed *Dissemination action plan* will ensure that the most important issues from the Report are highlighted, and results are disseminated to key audiences, nationally and internationally.

## 3. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CAPACITIES TO CONTROL PRIORITY PRESSURES ARISING FROM HUMAN ACTIVITIES IN COASTAL AND MARINE NATURA 2000 SITES

The initial project activity included an analysis of the institutional and legal framework and existing capacities for controlling priority pressures arising from human activities in coastal and marine Natura 2000 areas. The analysis covered existing pressures resulting from daily human activities, relevant regulations for their control, competent authorities responsible for implementing surveillance and enforcement, and their capacities, as well as identified obstacles to more effective protection on the ground. The analysis relied on available data and documents, including management plans, laws, regulations, reports, and statistical data on surveillance and enforcement activities and implementation of protection. Results from stakeholder interviews conducted through a semi-structured questionnaire were also considered. The analysis was based on selected pilot areas (9) in Croatia and Italy and the main identified pressures (fishing, free anchoring, wastewater from vessels, pollution of surface waters due to agricultural activity and fires).



### 3.1. Main recommendations for reaching more efficient surveillance and enforcement identified through initial legal and institutional analysis

Despite the successful transfer of the legal acquis of the European Union in the field of nature protection to the Croatian national legislation and the established institutional framework for combating crimes against nature, there is a certain scope for improving the current regulations and cooperation between competent authorities. Although the regulations are generally harmonised with European and international obligations, handling certain cases represents a challenge for the surveillance and prosecution authorities. Jurisprudence related to crimes against nature is not uniform, and the punishment policy is mild. In criminal cases, suspended sentences are generally awarded, except in cases of recidivists, while in misdemeanour cases, extremely low fines are usually imposed. In Croatia, no level of political responsibility would ensure high-quality interdepartmental cooperation (and sometimes even intradepartmental cooperation) for the benefit of society. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development should actively assume the role of interdepartmental coordinator regarding crimes against nature. It includes assuming responsibility for the development of strategic and implementation documents. It is assumed that there is a disproportion between the number of committed, discovered, and prosecuted cases of crimes against nature which comes from low awareness of such crimes and a lack of understanding of their significance and consequences, both among the public and within competent authorities (police, customs, judiciary). Surveillance and detection services are under-staffed (inspection and rangers), which results in a weaker possibility of immediate detection of punishable acts. Despite the large number of stakeholders involved, the exchange of information and coordination has not been formally established, and there is a lack of clear procedures and legal support when dealing with this type of crime. Better coordination of bodies and transparency of work could lead to greater awareness of the relevant stakeholders and the public about the importance of this topic and act preventively against possible perpetrators. There is a lack of regular specific education in all segments of the process of combating crimes against nature.

Improvement of the data system and monitoring of conditions and processes in the coastal area is necessary. This should include enabling access to data between departments (nature protection, spatial planning, maritime, fisheries...), joint planning for monitoring the situation



(through interdepartmental cooperation) and the use of limited capacities (both human and financial) more efficiently.

A planned and organised approach to combating crimes against nature can be achieved by adopting a national strategy and action plan for this type of crime, creating a unique protocol for the coordinated work of bodies involved in combating this type of crime, and standardising court practice. It is essential to provide adequate financial and personnel resources to enhance surveillance and detection activities. Additionally, continuous training should be ensured for competent state and public officials, including rangers, inspectors, police officers, state attorneys, and judges, focusing on combating crimes against nature. In conclusion, it is necessary to raise the awareness of competent authorities and the public about the meaning and consequences of this type of crime on nature and society.

The analysis of the management and monitoring of Natura 2000 sites in Croatia and Italy highlights several common challenges and opportunities for improvement. These shared aspects provide a foundation for collaborative strategies and knowledge exchange, enhancing conservation efforts across both countries. Among the common challenges are fragmented coordination and management, limited resources, data collection and reporting inconsistencies, and reactive surveillance practices.

Croatia and Italy face issues with the fragmentation of responsibilities among various control bodies. This leads to inefficiencies and a lack of cohesive management strategies, which hinder effective conservation efforts. The involvement of multiple authorities without a unified management system creates delays in addressing environmental violations. Both countries need to enhance coordination among the various authorities and organisations involved to address these issues. Establishing more effective coordination mechanisms will ensure a unified and coherent approach to managing the sites. The current fragmentation of responsibilities leads to overlaps and gaps in control effectiveness, making a coordinated strategy indispensable.

Another significant challenge in both countries is the scarcity of financial and human resources dedicated to the management and monitoring of Natura 2000 sites. This lack of resources limits the frequency and coverage of surveillance activities, thereby increasing the vulnerability of protected areas to illegal activities and environmental degradation. Tackling



this challenge requires a strategic allocation of resources and the exploration of innovative funding mechanisms to provide adequate support for conservation efforts.

Furthermore, both countries experience inconsistencies in how data is collected and reported by public institutions. This inconsistency complicates the evaluation and comparison of conservation efforts across different sites and authorities, leading to gaps in the effectiveness of monitoring and management practices. Standardizing data collection and reporting protocols will facilitate better assessment and comparison, thus improving the overall management of Natura 2000 sites.

Lastly, the current surveillance practices in Croatia and Italy tend to be reactive rather than proactive. The emphasis on responding to emergencies rather than continuous monitoring and preventive measures reduces the effectiveness of conservation efforts. Additionally, there is a lack of standardised training and protocols for the personnel involved in these activities. Implementing proactive surveillance strategies and standardising training and protocols will enhance the effectiveness of conservation measures and ensure better protection of Natura 2000 sites.

By addressing these common challenges, Croatia and Italy can significantly improve the management and monitoring of their Natura 2000 sites, ultimately contributing to more effective conservation efforts across both countries.



## 4. DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

After the initial legal and institutional framework analysis, project partners organised workshops with key stakeholders to discuss conclusions from the developed analysis, validate results and develop possible solutions for identified problems. Workshops served as a platform to identify good practices, exchange experiences, build partnerships, and identify capacity-building needs. Partners organised five local workshops and one joint cross-border workshop.

Croatian local workshops focused on the regulation of anchoring on *Posidonia* meadows and improvement of record-keeping of rangers' services within public institutions for the management of protected areas and Natura 2000 sites. Workshops organised by the Municipality of Ugento focused on critical issues in the biodiversity control and surveillance system and useful solutions, the importance of coordination of enforcement entities, the establishment of a coordination table, personnel and financial shortage and the lack of clarity in the governance and regulations concerning marine protected areas.

Joined workshop entitled "Surveillance and Enforcement for the Effectiveness of Marine Protected/Natura 2000 areas in the Adriatic Sea" brought together Croatian and Italian experts and stakeholders to discuss the importance of surveillance and enforcement in marine Natura 2000 areas. The event was also supported by the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process, a process that involves a series of seminars and networking events in each region aimed at promoting knowledge exchange, networking and collaboration among member countries on issues related to Natura 2000. The workshop included discussions within working groups on anchoring, fires, and surveillance in protected areas (acting of rangers).

### 4.1. Main recommendations for reaching more efficient surveillance and enforcement identified through organised workshops

- Both countries are currently oriented towards key objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (increase in the percentage of marine protection and strictly protected areas), more effective protection and restoration of nature. Member States have a clear obligation to establish and implement specific conservation



measures for target habitat types and species and must take appropriate steps to prevent deterioration of natural habitats (Article 6 of the Habitats Directive).

- The current legal framework is good, although it could be improved in both countries to allow better management, especially in Natura 2000 sites. The current Croatian Nature Protection Act has limitations regarding the possibilities of rangers to act, so the effort of the NGOs should be in advocating the insertion of misdemeanour provisions in the new Nature Protection Act regarding Natura 2000 sites, clearer distinguish between rangers and inspection, etc. The current legal framework for the protection of Ugento Regional Park is old and outdated.
- Communication and information campaigns are very important when introducing new regulations. These should focus on other sectors involved (to raise their level of awareness on nature conservation issues), users and beneficiaries (marinas, charter industry, nautical tourists) and the general public (as economic issues will be publicly questioned).
- Efficient surveillance and enforcement require great cooperation and coordination among competent authorities and organizations involved in surveillance (rangers service, coast guards, port authorities, etc.). Currently, in both countries, there is a lack of communication among the bodies involved in management and surveillance, although progress has been visible in recent years.
- Improved communication between bodies involved and coordinated planning of interventions improves resource management (staff and financial).
- Establishing a Coordination table between various bodies involved in surveillance proves to be a good solution to improve communication between them and support them in better planning and coordinating joined activities and appropriate financial resources.
- It is crucial to establish fast, effective and standardised communication protocols for bodies involved in surveillance. This approach allows potential crimes to be immediately identified and to respond quickly.
- Record-keeping of institutions involved in surveillance and enforcement should be improved (to allow comparison), linked/connected and accessible for everyone within the enforcement chain. It is important for all institutions involved to be able



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to track the proceedings in which they were involved. Currently, there is often no information exchange between these bodies.

- Establishing of Voluntary Ecological Guards (VEG) in some protected areas in Italy prove to be a good solution for increasing the number of surveillance actions within protected areas.
- Regulation of anchoring is the main issue concerning the protection of *Posidonia* meadows in Croatia. Based on experience from Western Mediterranean countries, the regulation should be gradual. The current infrastructure in Croatia wouldn't be enough to accommodate all the boats visiting the country if free anchoring was completely banned. As a pre-condition for regulation, habitat maps and data on pressures should be available to help identify priority sites and propose regulation strategies.
- Establishment of mooring sites goes through spatial plans at the county (regional) level. A good example to follow is Split-Dalmatia County. Specifically, they developed an Anchoring Study for Split-Dalmatia County which provides guidelines for their development and Plan for nautical mooring sites along Split-Dalmatia which defines the location, size, and maximum capacity of mooring sites. These documents serve as a basis for the spatial plan for Split-Dalmatia County and prove to be a quality way to address the issue of free anchoring in terms of protecting sensitive and valuable habitats.
- Regulation of anchoring requires the involvement of different sectors, especially the maritime domain sector and special planning, so a special effort should be put into advocacy towards these sectors.
- Video materials can be very efficient in communicating new regulations, especially with *Posidonia* and anchoring, as they show the level of destruction and raise awareness with the public. The regulation should start with raising awareness activities, not prosecution. Direct joint action on the field to inform boaters of new regulations proved to be very efficient in Spain (Balears).
- Installation of eco-moorings is more expensive than current practices (*colpo morto*) but needed if we want to protect priority habitats of the EU. Efforts should be put into explaining the benefits and technical specifications of such a mooring system,



especially to potential concessionaires and users. Some countries are searching for a financial model to co-finance eco-moorings and boost their instalment.

- Involvement of local communities in the management of Natura 2000 sites is a key element for the long-term success of conservation.
- Fire prevention is fundamental to reducing the risk of biodiversity loss, but many parks struggle with resources allocated for these activities. It is important to raise awareness of private owners on fire prevention as in many protected areas there is a significant portion of private land.
- In Puglia, the role of ARIF is fundamental for fighting and control of forest fires in parks. The agreement between ARIF, Puglia region and parks is essential to facilitate fire prevention, an active fight against forest fires in protected areas, and better planning and spending of regional resources allocated to these activities.
- Funding significantly impacts the management and surveillance, as higher funds enable the employment of qualified staff, necessary equipment for effective surveillance, and more frequent actions on the field.
- The possibilities of new technologies usage in surveillance and monitoring should be explored and encouraged, as it has great potential and there are already some good examples (video surveillance systems implemented by the Torre Guaceto Reserve Management Consortium). When planning the use of technology in surveillance and enforcement, the issue of personal data should be carefully considered.
- Equipment is needed to facilitate biodiversity monitoring activities, as well as combating illegal activities in protected areas. Financing video surveillance systems of marine Natura 2000 sites would ease the surveillance of illegal activities and facilitate the intervention of enforcement bodies (Coast Guard, Port Authority).
- Protected areas staff needs to be encouraged to enhance their skills in new technologies and use them to improve monitoring and surveillance in these areas.
- The Croatian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development developed an Assessment Study of training and capacity-building needs and gap identification in the implementation of educational programs in the nature protection sector. Rangers assessed that they need more capacity building on the natural values of the area, computer skills and technology, projects, plans and policies and administration. Although there is some progress in developing educational modules for rangers,



there are many more educational needs than currently provided. They would also highly benefit from training in communication skills. They regularly encounter various offenders in the field, so they have to know the legal framework well, but also how to treat people properly and communicate nature protection.

## 5. CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING

Initial project activities were used to identify capacity-building needs and develop capacity-building training. This training aimed to build capacities on common cross-border weaknesses identified through previous activities and support solutions development. The capacity-building involved representatives of public authorities responsible for the enforcement and surveillance in protected areas and Natura 2000. Project partners designed and conducted 4 trainings. The topics involved maintaining order in maritime domains within protected areas technology as an innovative solution in the monitoring and surveillance of protected areas and drone usage (with licence exam for participants).

### 5.1. Main recommendations for reaching more efficient surveillance and enforcement identified through organised capacity-building training

- Implementation of the New Maritime Domain and Seaports Act (Croatia) by public institutions that manage marine protected areas remains challenging. Related capacity building of their staff remains one of the priority needs of these institutions in the future.
- Persistence and perseverance of rangers is significant as it signals competent institutions (police, courts) that changes and new practices are needed. This inevitably leads to an increase in institutional capacities and affects the change in people's awareness and behaviour.
- Communication with offenders should be clear and professional as it shapes the personal image of rangers, while politeness and respect contribute to the offenders' cooperation.



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- It is important to strengthen communication and cooperation between rangers and police, and other institutions involved in the enforcement chain, to suppress threats to rangers and other offences.
- Organising intersectoral education in the future would contribute to better cooperation between institutions and sectors involved in the enforcement chain.
- Collaboration and coordination between law enforcement agencies in Puglia responsible for surveillance of various areas (including protected ones) with differing roles and competencies should also include unified training and coordination exercises to strengthen surveillance and enforcement in Natura 2000 sites across the region.
- The fact that some protected area has video surveillance is enough to deter criminals.
- Technology can be very helpful for the surveillance of the rangers' service, but also for research activities of the expert service.
- Technology usage should be incorporated into the legal framework, to be able to use photo and video materials in misdemeanour and criminal offences.
- GDPR must be seriously considered by institutions doing recordings, in terms of the management and access to these recordings.
- Drones are very useful as they are affordable and easy to get a license and navigate. But these recordings have more cognitive value.
- Considering that regional parks and Natura 2000 sites managed by local authorities in Puglia are small in size and lack sufficient staff to ensure continuous monitoring and surveillance of the territory, the use of technology can enhance control of the area.
- Identified additional educational needs through participants' feedback including surveillance and enforcement issues, competencies and procedures, the vagueness of legal regulations, maritime domain management planning, control of fishing, proceedings in case of illegal construction, acting in case of cooperation refusal, disobedience, and non-arrival of the police.
- Sharing experiences between Italy and Croatia during organised training was important in this project and contributed to the capacity building of employees within public institutions managing marine protected areas.



## 6. DIRECT JOINT ACTIONS

Demonstrative collaborative surveillance actions in Natura 2000 sites were organized by each project partner to showcase in practice how collaboration between competent authorities can contribute to surveillance and enforcement efficiency. Since, in collaboration with the Public Institution for Management of Protected Parts of Nature of the Split-Dalmatia County, “Sea and Karst” and representatives of local authorities and organizations organised 2 joint actions in marine Natura 2000 sites during the summer months of 2024 (HR3000120 Zlatni rat na Braču - podmorje and HR3000119 Šćedro - podmorje).

The focus of these joint actions was to inform nautical tourists about the importance of *Posidonia oceanica* as a strictly protected species in Croatia and priority EU habitat type, and the impact of free anchoring on the state of the meadows. Many of these sailors are unaware that *Posidonia* meadows play a crucial role in the marine ecosystem by providing habitat for marine species, reducing coastal erosion, protecting beaches, producing oxygen, and improving water quality. To preserve the slow-growing *Posidonia* meadows, sailors should avoid anchoring in *Posidonia* meadows and use ecological moorings where possible.

Actions and their results were also promoted in the media to raise their profile and public awareness on issues that Natura 2000 sites are dealing with. The pilot action carried out by Natural Regional Park “Litorale di Ugento” included close collaboration with the Municipal Police and the Airspace Control Service of the 61st Wing of the Lecce CTR, at Galatina Airport. The primary goal was to identify and monitor the areas within the Park most exposed to wildfire risks using the drone. The drones proved to be particularly effective in surveying vast territories quickly and accurately, enhancing the capacity for rapid response and prevention of fires.

### 6.1. Main recommendations for reaching more efficient surveillance and enforcement identified through organised direct joint actions on the field

- Nautical tourism has its daily and weekly dynamics, which should be considered when planning joint action on the field involving them (time of the day, day within the week). Including the local community in the planning process is recommended as they can provide information on these trends on the local level.



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- Informative, awareness-raising campaigns on the field (going from boat to boat) prove to be effective ways to reduce the impact of anchoring on *Posidonia* meadows. It is important to plan ahead with all involved to agree on the main goal, concept and program, individual roles and the message we want to send as time is very limited during this type of action (boat to boat approach).
- Communication materials (leaflets and dry bags) were well received by tourists during joint actions in Croatia. Leaflets are still very useful tools in communication with nautical tourists, although we would recommend combining them with QR codes to lower environmental impact.
- It is crucial to inform nautical tourists about the value of *Posidonia* and the impact of anchoring, while also providing alternative options, such as nearby mooring sites or low-impact sand areas. Challenges include tourists misunderstanding the upside-down anchor symbol and disregarding information from nautical charts and apps.
- Having an institution constantly present on the field (local public authorities, concessionaires), aware and oriented towards marine protection is crucial. Then good initiatives that come from the regional or national level will have an accelerating and more positive impact.
- The current capacities of Croatian local port authorities are significantly limited, hindering effective surveillance in the maritime domain. Enhancing these capacities will need to be a future priority to ensure more efficient protection of marine environments.
- Experience gained from these actions shows that one of the possibly most effective strategies to improve protection on the field is local awareness-raising campaigns, implemented through networking and cooperation of responsible institutions. This has proven to be extremely important as a precautionary measure to reduce the negative impact of human activities.
- These types of actions are well received in media as they represent a concrete action on the field. Involving media before an action or inviting some media representative to join can also be a good way to further raise awareness of the public on these issues.
- Proactive and preventive public awareness campaigns and activities should always follow joined actions to engage local communities and tourists, highlighting the importance of environmental protection and the measures being implemented.



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- The use of advanced technology during joined actions, especially drones, proved to be very effective in covering larger areas and quickly identifying high-risk zones.
- Strengthening collaboration and coordination of local authorities, operators, and stakeholders when using advanced technology through regular meetings and clear operational protocols is important to avoid interferences and maximise operational efficiency.
- To increase the efficiency of surveillance and enforcement actions, it is important to continue enhancing operational capacities and investing in local authorities' training and equipment. Advocacy toward regional and national institutions for greater support is important to ensure adequate resources and greater relevance for protection activities.
- Integrated structured evaluation tools would be useful to measure the effectiveness and impact of activities. This could then assist in identifying best practices that can be replicated in other areas.



## 7. CONCLUSION

The EFFICIENTN2K project's overall objective is to increase collaboration within institutions involved in surveillance and enforcement to improve governance of the coastal and marine Natura 2000 network. During the implementation period, partners work intensively on improving collaboration among competent authorities and building their capacities. Organised joint workshops, capacity-building training, and demonstrative collaborative surveillance actions in Natura 2000 sites showcased in practice how collaboration can contribute to surveillance and enforcement efficiency. Although financial and human resources are scarce, and improvement of the legal framework in both countries is needed, the project proved that strengthening cooperation between competent authorities is crucial for effectively addressing environmental problems and can help overcome institutional and legal weaknesses. Project recommendations will be used to develop new project ideas and as a baseline document to understand better what to focus future advocacy actions on, related to increasing the efficiency of the marine and coastal Natura 2000 network. With its focus on innovation, collaboration, and local community involvement, the EFFICIENTN2K project has laid a solid foundation for future efforts toward more effective management of coastal and marine protected areas, setting a benchmark for new cross-border initiatives.

