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Widespread monitoring pilot action

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WP 1
OUTPUT 1.2

Widespread monitoring pilot action

Work Package	WP 1 – Joint development of the transnational strategy for the monitoring sentinel species
O 1.2	Widespread monitoring pilot action
Output description	This output contains the experience developed by partners and local stakeholders in grounding the cooperation model and monitoring guidelines in local hotspots. It is intended to serve as a sharing of best practices that can be an inspiration for other local contexts. This output will be shared and explained to at least 100 public authorities (with emphasis on coastal municipalities), and 100 private organizations involved in monitoring and conservation.
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Introduction

The widespread monitoring Pilot Action was developed under Activity 1.3 of the SAMESEA project, to test and validate the Transnational Cooperation and Monitoring Model (Deliverable 1.2.2) and Transnational Monitoring Guidelines (Output 1.1) developed under Activity 1.2.

Through field testing in four selected hotspots (Piran Bay, Slovenia; Island of Vrgada, Croatia; Boka Kotorska, Montenegro; Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park, Albania), local partners and their stakeholders applied the proposed coordination model and monitoring guidelines, and provided feedback on their practical implementation, strengths and limitations. This process contributed to the revision and consolidation of the monitoring strategy, resulting in a jointly validated framework adaptable to the different operational contexts of the participating countries.

This document presents the experience and best practices developed during the implementation of the widespread monitoring Pilot Action and aims to provide a useful reference for replication in other local contexts. It is addressed to coastal municipalities, public authorities, organisations and other public or private entities that can contribute to the monitoring of project target species (the common bottlenose dolphin, the loggerhead sea turtle and the Mediterranean monk seal) and their interactions with anthropogenic activities.

Preparatory Framework for the Widespread Monitoring Pilot Action

01

FROM STRATEGY TO PRACTICE

The Pilot Action was guided by the key principles of the monitoring strategy:

- Harmonised monitoring methods and data comparability;
- Cooperation among stakeholders;
- Centralised data collection and management;
- Data accessibility and long-term continuity.

02

THE SPECIES

The monitoring framework focused on the three sentinel species selected by the SAMESEA project: the **common bottlenose dolphin** (*Tursiops truncatus*), the **loggerhead sea turtle** (*Caretta caretta*), and the **Mediterranean monk seal** (*Monachus monachus*). These were selected as target species due to their ecological relevance and their high potential for interactions with coastal anthropogenic activities.

03

MONITORING CATEGORIES

The Pilot Action focused on **three main monitoring categories**, with particular attention to identifying and documenting interactions with anthropogenic activities:

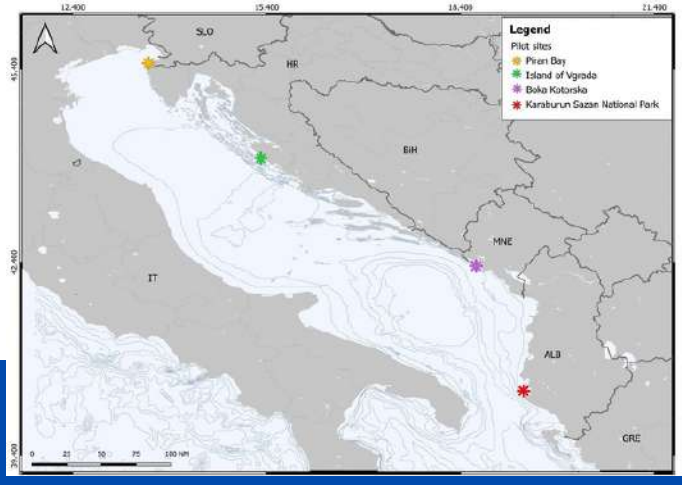
1. **Live and dead strandings;**
2. **Occurrence of free-ranging sentinel species;**
3. **Sea turtle nesting sites.**

04

TRANSNATIONAL COORDINATION AND MONITORING MODEL

The Transnational Cooperation and Monitoring Model (Deliverable 1.2.2) provided the methodological and coordination framework to activate the local monitoring networks. Existing knowledge and previous projects informed the development of common monitoring guidelines and protocols (Transnational Monitoring Guidelines, Output 1.1), based on a tiered approach that allows their application according to different levels of expertise and available resources.

Preparatory Framework for the Widespread Monitoring Pilot Action



05

SELECTION OF PILOT ACTION AREAS

Pilot Action areas were selected based on their relevance as hotspots of interaction between sentinel species and anthropogenic activities, considering existing knowledge and monitoring data, as reported in Table 1. The Pilot Action was subsequently implemented across four hotspots, representing different ecological and socio-economic contexts.

TABLE 1. HOTSPOTS SELECTED AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Hotspot	Species presence	Anthropic pressure
Piran Bay, Slovenia	*Tursiops truncatus* *Caretta caretta*	This site contains an aquaculture facility and important dolphin feeding ground, which attracts bottlenose dolphins, as well as numerous leisure boats. Situated at a river estuary, it features different ecological conditions than in open sea habitats.
Island of Vrgada, Croatia	*Tursiops truncatus* *Caretta caretta*	This site is known to feature multiple interactions among sentinel species, aquaculture farms and their operators, and leisure boats, which leads to several negative interactions.
Boka Kotorska, Montenegro	*Tursiops truncatus* *Caretta caretta* *Monachus monachus*	This area is recognized as an important foraging and nursing ground for the common bottlenose dolphin, and other priority species and habitats. It is affected by cumulative human pressures (i.e tourism, habitat destruction, marine debris and traffic).
Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park, Albania	*Tursiops truncatus* *Caretta caretta (nesting)* *Monachus monachus*	It is the first MPA in Albania in which impacts on natural resources are already documented. It is characterized by both the presence of priority habitats and species under HD and several socio- economic activities (e.g. tourism, artisanal fisheries, aquaculture).

Pilot Action Experience and Best Practices

This section outlines the main steps followed for the implementation of the Pilot Action and highlights the best practices developed and tested throughout the process. These experiences provide the basis for assessing the transferability and potential replication of the approach in other local contexts.

Local Context Assessment and Selection of Monitoring Tiers

Based on the characteristics of each hotspot, including the sentinel species and anthropogenic pressures present, as well as the available technical expertise and human and financial resources, each area identified the most appropriate monitoring categories and tiers to be implemented.
The timing of the monitoring activities was also defined according to local conditions and the seasonal occurrence of the target species and activities. Overall, the main implementation period was the spring–summer season.

Stakeholder Engagement and Local Monitoring Networks

Local stakeholders were identified based on the expertise and resources available in each area and involved in the implementation of the monitoring activities. Particular attention was given to the establishment or strengthening of local monitoring networks, bringing together public authorities, research, monitoring and conservation organizations and other relevant stakeholders. These networks supported the application of standardised monitoring protocols and facilitated communication and data exchange between local actors, institutions and decision-makers.

Capacity Building and Training

A dedicated modular task force was established to provide targeted training on the monitoring protocols, tools and data collection procedures. The task force included representatives of the scientific and operational organisations involved in the project and travelled to the selected hotspots to deliver targeted capacity building sessions.
The training combined theoretical and practical activities, enabling local stakeholders to familiarise themselves with the monitoring model and apply the shared protocols consistently.

Testing and Adaptation of Monitoring Protocols

The monitoring protocols were tested in the selected hotspots in cooperation with local stakeholders. Their implementation was adapted, where necessary, to the specific ecological, technical and operational conditions of each area, while maintaining the common methodological framework and the principles of the tiered approach.

Citizen Science and Fishermen Engagement

The general public was involved through citizen science activities, including the reporting of species sightings, stranded animals and sea turtle nests.
Specific materials and reporting tools were developed for fishermen, who represent an important source of information due to their regular presence at sea and their ability to report sightings, accidental captures and other interactions with sentinel species.

Data Collection and Centralisation

Data collected by local stakeholders during the testing phase were submitted to the partners responsible for the Pilot Action, which subsequently transmitted the information to the central project level through the Lead Partner. This approach supported the harmonisation and centralisation of data collected across the different hotspots.

Feedback and Review

Following the testing phase, local partners and stakeholders jointly reviewed the data collected, the implementation process and any issues encountered. The feedback gathered through the Pilot Action contributed to the review and refinement of the coordination and monitoring model, supporting its finalisation and transferability to other contexts. The results of this review are presented in Deliverable 1.3.1 Report on the Pilot Action with a Critical Review of the Model and a Model Update.

Transferability and Replication Toolkit

To replicate a similar monitoring network in another territory, stakeholders can contribute according to their specific roles, expertise and available resources. The following overview summarises the main potential contributions identified through the Pilot Action.

Stakeholder	Potential contribution to the monitoring network
Local authorities	Support institutional coordination and stakeholder engagement; integration of monitoring results into conservation and management measures; support communication with local communities and authorities; financial support for monitoring activities.
Marine Protected Areas	Implementation of field monitoring; coordinate monitoring within protected areas.
Monitoring and conservation organizations	Implementation of field monitoring, support citizen science, awareness-raising and engagement of local communities.
Higher education and research institutions	Provide scientific and technical expertise, data validation and methodological support and provide local knowledge.
Fishermen and fisheries/aquaculture organisations	Contribute observations from offshore areas, report sightings and accidental captures, and support monitoring of interactions with fishing activities.
General public	Contribute to data collection through citizen science and reporting of sightings, strandings and nesting events.

Replication Toolkit

The SAMESEA project has produced a set of Outputs and Deliverables that can be capitalised and used as practical resources for replicating the Pilot Action in other territorial contexts. Together, these resources provide the methodological, operational and training framework needed to support the implementation of monitoring activities and transnational cooperation.

Deliverable 1.2.2 – Transnational Cooperation and Monitoring Model
Provides the coordination framework for establishing local monitoring networks and connecting them through a wider transnational network.

Deliverable 1.3.1 - Report on the Pilot Action with a Critical Review of the Model and a Model Update
Provides the assessment of the Pilot Action, including key results, lessons learned, and recommendations to refine and update the monitoring model.

Output 1.1 – Transnational Monitoring Guidelines
Provides monitoring protocols, data collection templates, supporting materials and checklists, supporting the practical implementation of monitoring activitis.

Output 1.3 – Transnational Monitoring Strategy
Provides the strategic framework for promoting cooperation and harmonisation of monitoring practices at transnational, regional and local levels.

Deliverable 3.2.1 – Video Pills and Training Materials
Provides a series of online training materials supporting the practical implementation of the monitoring protocols and the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

The Pilot Action demonstrated the value of a flexible, tiered and transnational monitoring model, combining harmonised methodologies with adaptation to local contexts and available capacities. The experience gained highlights the model's strong transferability potential, supported by shared protocols, stakeholder networks, training materials and practical tools that can be adapted and replicated in other territories.

By strengthening cooperation, knowledge exchange and the harmonisation of monitoring practices across borders, the approach contributes to the ADRION objectives of enhancing cooperation, supporting sustainable management of natural resources, and strengthening the capacity of institutions and local stakeholders across the Adriatic-Ionian region.

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