SPECIAL ISSUE

INTERNAL NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026 - SPECIAL ISSUE
MILESTONE 8 - DEMO SITE VALIDATION

INTRO

This special edition features insights from all 12 Demonstration Site Validation Workshops completed in early 2026, highlighting the significant progress made across the project, and the strong efforts of partners and local stakeholders driving BLUE CONNECT forward. Click on the Demo Site name to explore the details.

Happy Reading!

HIGHLIGHT

D3.1, D3.2, D3.3 AND M6, M8 & M9 HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED SUCCESSFULLY. **CONGRATS TO ALL PARTNERS FOR THIS GREAT WORK!**

MILESTONE 8 MARKED A SIGNIFICANT STEP IN BLUE CONNECT COMMENCING THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PROJECT.

FIRST VALIDATION COMPLETED IN ALL DEMO SITES

In February 2026, The BLUE CONNECT project has successfully reached a major milestone with the completion of Milestones 8 and 9, marking a significant step forward in the development, validation, and regional grounding of the project's Blueprint framework and co-management schemes. Let's dive into the workshops!

MACARONESIA

DS Lead: University of Azores
25 Feburary 2026

For the Macaronesian Demo Site, co-management and ownership played a central part in the workshop. Lessons learned, experiences and regional insights from all four archipelagos helped to formulate real life challenges and shared opportunities. Discussions will be kept alive through several ongoing working groups.

CABO ROCHE

DS Lead: SOLDECOCOS
17 February 2026

In Cabo Roche, stakeholders advocated for an integrated, multilevel, ecosystem-based co-management framework, evidencing the usefulness of the draft tools presented by the team. Through a Steering Group and thematic subgroups, coordinated action will continue with the aim of co-drafting a management plan for the area by 2027.

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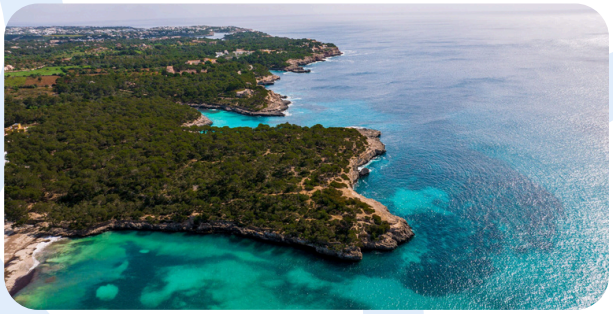

PITIUSAS ISLANDS

DS Lead: GEN-GOB
12 February 2026

Following a previous meeting held in December, stakeholders came together once more to review progress in the region. The team was able to validate and reinforce the co-management methodology for uptake through the Marine Stewardship Board, driving collaborative approaches in the site since 2021. Participants planned a knowledge-exchange workshop across initiatives in late April on marine governance to continue efforts of improving co-management and ownership in their region and beyond.

CETACEAN MIGRATION CORRIDOR

DS Lead: University of Málaga
September 2025

Last year, the team piloted a Scientific-Technical Group for the Cetacean Migration Corridor MPA, creating an open space for experts from different fields to exchange on ongoing research, monitoring effort in the region and possible future improvements. The team was able to foster cross-institutional cooperation by examining conservation priorities, pressures and species distribution in the area and started the process of grounding management in robust scientific evidence.

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L'ALBERA

DS Lead: SUBMON
18 February 2026

The L'Albera team organised two complementary workshops involving regional authorities and local communities to discuss connectivity and pressure analysis tools, in particular, which could facilitate an expansion of the MPA. While a specific focus included the integration of local knowledge, the co-management scheme was discussed as challenging.

ITALIAN NORTHERN ADRIATIC

DS Lead: WWF Italy
25 February 2026

The Northern Adriatic took a decisive step toward enhanced marine protection on 25 February 2026, when WWF Italy convened regional institutions, enforcement bodies, and marine experts for a workshop that set the tone for an ambitious year of monitoring and governance development.

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BURGAS BAY

DS Lead: BBF + CCMS
25 February 2026

28 stakeholders from diverse sectors came together and discussed the operational framework, especially focusing on the ecological prioritisation process and cumulative impact assessments for the area. For the uptake of the presented co-management methodology, participants highlighted the need for further dialogue and refinement.

CENTRAL ROMANIAN COAST

DS Lead: NIMRD
24 February 2026

The team focused primarily on discussions around advanced modeling tools such as Unmanned Surface Vehicles and cumulative effect mapping to identify ecological hotspots as well as priority risk zones for the area. By co-examining the prioritisation of phytobenthic species along the Romanian Black Sea, the team was able to incorporate local knowledge and strengthen the LSWG in its collaborative approach.

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RAET NATIONAL PARK

DS Lead: SALT + NIVA
24 February 2026

In Arendal, Norwegian stakeholders came together and discussed critical issues for implementing co-management in the area, highlighting the novelty of this approach on a regional level. Constraints in the legal framework for MPAs keep participants skeptical about its realistic uptake in Norway. By discussing concrete goals for the area, stakeholders evidenced the first uptake of the operational framework to improve MPA management.

VLAAMSE BANKEN MPA

DS Lead: Ghent University
9 February 2026

During this workshop, 28 stakeholders discussed key scientific questions regarding the co-management methodology, connectivity and ecosystem functioning tools as well as innovative monitoring techniques related to the site and the planned oyster restoration measures. Strong support was expressed for the collaborative governance and will be further explored in future interactions.

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SCOTTISH MPA NETWORK

DS Lead: Shetland University
13 February 2026

The Scottish team examined innovative monitoring techniques for marine mammals with stakeholders and further explored possibilities for co-management in the area. By creating a local Marine Mammal Working Group situated within the MPA governance structures, stakeholders provided concrete ideas on lasting collaborative co-management beyond the project lifespan.

SAIS-EBSA

DS Lead: WWF Mediterranean
25 February 2026

In the Mediterranean, stakeholders provided valuable feedback on the presented co-management methodology and the operational framework showing the need for a more transparent and clear integration of socio-economic factors. Stakeholders agreed to the creation of two dedicated Working Groups continuing efforts for increased collaboration, complemented by a selection of core team members for each group to drive progress.

Thank you for reading

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