

Ocean literacy as a driver of behavioural change and coastal sustainability

How A-AAGORA demonstrates that ocean literacy enables long-term stewardship, pollution reduction, and nature-positive coastal transitions



A-AAGORA is positioned within the EU Mission “**Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030**” as a lighthouse initiative demonstrating how citizen engagement and participatory approaches can strengthen coastal sustainability and environmental stewardship. This policy brief responds to the need for actionable guidance by translating A-AAGORA’s ocean literacy approach into targeted recommendations, supporting the integration of behavioural change, community engagement, and knowledge co-creation into policy and practice across coastal systems.

Key messages

- **Ocean-related challenges are fundamentally behavioural.** Marine litter, biodiversity loss, and degradation of coastal ecosystems are largely driven by everyday human decisions, yet policies often focus on technical or regulatory responses alone.
- **Ocean literacy provides a missing enabling condition.** By strengthening understanding of how the ocean affects people—and how human actions affect the ocean—ocean literacy transforms awareness into responsibility and action. Education, creativity, and citizen participation are essential to achieve lasting behavioural change.
- **A-AAGORA validates ocean literacy as a scalable solution.** Through Living Labs, A-AAGORA demonstrates how hands-on education, citizen science and art-based engagement empower communities to reduce marine litter, support restoration, and adopt more sustainable practices.
- **Integrated approaches achieve durable outcomes.** Ocean literacy, when embedded into local initiatives and governance processes, builds social ownership, strengthens communities of practice, and supports the long-term success of biodiversity, climate, and pollution-reduction policies.

Introduction

European and international policies increasingly recognise that environmental challenges cannot be addressed through regulation and infrastructure alone. Behavioural change, social ownership, and public engagement are necessary conditions for achieving cleaner seas, restored ecosystems, and climate resilience.

Ocean literacy—defined as understanding the ocean’s influence on society and society’s influence on the ocean—plays a critical role in enabling such change. However, ocean literacy initiatives are often fragmented, limited to awareness campaigns, or disconnected from local realities and policy processes.

The A-AAGORA project addresses this gap by validating **ocean literacy as a solution-oriented, participatory, and place-based approach**. By combining education, citizen science and creative engagement, A-AAGORA demonstrates how ocean literacy can be embedded in everyday practices and local governance, leading to measurable behavioural change and long-term coastal stewardship.



Relevance to legislation and relevant strategic documents

This Policy Brief supports the implementation of:

- **EU Zero Pollution Action Plan**, by addressing marine litter through prevention, awareness, and responsible behaviour.
- **EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”**, by strengthening citizen engagement, ocean literacy, and social ownership of restoration efforts.
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water)**, by enabling inclusive, participatory approaches to marine conservation.
- **Norwegian Integrated Ocean Management Plans**, by supporting ecosystem-based management, knowledge-based decision-making, and stakeholder engagement in marine governance.
- **Ireland’s National Marine Planning Framework**, by promoting integrated, participatory governance and sustainable use of marine and coastal areas.
- **Portuguese National Plan for Marine Litter**, by supporting education, prevention, and community-driven solutions.
- **Portuguese National Strategy for Environmental Education 2020–2030**, by operationalising experiential, action-oriented learning.

Ocean literacy acts as a cross-cutting enabler that increases the effectiveness, legitimacy, and durability of environmental policies at local, national, and European levels.

Recommendations

Embed ocean literacy into policy implementation, not only outreach Public authorities should treat ocean literacy as an enabling infrastructure for environmental policy, integrating it into marine litter strategies, restoration plans, and climate adaptation initiatives.

Support hands-on, place-based learning Education should move beyond classroom awareness. Participatory restoration, coastal fieldwork, and citizen science connect abstract challenges to lived experience, reinforcing responsibility and care.

Institutionalise partnerships for delivery Effective ocean literacy depends on collaboration between schools, municipalities, NGOs, researchers, and cultural actors. Authorities should support and fund these partnerships as communities of practice.

Invest in creative and digital engagement tools Art-based approaches, storytelling, and digital games enhance emotional connection, accessibility, and inclusiveness, particularly for young people.

Monitor behavioural outcomes, not only participation Evaluation frameworks should move beyond counting participants to assessing changes in awareness, attitudes, and behaviours over time.

Examples from Norway and from Portugal



Pupils at Hansnes School (Norway) have designed and built an underwater garden of kelp. These were presented to parents spreading the word of the importance of kelp forests in the community.



Pupils at multiple schools in Aveiro (Portugal) created art with marine litter and presented it to parents at school, while also engaging with digital games, raising awareness of coastal pollution and encouraging more sustainable behaviours within the local community.

References

- A-AAGORA (2026). *Blueprint: Ocean Literacy in Coastal Communities*
 A-AAGORA (2025). *Deliverables on Living Labs and societal engagement*
[EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”](#)
[EU Zero Pollution Action Plan](#)
[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – SDG 14](#)
[Norwegian Integrated Ocean Management Plans](#)
[Ireland’s National Marine Planning Framework](#)
[Portuguese National Plan for Marine Litter](#)

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