



WESTMED 2023

STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE

Boosting the Sustainable Blue Economy

22 June | Malta

SUMMARY NOTE

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All presentation-videos (and PPT slides) are available through the [Conference 2023 page](#) on the WestMED website

Photo credit: Govt. Malta



CONCEPT AND OBJECTIVES

After the successful [2021 WestMED Stakeholder Conference](#) in Rome and the [2022 Hackathons on project development](#) in Malta, the 2023 edition of the WestMED Stakeholder Conference took place in Malta on 22 June 2023.

The objective of this event was to provide a forum for stakeholders of the WestMED sea basin strategy to meet, exchange good practices, share information and identify funding and projects opportunities. The aim was to inspire stakeholders and encourage them to share experiences to succeed with their project ideas.

The event was fully in-person with more than 110 stakeholders from around the region who support the sustainable blue economy in the Western Mediterranean.

This Stakeholder Conference was followed by a [WestMED Ministerial Conference](#). A new Ministerial Declaration was signed to express a re-commitment to the Initiative and streamline the priorities for action.

Conference structure

The stakeholder Conference was structured in four key blocks:

- [Setting the scene](#): the political/institutional framework for the development of a sustainable blue economy in the WestMED.
- [Project inspiration](#): building on the success of WestMED's outcomes. After an overview of existing projects aligned with the WestMED's priorities, successful projects were presented related to 2 key areas: blue skills & ocean literacy, and sustainable & coastal tourism.
- [Thematic workshops](#) (parallel sessions) with group discussions on the main areas that the WestMED Assistance Mechanism actively facilitates: Sustainable Aquaculture, Green Shipping, Maritime Clusters and MSP. Discussions focused on status, challenges and road ahead.
- [Awards 2023 Ceremony](#).

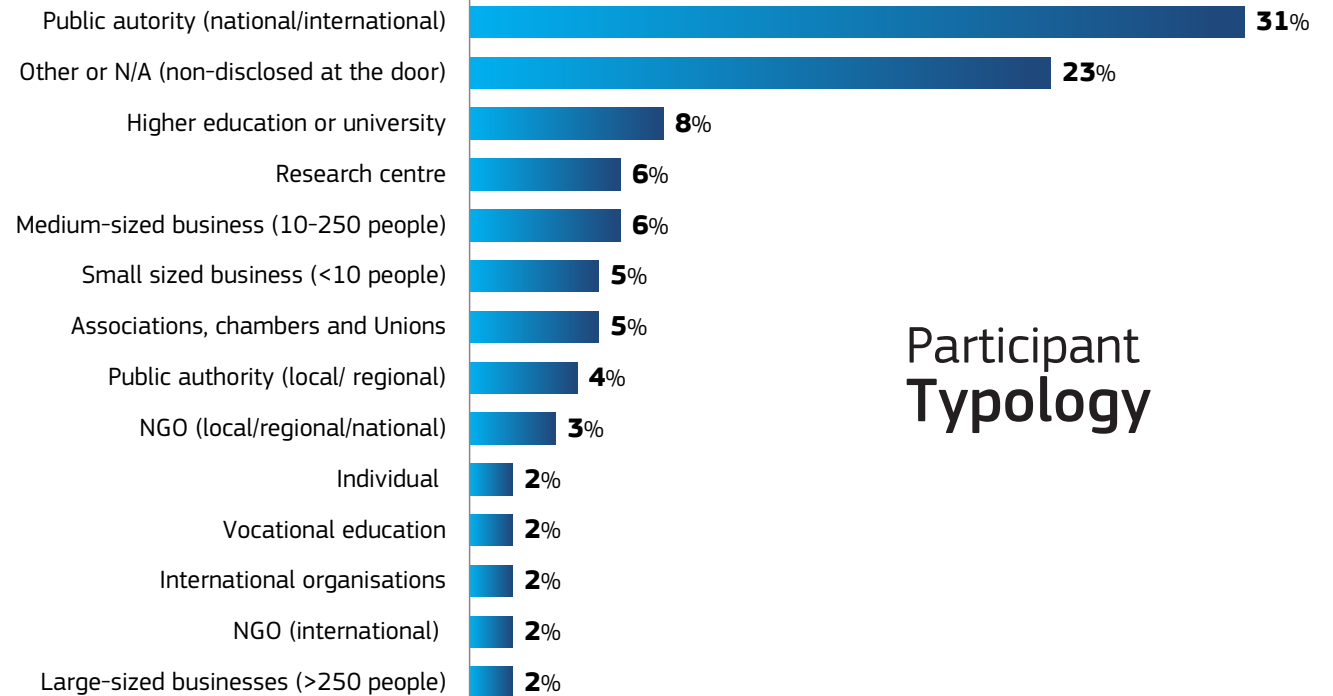
PARTICIPANTS

In-person
participants

117

Represented
Countries

13



Setting the scene

Welcome and Opening Remarks



Photo credit: Govt. Malta



AARON FARRUGIA

Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and
Capital Projects of Malta
(WestMED co-presidency)



MOHAMED MAAYIF

Minister of Fishery and Maritime Economy of
Islamic Republic of Mauritania
(WestMED co-presidency)



CHARLINA VITCHEVA

Director-General
European Commission Directorate-General
for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

“

The success of the WestMED Initiative since its inception in 2017 is first of all the concept of collaboration, the sharing of information, expertise, best practices and above all congeniality between all member states.

And second is the level of engagement by all levels of society with all stakeholders involved.”

“

We now have a maritime cluster which aims to be the body for consultation and dialogue at the national level and which ensures multi-sectorality in order to be able to develop and agree on a national strategy for the blue economy.”

“

I would like to commend the progress made - especially the Maritime Spatial Planning Community of Practice. When we are talking about the blue economy and scaling up the many activities that we can do at sea, the most important enabling factor is actually Maritime Spatial Planning. So this is extremely timely that we have this community vibrant on the West Mediterranean side.”



ADRIANA SALAZAR

Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)



KATYA DE GIOVANNI

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)



MARTA PASCUAL

Spanish WestMED and Atlantic National Hub

Since 2015, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has supported the WestMED Initiative inviting the participating countries to explore the added value and feasibility of appropriate maritime strategies at sub-regional level, and build on the experience of the 5+5 Dialogue.

The 2023 WestMED Declaration is fully in line with the [2nd UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy](#) adopted on 2 February 2021 and its related Roadmap for implementation.

The [UfM Blue Economy Roadmap](#) is a landmark document in the region. It provides an overview and analysis of the joint needs, gaps and opportunities for future support, funding, and implementation by the different thematic priorities.

It allows potential avenues for future cooperation (promising pathways, processes and actions) that can be launched and scaled-up in the short, medium, and longer term.

The [Blue Mediterranean Partnership](#), announced at COP27, will establish a platform to coordinate and leverage financial resources from implementing organisations and donor partners, to enable sustainable blue economy investments, especially in non-EU Mediterranean countries.

Since 2017, the WestMED Initiative has proved to be a useful inter-governmental platform for promoting sustainable blue economy sectors across the Western Mediterranean with its bottom-up approach. Their events have gathered hundreds of participants from the region.

Through a balanced top-down and bottom-up project development approach, the WestMED Assistance Mechanism has provided consistent technical support to numerous organisations, supporting more than 100 projects ideas during the last 5 years.

Some of these projects have received grants and can be found in the [Maritime DataHub](#), the inventory of relevant blue economy projects. Aquaculture, coastal tourism, entrepreneurship, marine aquaculture and MSP are some of the key topics funded by EC calls and promoted by the WestMED Initiative.



Blue economy implementation policies face a million challenges from lack of robust marine policies and weak ocean governments to unregulated fishing and ocean pollution, mass tourism and uncontrolled coastal development. In this regard, parliamentary regional cooperation and dialogue can significantly contribute by fostering the implementation of coherent and innovative legislative frameworks.”

Katya de Giovanni | PAM

Building on the success of WestMED's outcomes so far

Inspiring Projects

OCEAN LITERACY AND BLUE SKILLS





ALAN DEIDUN

Blue Schools Med
University of Malta



MARK MILFSUD

Blue Schools Med
University of Malta



ROBERTA LUPIS

e-fishMed
EFCA



MARIA GARCIES

Dialogue4Innovation
CPMR



FEDERICO FERREIRA

Portuguese WestMED
and Atlantic National Hub

Blue skills is a common and cross-cutting topic for collaboration among the stakeholders in the region. There is a need for up- and reskilling the workforce to meet the demands of new jobs and technologies, facilitating the process of mutual recognition of qualifications to increase cross-border mobility of workers in blue economy sectors, as well as ensuring the promotion of maritime professions.

Ocean Literacy can be defined as the understanding of the ocean's influence on us, and of our influence on the ocean. Ocean literacy is a way, not only to increase the awareness of the public about the ocean, but also as an approach to encourage all citizens and stakeholders to have a more responsible and informed behaviour towards the ocean and its resources.

The WestMED Initiative promotes strengthening the involvement of the public, and in particular young people, in favour of the Mediterranean through education, knowledge development and awareness-raising actions on the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of resources.

Three ongoing projects were presented as successful cases of creating ocean literacy amongst younger generations and policy-makers.

- [Blue Schools Med](#) (funded by Erasmus+) with a twofold aim: learning about the sea and producing citizens that take care of the sea

- [e-FishMed](#) (funded by EMFAF): Fostering cooperation, best practices and training regarding fishery control and inspection between the north and the south of the Mediterranean
- [Dialogue4Innovation](#): Strengthening Mediterranean policy makers capacity for innovative transformative policies that are always linked to a societal goal

Next to this, synergies between the neighbouring Atlantic and WestMED sea basins were highlighted to indicate that a stronger cooperation and knowledge exchange between the two, benefits ocean literacy and blue skills efforts as a whole and that with the current joint EU seabasin approach, connecting the dots has become a focus of attention.



E-FishMed is an example of how to promote cooperation, best practices and training in fishery control and inspection between the different associated countries. It is a catalyst for cooperation on sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean and the eastern Atlantic. Cooperation and trust are the different faces of the same medal and explain the success of this project”

Roberta Lupis | European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA)

Building on the success of WestMED's outcomes so far

Inspiring Projects

COASTAL AND MARITIME TOURISM





LESLIE VELLA

Malta tourism Authority



CLAUDIA IGLESIAS

EU WeMED_NaTOUR
X23



VIVIANA RIZZUTO

REBOOT MED
Prism



MARIKA MAZZI BOÉM

ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR
X23



ADOLFO BORRERO

Sun & Blue Congress

Coastal and maritime tourism is one of the major economic sectors for the Mediterranean countries. For example, Malta receives 2.75 million tourists annually. However, this sector has significant impacts on the environment and local population, such as over-population during high seasons, scarcity of natural resources, pollution and dumping sources, etc. The WestMED Initiative encourages the countries to promote policy coordination and stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the resilience of this sector in the Mediterranean. It also promotes eco-tourism and the decarbonisation of the sector through digitalization and green maritime transport.

The progress of cooperation on sustainable coastal tourism as a shared priority sectors and a cross-cutting matter has resulted in flagship projects co-funded by the EMFAF and supported by the WestMED Initiative:

- [EU WeMED NaTOUR](#) : Travelling Aware of our Footprint.
- [REBOOT MED](#) : Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting eco-tourism in the WestMed area - with a focus on school children.
- [ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR](#) : Sustainability on the Wave project with a focus on the cruise industry.

An example of alternative tourism options in Almería (Spain) was presented on behalf of the [Sun&Blue Congress](#), where strategies are being implemented by the local government to promote active wellness tourism and awareness activities.

This strategy includes awareness action, scientific dissemination and a transformation of the digital marketing to reach the blue tourists.



Benefits will go two ways: children will have the opportunity to learn, by visiting beautiful landscapes and to contribute preserving the fragile and unique ecosystems. And local tourism SMEs will be actively involved at the destinations, as they are crucial players to the new value chain that we want to create.”

Viviana Rizzuto | REBOOT MED

WestMED supported **THEMATIC WORKSHOPS**



MARITIME CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

Workshop objectives

Maritime clusters are the backbone of support for uptake of knowledge and innovation for local blue economy businesses and other relevant players in innovation ecosystems.

- The objective of the session was to present the state-of-play in clusters' support by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism ([Maritime Clusters Alliance](#)), discuss future opportunities and challenges to be addressed through WestMED support and illustrate relevant sources of financing.

Key outcomes

The support provided by the WestMED Initiative and the Assistance Mechanism on Maritime Clusters was discussed. This included:

- Objectives and actions of the WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliance and the support by the Assistance Mechanism in terms of capacity building, cooperation, direct engagement with investors/SMEs, etc.
- An overview of exemplificatory ongoing projects including MedBAN (COSME), MarMED (ERASMUS+) and other supported projects pending approval, such as CallMeBlue (EMFAF).
- An overview on how the Alliance can further support regional practitioners, investors and SMEs, including involvement of new partners, such as Malta Marittima.
- The essential growing role of maritime clusters in their support to ocean literacy, which includes:
 - Strengthening the sector's attractiveness and capability of young maritime professionals.
 - Engaging with young generations by expanding on success cases as the UN Ocean Conference.



Summary of the workshop outcomes

Next steps

- Support project definitions by building on the above-mentioned opportunities and involve key partners.
- Share good practices across different countries and sectors for cluster success.
- Support cluster work on ocean literacy, including skills development and training for the Blue Economy.
- Strengthen synergies with the Atlantic and Black Sea for cluster cooperation.
- Continue engaging with existing and new projects for maritime clusters to actively support SME in innovation development and engage with sustainable impact investors in the region.
- Promote the role of clusters to support and contribute to the policy exchanges related to national blue economy strategies and associated tools (MSP, etc.).



AQUAWEST | SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE

Summary of the workshop outcomes

Workshop objectives

The main objective of this session was on [WestMED's Technical Group AquaWest:](#)

- Present the current status of AquaWest and discuss next steps.
- Identify existing funding opportunities to support the AquaWest mission.
- Several key topics were discussed:
 - Environmental sustainability in aquaculture.
 - Technological advancement and innovation in aquaculture.
 - Responsible/ ethical/ sustainable farming practices.
 - Economic potential of sustainable aquaculture.

Key outcomes

- The funding programme [COST](#) was presented. This call offers researchers and innovators the opportunity to work together on a wide range of topics including the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of the aquaculture sector.
- Innovative initiatives were shared. In particular, [Switchmed](#), an innovative project on Artificial Intelligence tool in aquaculture under implementation in Tunisia.
- The vast network of [NewTechAqua](#) was offered to be shared with AquaWest, as well as the lessons learnt in the framework of this EU project. It was agreed that both the Tunisian project and the NewTechAqua project should be capitalized on for the submission of a proposal under the COST programme.

- The [AquaBiotech Group](#) in Malta illustrated the potential of the infrastructure facilities available and the variety of the thematic research led by the AquaBiotech Group. He also expressed the possibilities to develop a project under AquaWest for the upcoming calls.

Next steps

The participants of the session agreed on the objectives of this Technical Group in the short/medium term:

- Strengthen regional cooperation.
- Disseminate information on relevant national programmes and/or initiative.
- Identify potential for technical transfer and disseminate innovative business models.
- Pool, and support the harmonization, of existing capacity building tools/ schemes with the aim to promote employability in the sector.
- Identify mechanisms of operational collaboration with the group focusing on MSP.



GREEN SHIPPING

▶ **Summary of the workshop outcomes**

▶ **Live excerpt from the discussions**

Workshop objectives

Advance towards the composition of new project partnerships among stakeholders and a stricter cooperation with REMPEC. It also included further defining the role of [WestMED's Green Shipping Technical Group](#) to support:

- Re-structuring a Mediterranean shipbuilding industry supply chain.
- Identifying steps towards a WestMED Alliance of Energy Communities in Ports, and
- Facilitating clusters of Maritime Transport operators along the main Mediterranean routes, to tackle the main sustainability challenge through the focus on the concept of 'Connectivity.' (see also key-outcome nr. 2).

Key outcomes

- The possibility of implementing further cooperation with REMPEC was discussed, particularly since their objectives are in line with the WestMED's priorities, presenting an occasion to enhance synergies.
- The POWER4MED project proposal submitted under the latest EMFAF was presented as an example of a successful technical assistance from the WestMED Initiative. POWER4MED focuses on the refitting solutions for vessels in the fishery sector, in the yachting and in the shipping fields.
- Four key priorities were identified as very important for the transport sector:
 1. Focus on a versatile system of alternative fuels (for port-infrastructures and fleets).

2. Develop the concept of connectivity, including the development of coherent networks of technological solutions, environmental and sustainable services, energy communities, along the TEN-T corridors extended to third southern and eastern non-EU countries, as well as along the Suez-Gibraltar route.
3. Work to re-organize and complete the European and Mediterranean supply chain in shipbuilding, with specific focus on naval engines and propulsion systems, based on the different technological solutions.
4. The sustainability of the transport sector depends on the synergies that are developed within the different structures of the sector, the effective coordination amongst partners, as well as the availability of funding which is to be extended to Southern countries.

Next steps

- The Technical Group on Green Shipping will further engage with stakeholders, match the expressed priorities with the incoming calls, assist in the creation of partnerships and provide assistance until the submission of project proposals.
- Further steps towards cooperation and enhancing synergies with REMPEC will be undertaken, in order to make the system more operative.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING - 1

▶ Summary of the workshop outcomes

▶ Live excerpt from the discussions

Workshop objectives

The session capitalized on the recent work done by the [MED-MSP-CoP](#) on the screening of MSP-related projects and initiatives and on the identification of topics and sub-topics of common interest.

The plenary session discussed key priorities for MSP in the region, offered the opportunity to showcase examples of key projects and discussed how these and other initiatives are tackling the needs of the two main topics of interest for the 1st-year activity of the Community of Practice:

1. MSP as key enabler for implementing the national Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) strategies and initiatives.
2. MSP supporting the extension, improved management and improved connection of Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area based Conservation Measures.

The discussion highlighted that on-going and past MSP projects and initiatives provide lot of knowledge and tools to be capitalized. As a concrete next action of the MED-MSP-CoP, it was agreed to organise a series of Webinars to present examples of project's outcome and discuss the way they respond to common needs and challenges.

After the plenary session, the participants were split into two groups, to deepen the discussion on two specific subtopics:

1. MSP as a strategic framework for Sustainable Blue Economy.
2. Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management.

Key outcomes - topic 1

MSP as a strategic framework for Sustainable Blue Economy

- Most sectoral strategies are developed and implemented independently. Beyond the spatial approach, MSP can establish a framework to align sectors' perspectives at a strategic level. To do so, approaches considering pre-existing strategies should be developed, as well as methods to incorporate new uses' perspectives.
- Direct integration of SBE objectives into MSP should be a key component of any maritime spatial plan, which can have different level of regulations of SBE sectors (from strategic to prescriptive).
- Investigate the concept of Climate-Smart MSP plans that can be fed with individual sectoral strategies. Or, alternatively, Climate-Smart MSP plans that include sustainable strategies for sectors that do not have a strategy of their own.
- Current experiences are quite diverse, also depending on the local context: some countries have SBE Strategies but no MSP Plans, some countries have MSP Plans but no SBE Strategies, others have ongoing processes, more or less coordinated, on both instruments.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING - 2

Key outcomes - topic 2

Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management

- It is important to engage historical and emerging maritime sectors in the progress toward environmental conservation objectives. MSP can establish a framework and a process to foster this involvement.
- Beyond MPA designation and management, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) are considered important instruments to further engage maritime sectors in conservation matters.
- The identification of ways to properly engage economic stakeholders in conservation is a key point, including modalities related to awareness raising or financial aspects. For example, MSP could facilitate fund raising for marine conservation from economic sectors (through voluntary engagement or taxes).
- Different sector-based regulations that spatially overlap can strengthen protection, but also lead to a lack of clarity, implementation difficulties or even counterproductive effects. MSP can rationalize integration of these multiple regulations and create a comprehensive picture of these different instruments at the plan's scale.



WestMED

BEST PROJECT AWARDS 2023



FIVE WINNERS

This year's Conference included the 2nd edition of the WestMED Project Awards, with the objective to identify, showcase and honour exceptional projects in different areas that provide innovative and replicable solutions embodying the WestMED initiative's vision for the Western Mediterranean.

Sixty-one highly interesting and valuable projects from both shores (North and South) entered the competition.

There were four categories:

1. Biodiversity, marine habitat conservation and response to marine pollution
(Winner: [Bleu Adapt](#) and [Marine Hound](#))
2. Sustainable consumption and production
(winner: [GALATEA](#))
3. Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and coastal community development
(Winner: [NewTechAqua](#))
4. Skill development and circulation
(Winner: [We are blue schools](#))

An independent jury assessed the applications and selected five winners. This selection was formally endorsed by the WestMED Steering Committee.

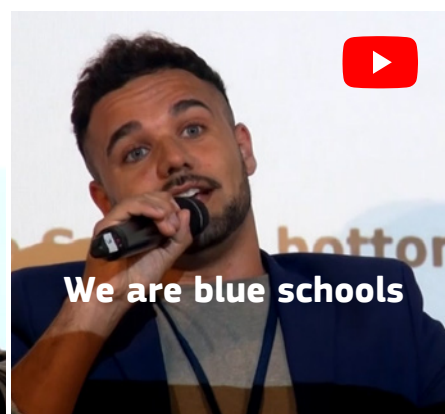
This year there were two projects that received an equal amount of winning points in the category Biodiversity, Marine habitat conservation and response to marine pollution. Consequently, the jury decided to announce two winners in this category.

After the winners were announced, the Master of Ceremonies gave the floor to the Category winners, to pitch their project to the audience.

The five project winners promoted the key selling points of their project in 5 minutes.

Once these presentations were delivered, the audience voted for the 'Best of the best' WestMED project of the year 2023.

'We are blue schools' was chosen as ultimate winner by the majority of the conference participants.



WestMED Conference 2023

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A banner for the WestMED 2023 Stakeholder Conference. The background is a dark blue sky with a cityscape on the right, including a prominent church spire. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font.

WESTMED 2023
STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE

Boosting the Sustainable Blue Economy



LUCIENNE MEILAK

Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure
and Capital Projects, Malta



DELILAH AL KHUDHAIRY

European Commission Directorate
General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

“

There is a changing and challenging context that we are living in, such as climate change and biodiversity, and the technology and innovation that you, yourselves are at the forefront of and as we have seen with the award winners. There is a richness here of innovation and research being made.

The time now is right, for political renewal to give fresh impetus to recognise the challenges that we have ahead of us, and tomorrow we will just do that, when our Ministers meet and will be giving us this new commitment at state level. I thank you very much for your participation.”

“

The WestMED Initiative is an excellent example of cooperation, of engagement at all levels and it is contributing effectively towards accomplishing the goals and the objectives for a sustainable economy in Europe.

The conference may be over, but we have the enthusiasm of the project winners to take things forward and also yourselves with ideas coming out of today.”

WestMED MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE



RENEWED MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Conference promo | Minister Aaron Farrugia (Malta)

After the Stakeholder conference, on June 2023, a WestMED Ministerial Conference was organised. Representatives from the 10 participating countries, the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean met in Malta to reassess and update the priorities, as were stated in the WestMed Framework for Action (2017) and supported by the WestMED Initiative.

It means a joint commitment across borders to further develop a sustainable, resilient, decarbonized and circular blue economy, address climate change, adapt to its effects and halt i.e. reverse marine biodiversity loss.

Under the [Framework for Action](#) the priorities were streamlined to focus on:

- Sustainable production and consumption, and in particular, through the support of the transition of Maritime Transport, Green shipping, and Ports towards carbon-neutrality and zero emission and ports as hubs for energy; Innovative and restorative aquaculture and fisheries and Coastal and maritime eco-tourism.
- Maritime Clusters.
- Blue skills and jobs.
- Ocean literacy and youth.
- Promoting Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP).

Opening statements

- Decarbonisation of the blue economy and, importantly, boosting the Marine Renewable Energy sectors.
- Stepping up the efforts to tackle air and marine pollution.
- Increasing ambition for preserving marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean.
- Promoting training and technology transfer.
- Developing coastal resilience solutions and early warning systems.
- Maritime security and surveillance as a pre-condition for a prosperous and sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean.



Ministerial declaration

[EN](#) | [FR](#)



Photo credit: Govt. Malta



WESTMED 2023

STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE



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The WestMED Stakeholder Conference 2023 was organised by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism (Ecorys led consortium), together with the Maltese Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects, CINEA and DG MARE.
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