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Best practices report

RESPONSIBLE PARTNER: SARONIS

Document History

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CONTETNS

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles are becoming increasingly important for businesses operating across the Blue Economy. Companies are being called upon to reduce their environmental footprint, strengthen their social responsibility, improve transparency and governance, and adapt their operations to the broader transition towards a more sustainable and resilient European economy. For Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), however, the practical implementation of ESG principles can often be challenging due to limited financial and human resources, insufficient technical expertise, and a lack of clear and accessible examples of how ESG can be integrated into everyday business activities.

In this context, the present report has been developed within the framework of the ESG LAB project. The report aims to identify and present relevant good practices demonstrating how ESG principles are already being applied within different areas of the Blue Economy.

The analysis focuses on examples from Greece, Cyprus and Portugal, reflecting a range of sectors including fisheries, aquaculture, coastal tourism, maritime transport and ports, renewable and marine energy, blue

biotechnology, marine ecosystem restoration, education and training, digitalisation, and innovation.

The identified practices illustrate different approaches to ESG implementation, ranging from waste reduction, circular economy solutions and renewable energy to sustainable aquaculture, marine ecosystem protection, skills development, digital transformation and cooperation between businesses, public authorities, research organisations and local communities.

By examining these examples across the three participating countries, the report also seeks to identify common trends, transferable approaches and key lessons that can support SMEs in understanding that ESG implementation does not necessarily require large-scale investment or complex organizational structures.

Information was collected primarily from official and reliable secondary sources, including:

- official websites of the organisations implementing the practices
- national and local public authority websites
- European Union institutions and programme portals
- research institutions and universities
- official project websites
- sustainability and activity reports

1.2. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The report is based on publicly available information identified during the desk research period. It therefore does not aim to provide an exhaustive inventory of all ESG-related initiatives taking place in Greece, Cyprus and Portugal.

The selected examples should instead be understood as a representative collection of relevant good practices that illustrate different approaches to ESG implementation in the Blue Economy.

Furthermore, the practices vary considerably in scale. Some relate to individual businesses or local initiatives, while others concern large

collaborative, national or European projects. The objective is therefore not to directly rank or compare their overall performance, but to identify useful approaches, methods and lessons that may contribute to ESG awareness and implementation among SMEs.

Where projects are still ongoing, the report distinguishes between achieved results and anticipated or expected benefits in order to avoid presenting projected impacts as completed outcomes.

2.OVERVIEW OF IDENTIFIED GOOD PRACTICIES

No.	Country	Sector	Good Practice	ESG Dimension
1	Greece	Coastal Tourism	Just Go Zero Tilos – Zero Waste Island	Environmental
2	Greece	Fisheries	HellasFish – Pathway to Sustainable Fisheries	Governance
3	Greece	Renewable Energy	Hybrid Renewable Energy System – Astypalaia	Environmental / Governance
4	Greece	Shipping & Ports	Green Port Practices – Port of Piraeus	Environmental / Social
5	Greece	Aquaculture	Circular Economy in Aquaculture – Central Greece	Environmental / Social
6	Cyprus	Coastal Tourism	Plastic-Free Beaches Initiative – Ayia Napa & Protaras	Environmental / Social
7	Cyprus	Fisheries & Aquaculture	Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme 2021–2027	Environmental / Governance
8	Cyprus	Renewable Marine Energy	HYDRO-RES – Floating Photovoltaics, Energy Storage & Offshore Renewables	Environmental
9	Cyprus	Maritime Transport & Ports	Green Port Initiative – Port of Limassol	Environmental / Governance
10	Cyprus	Education & Innovation	Blue Cove – Centre of Vocational Excellence for Blue Professions	Social / Governance
11	Portugal	Sustainable Aquaculture / Blue Food	Regenerative Bivalve Aquaculture – Oceano Fresco	Environmental / Governance

12	Portugal	Seaweed Aquaculture / Blue Biotechnology	Organic Seaweed Production – ALGAplus	Environmental / Governance
13	Portugal	Microalgae / Blue Biotechnology / Circular Economy	Microalgae for Circular Value Chains – Necton / AlgaCycle	Environmental / Social
14	Portugal	Aquaculture Innovation / Applied Research	Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation – S2AQUAcoLAB	Environmental / Governance
15	Portugal	Marine Conservation / Coastal Communities	Seagrass Meadow Restoration – Ocean Alive	Environmental / Social

3. GOOD PRACTICIES BY COYNTRY

A. GREECE

1. Practice Title: **Just Go Zero Tilos – Zero Waste Island**

Sector: Coastal Tourism
ESG Pilar: Environmental

What was done?

A comprehensive zero-waste system was introduced across Tilos, replacing landfills and public waste bins with source separation and door-to-door collection. Waste is weighed, tracked digitally through the Just Go Zero app, and then recycled, composted, reused, upcycled, or prepared for energy recovery at the Circular Innovation Centre. Residents, businesses, and visitors are also provided with equipment, information, and training on correct waste separation.

Who was involved?

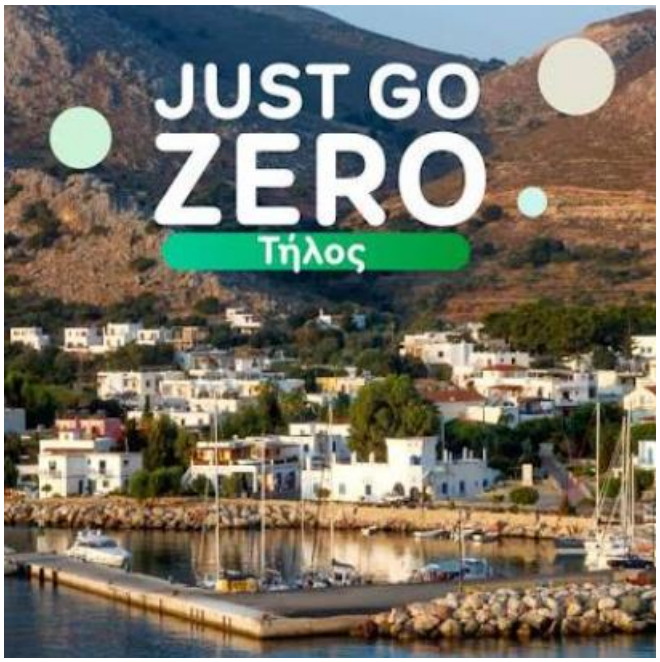
Polygreen and the Municipality of Tilos, together with local residents, businesses, and visitors, who actively participate in the island's zero-waste system.

Results/Benefits

The initiative transformed local waste-management infrastructure, strengthened the community's capacity for the green transition, and created more than 10 permanent or seasonal jobs. It also protects the natural environment, supports circular-economy objectives, provides a model that can be replicated by other communities, and strengthens Tilos' profile as an international sustainable-tourism destination.

Related website

Just Go Zero by Polygreen



2. Practice Title: **Sustainable Fishing Certification – Aegean Fisheries**

Sector: Fisheries

ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

Greek fisheries were mapped and assessed against the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Fisheries Standard in order to identify sustainability gaps and areas for improvement. Based on these assessments, action plans were developed to improve fishing practices, strengthen fisheries management and reduce environmental impacts. Specific work in Aegean longline fisheries also focuses on reducing bycatch and harmful interactions with endangered and protected species.

Who was involved?

The initiative is led by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), working with Greek fishers, fisheries stakeholders, researchers, independent assessors and other relevant organisations. The HellasFish project was initiated by MSC and funded by the MAVA Foundation, the A.G. Leventis Foundation and MSC.

Results / Benefits

The project has supported the development of five fisheries improvement action plans, implemented initial improvement actions and strengthened stakeholder capacity in sustainable fisheries management. It has also generated scientific information to support better management of fisheries, promoted cooperation among stakeholders and created a pathway towards potential future MSC certification. Expected longer-term benefits include healthier fish stocks, reduced impacts on marine biodiversity and more resilient livelihoods for coastal and island fishing communities.

Related website

HellasFish Project – Marine Stewardship Council

HELLASFISH

SUSTAINABILITY FOR GREEK FISHERIES

3. Practice Title: **Hybrid Renewable Energy System – Astypalaia**
Sector: Renewable Energy
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

A pilot hybrid renewable energy system combining a 3.53 MW photovoltaic plant with battery energy storage was developed on Astypalaia. The system is designed to store surplus solar energy and use it when renewable generation is lower, thereby increasing the share of locally produced clean electricity and reducing dependence on diesel-based power generation.

Who was involved?

The project is being implemented by PPC Renewables, a subsidiary of PPC Group, within the broader "Astypalea: Smart and Sustainable Island" initiative involving the Hellenic Republic and the local island community. The wider transformation initiative also involves Volkswagen Group in the areas of sustainable mobility and electrification.

Results / Benefits

The hybrid plant is designed to generate approximately 6.55 GWh of electricity annually, with the objective of covering more than 80% of Astypalaia's electricity needs and avoiding around 5,700 tonnes of CO_2 emissions per year. Battery storage is also expected to improve grid stability and the island's energy security while reducing reliance on fossil fuels

Related website

Astypalea – Smart and Sustainable Island

4. Practice Title: **Green Port Practices – Port of Piraeus**
Sector: Ports / Maritime Transport
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

Piraeus Port Authority (PPA S.A.) has introduced a range of environmental measures aimed at reducing the port's environmental footprint. These include the development of Onshore Power Supply (OPS / cold ironing) infrastructure for cruise vessels, allowing ships to connect to the electricity grid while berthed instead of running their auxiliary engines. The port also operates organised waste-separation and recycling systems, an air-quality monitoring network, and has developed a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Action Plan covering the port area.

Who was involved?

The main actor is Piraeus Port Authority S.A. (PPA S.A.). For the CIPORT shore-power project, PPA cooperated with the Hellenic Electricity Distribution Network Operator (HEDNO), National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), PROTASIS S.A., and HYDRUS Engineering S.A., with EU co-financing through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). Waste-management activities are also implemented in cooperation with authorised waste-management systems and private collection companies.

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Results / Benefits

The measures contribute to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and local air pollution, improving waste management and resource efficiency, strengthening environmental monitoring, and supporting the transition of Piraeus towards a greener and more resilient port model. The OPS initiative in particular is intended to reduce emissions from cruise vessels while they are berthed. In 2025, PPA also completed a Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Study and continued implementing its port-wide greenhouse-gas emissions reduction plan.

Related website

PPA – CIPORT: Cold Ironing in the Port of Piraeus

5. Practice Title: **Recycling of Fishing & Aquaculture Nets – Enaleia / Healthy Seas**

Sector: Fisheries & Aquaculture / Circular Economy

ESG Pilar: Environmental / Social

What was done?

End-of-life fishing gear and nets from fisheries and aquaculture activities are collected instead of being discarded at sea or sent to landfill. The recovered materials are sorted and channelled to specialised recycling and upcycling partners, allowing fishing nets and other marine plastics to re-enter the circular economy as raw materials for new products. Enaleia also works with fishing communities to prevent marine litter and promote more sustainable waste-management practices.

Who was involved?

The initiative involves Enaleia, professional fishing communities, fish-farming companies, port authorities and specialised recycling/upcycling organisations such as Healthy Seas. Previous implementation in Greece included collection points across numerous ports and participation from fish-farming companies.

Results / Benefits

The practice prevents used fishing gear from becoming marine litter or "ghost nets", reduces plastic pollution and keeps valuable materials in circulation through recycling and upcycling. More broadly, Enaleia reports that over 2 million kg of marine plastic have been collected since 2018, with a substantial share entering circular-economy pathways, while thousands of fishers have participated in its activities.

Related website

Enaleia – Mediterranean CleanUp

B. CYPRUS

1. Practice Title: **Keep Our Sand and Sea Plastic Free – Ayia Napa & Protaras**
Sector: Coastal Tourism
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Social

What was done?

The initiative worked with tourism businesses, local authorities, residents and visitors in Ayia Napa, Protaras and the wider Famagusta region to reduce the consumption and disposal of single-use plastics. Activities included supporting hotels and tourism businesses in changing procurement and operational practices, awareness-raising campaigns, beach and sea clean-ups, recycling initiatives and the development of designated "Plastic Free Beaches" equipped with facilities such as free filtered-water refill stations, information signage and dedicated waste-management points.

Who was involved?

The project is an initiative of the TUI Care Foundation, implemented in partnership with the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative (CSTI). Its first phase was also delivered with the Travel Foundation. Local authorities, tourism businesses and hotels, residents, tourists, schools and other community organisations have participated in the activities. The creation of the Plastic Free Beach at Ammos tou Kambouri in Ayia Napa was additionally supported by the Municipality of Ayia Napa and funding from Beyond Plastic Mediterranean (BeMed)

Results / Benefits

The initiative has achieved measurable reductions in single-use plastics and increased awareness among tourism businesses, residents and visitors. During Phase I, 115 tourism businesses, mainly hotels, participated, and 96% of participating businesses made at least one positive change or reduction in single-use plastics. The project estimated that at least 500,000 residents and tourists were reached through its awareness activities.

A particularly strong recent result comes from Ammos tou Kambouri Plastic Free Beach in Ayia Napa: between August 2025 and July 2026, its free water station provided 33,977 litres of drinking water, avoiding an estimated 67,954 single-use plastic bottles in less than one year.

Related website

Keep Our Sand and Sea Plastic Free

Co-funded by the European Union

2. Practice Title: **Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme 2021–2027**
Sector: Fisheries & Aquaculture
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Social / Governance

What was done?

Cyprus established the Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme 2021–2027 to support the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture. The programme finances actions aimed at improving the environmental sustainability and competitiveness of the sectors, protecting marine ecosystems, supporting sustainable management of fishery resources, promoting innovation and strengthening employment and economic activity in coastal communities.

Who was involved?

The programme is managed by the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research (DFMR) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of the Republic of Cyprus. It is co-financed by the European Union through the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and the Republic of Cyprus. Beneficiaries and stakeholders include fishers, aquaculture enterprises, producer organisations, coastal communities and other public and private actors in the fisheries and marine sectors.

Results / Benefits

The programme has a total budget of €54.7 million, financed 70% by the European Union and 30% by the Republic of Cyprus. Its expected benefits include more sustainable management of marine resources, environmentally

responsible fisheries and aquaculture, increased sector competitiveness and innovation, protection of the marine environment, and support for employment and economic development in coastal communities.

Related website

Department of Fisheries and Marine Research – Cyprus

3. Practice Title: **HYDRO-RES – Floating Photovoltaics, Energy Storage & Offshore Renewables in Cyprus**

Sector: Renewable Energy / Blue Energy

ESG Pilar: Environmental

What was done?

The HYDRO-RES project provided technical support for the development of floating photovoltaic systems, pumped-hydro energy storage and offshore renewable energy in Cyprus. It assessed the technical and economic feasibility of these technologies, examined potential locations and barriers to deployment, and supported the development of appropriate legal, regulatory and financing frameworks. The project also developed technical specifications, contractual models and recommendations to facilitate future renewable-energy investments.

Who was involved?

The project was implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in cooperation with the Ministry of Energy, Commerce

and Industry of Cyprus and the Water Development Department. It received financial support through the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and the German European Climate Initiative (EUKI), with additional technical and legal expertise from specialised organisations.

Results / Benefits

The project produced feasibility assessments for floating solar, pumped-hydro storage and offshore renewable energy, supported the development of the necessary legal and regulatory framework, and strengthened the capacity of Cypriot authorities to plan and implement these technologies. The work provides a foundation for increasing renewable-energy deployment, improving energy-system flexibility, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and supporting Cyprus's transition towards a lower-carbon energy system.

Related website

European Commission – Technical support for floating photovoltaics, energy storage and offshore renewables in Cyprus

4. Practice Title: **Blue Cove – Centre of Vocational Excellence for Blue Professions**

Sector: Education & Training / Blue Economy

ESG Pilar: Social / Governance

What was done?

The Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute (CMMI) established Blue Cove, a Centre of Vocational Excellence for Blue Professions, to address skills gaps in the Blue Economy and support the transition towards digitalisation and decarbonisation. Its activities focus on providing labour-market-relevant skills, lifelong learning, innovative and learner-centred training approaches, and opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. Key initiatives include the accreditation of CMMI to provide vocational education and training programmes, the establishment of a Blue Career Guidance Office, and the development of micro-credentials for continuous professional development.

Who was involved?

The initiative is led by the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute (CMMI) in Larnaca. Its vocational education activities involve cooperation with public authorities, industry, academic and research institutions, VET providers and other Blue Economy stakeholders. CMMI has also cooperated with the Municipality of Larnaca and the Larnaca District Development Agency in developing the Blue Career Guidance Office, while its professional training activities are accredited by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA).

Results / Benefits

The initiative has strengthened the link between education, research and the needs of the marine and maritime labour market in Cyprus. It provides mechanisms for vocational training, career guidance and continuous professional development in Blue Economy professions. Through initiatives such as Blue Career activities, training programmes, Blue Schools and youth-oriented programmes, CMMI also promotes awareness of maritime careers and helps develop the skills needed for emerging blue professions.

Related website

CMMI – Blue Cove: Centre of Vocational Excellence for Blue Professions

5. Practice Title: DECARBONLIM – Decarbonising Limassol Port through OPS and Renewable Energy Solutions

Sector: Ports / Maritime Transport

ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

The DECARBONLIM project was launched to support the decarbonisation of Limassol Port through the development of Onshore Power Supply (OPS) infrastructure and renewable energy solutions. The project includes technical and economic feasibility studies, cost-benefit analysis, detailed engineering planning and technical specifications for the future installation of shore-side electricity facilities. OPS will allow vessels berthed at the port to connect to the electricity grid instead of operating their auxiliary engines, thereby reducing emissions generated while ships are in port.

Who was involved?

The project is led by the Cyprus Ports Authority, in cooperation with Frederick University, DP World Limassol Ltd, Eurogate Ltd, the Electricity Authority of Cyprus, the Cyprus Transmission System Operator and the Municipality of Limassol. The initiative is supported by European Union funding.

Results / Benefits

As the project runs from November 2024 to October 2026, I would present these mainly as expected benefits rather than completed results. The planned OPS infrastructure is expected to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and local air pollution from vessels while berthed, support the transition towards

renewable energy, improve the environmental sustainability and competitiveness of Limassol Port, and contribute to better air quality and quality of life in the surrounding urban area. It also supports Cyprus in meeting EU maritime decarbonisation and Green Deal objectives.

Related website

DECARBONLIM – Municipality of Limassol

C. PORTUGAL

1. Practice Title: Regenerative Bivalve Aquaculture – Oceano Fresco
Sector: Sustainable Aquaculture / Blue Food
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

Oceano Fresco developed a science-based regenerative aquaculture model for native European bivalves, including clams and European flat oysters. The company operates an integrated production system covering hatchery, nursery and open-sea farming, allowing it to control the full life cycle of the bivalves. Its approach is non-extractive and focuses exclusively on native European species. Bivalve farming requires no artificial feed, antibiotics or freshwater, while the animals naturally filter seawater and can contribute positively to marine ecosystems.

Who was involved?

The practice is led by Oceano Fresco, a Portuguese sustainable aquaculture company, working with researchers, aquaculture specialists, commercial

partners and investors. The company has also participated in EU- and nationally supported R&D initiatives, including Atlanticlam and the Blue Bioeconomy Pact, aimed at improving regenerative bivalve aquaculture technologies and production methods.

Results / Benefits

The model supports the production of low-impact seafood, reduces reliance on wild harvesting and contributes to the recovery and cultivation of native European bivalve species. Open-sea bivalve farming can also provide habitat for other marine organisms, while shell formation contributes to carbon sequestration. Oceano Fresco has developed what it describes as the world's first open-sea clam farm, and in 2025 achieved its first harvest and commercial sale of adult European flat oysters. In 2024, the company was also selected as an EU Blue Champion by the European Investment Bank and European Commission, recognising its potential to contribute to a more sustainable Blue Economy.

Related website

Oceano Fresco – Regenerative Farming

2. Practice Title: **Organic Seaweed Production – ALGAplus**

Sector: Seaweed Aquaculture / Blue Biotechnology

ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

ALGAplus developed an organic Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) system in the Ria de Aveiro, Portugal. Seawater flows first through fish-farming ponds and then into macroalgae cultivation tanks, where the seaweed absorbs nutrients dissolved in the water. This allows the water to return to the lagoon with fewer excess nutrients, helping to reduce the risk of eutrophication. The company also manages the entire seaweed production cycle internally, from nursery and cultivation to processing and packaging, while minimising freshwater use.

Who was involved?

The practice is led by ALGAplus, a Portuguese company specialising in sustainable cultivation of Atlantic macroalgae. The company has also participated in EU- and nationally co-funded research and innovation projects with research institutions and other aquaculture stakeholders. One example is the IMTA BIO Algas & Peixe project, where ALGAplus was the beneficiary and received support from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

Results / Benefits

The system enables the year-round production of native Portuguese seaweed species without putting additional pressure on wild populations. It contributes to improved nutrient recycling, cleaner water, reduced eutrophication risk and more efficient use of marine resources. The model also supports organic-certified, traceable and commercially viable production, while promoting circularity between fish and seaweed aquaculture. ALGAplus obtained organic certification in 2015 and has progressively expanded its production system.

Related website

ALGAplus – Production System

Co-funded by the European Union

ESG LAB

ALGA+

SEAWEED FARMERS SINCE 2012

DE ALGA E CORAÇÃO

3. Practice Title: **ALGACYCLE – Valorisation of Greenhouse Effluents with Microalgae**

Sector: Microalgae / Blue Biotechnology / Circular Economy

ESG Pilar: Environmental / Social

What was done?

The ALGACYCLE project developed a circular-economy approach in which nutrient-rich drainage water from soilless greenhouse cultivation was reused to grow microalgae. Instead of treating this nutrient-rich water simply as waste, it was used as a source of water and nutrients for microalgae production. The resulting biomass was then explored as a raw material for sustainable aquafeeds and agricultural biostimulants, creating links between agriculture, aquaculture and blue biotechnology.

Who was involved?

The project was coordinated by the Portuguese microalgae company Necton S.A. Partners included University of Algarve, Hubel Verde, FulgurIT, Nord University in Norway and the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research (NIBIO). The project was supported through the EEA Grants Blue Growth Programme.

Results / Benefits

The project demonstrated that nutrient-rich agricultural drainage water can be successfully reused for microalgae cultivation, simultaneously supporting wastewater treatment and the production of valuable biomass. Subsequent research linked to ALGACYCLE demonstrated cultivation at industrial scale in 19 m³ photobioreactors, producing approximately 20 kg of dry biomass for each tested microalgae species. The biomass contained more than 30% protein and high levels of polyunsaturated fatty acids, showing potential for applications in aquaculture and agriculture. Overall, the approach reduces nutrient waste, promotes water reuse, creates value from agricultural effluents and strengthens circular links between the agricultural and aquaculture sectors.

Related website

University of Algarve – ALGACYCLE Project

4. Practice Title: **Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation – S2AQUAcoLAB**
Sector: Aquaculture Innovation / Applied Research
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Governance

What was done?

S2AQUAcoLAB was established in Portugal as a Collaborative Laboratory for Sustainable and Smart Aquaculture, connecting scientific research with the practical needs of aquaculture producers. It develops and transfers innovative solutions in areas such as production optimisation, aquatic animal health and welfare, biosecurity, environmental interactions, nutrition, reproduction, macroalgae cultivation, modelling and emerging technologies. Its work also addresses adaptation of aquaculture production systems to climate change and the development of new, more sustainable products and production methods.

Who was involved?

S2AQUAcoLAB brings together a broad partnership of research institutions, universities, public authorities, producer organisations and private aquaculture companies. According to Portugal's Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA), its network includes IPMA, the University of Algarve, Polytechnic of Leiria, research centres such as CCMAR, a municipality, a producer association and private companies including Necton, Oceano Fresco, SPAROS, Aqualvor and Atlantik Fish, among others.

Results / Benefits

The initiative has strengthened cooperation and knowledge and technology transfer between research and the aquaculture industry. It provides producers with practical tools and specialised services to improve production efficiency, animal health and welfare, environmental performance and resilience. It also supports technical training, R&D projects and the adoption of emerging technologies, helping make Portuguese aquaculture more innovative, competitive and environmentally sustainable.

A recent example of its expansion is DigiATLA, led by S2AQUAcoLAB, which has a budget of €2.1 million and is 75% co-financed by the EU through the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme to strengthen digital capacity and innovation in Atlantic aquaculture.

Related website

S2AQUAcoLAB – Official Website

S²AQUA

Laboratório Colaborativo
Sustainable and Smart Aquaculture

5. Practice Title: **Seagrass Meadow Restoration – Ocean Alive**
Sector: Marine Conservation / Coastal Communities
ESG Pilar: Environmental / Social

What was done?

Ocean Alive developed a community-based approach to the conservation, monitoring and restoration of seagrass meadows in the Sado Estuary, Portugal. Activities include mapping and monitoring seagrass habitats, identifying and reducing threats such as destructive harvesting practices and anchoring, promoting responsible navigation, and implementing direct restoration actions in degraded areas. Local fisherwomen are trained to use GPS and monitoring techniques and actively participate in scientific data collection and marine conservation.

Who was involved?

The initiative is led by Ocean Alive, working closely with women from local fishing communities — known as the Keepers of the Sea — as well as marine scientists, universities, public authorities, decision-makers, tourism operators and local communities. Specific restoration activities have also involved the Centre of Marine Sciences (CCMAR) of the University of Algarve, while some projects have received support from the European Union and other public and private funders.

Results / Benefits

Ocean Alive has identified approximately 31 seagrass meadows and mapped 29 of them, covering at least 190.91 hectares in the Sado Estuary. Across nine meadows monitored using comparable methods, the organisation recorded an increase of 35.62 hectares over four years, indicating positive signs of ecosystem recovery. The initiative also contributes to biodiversity conservation, blue-carbon protection and healthier fisheries, while creating new professional roles and complementary income opportunities for local fisherwomen involved as seagrass monitors, environmental guides and awareness agents.

Related website

Ocean Alive – Seagrass Meadows

4. CONCLUSIONS

The review of the selected good practices highlights several recurring elements that appear to support more effective ESG implementation within the Blue Economy. One of the clearest findings is the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation: many of the initiatives examined rely on partnerships between businesses, public authorities, research organisations, local communities and specialised organisations, showing that ESG challenges are often addressed more effectively through collaboration rather than isolated action.

Another important finding is the strong role of innovation and circular approaches. Several practices demonstrate how waste streams, natural resources and existing infrastructure can be managed differently to reduce environmental impact while also creating new economic opportunities. Examples such as the reuse of nutrient-rich water for microalgae production, the recycling of fishing gear, sustainable aquaculture systems and renewable-energy solutions illustrate how environmental objectives can be integrated into operational and business models.

The practices also show that ESG implementation can generate benefits beyond environmental protection. Improved resource efficiency, stronger cooperation, development of new skills, enhanced resilience, innovation capacity and new employment opportunities are among the wider benefits identified. This demonstrates that ESG measures can contribute simultaneously to environmental, social and organisational improvement.

At the same time, the examples reveal that ESG implementation is not uniform across sectors or organisations. The scale, resources and level of maturity of the initiatives vary considerably. For SMEs, this suggests that there is no single model that needs to be followed. Instead, businesses can identify actions that correspond to their own capacity, sector and operational needs, beginning with realistic measures and gradually strengthening their ESG practices.

Overall, the good practices presented in this report demonstrate that the transition towards a more sustainable Blue Economy is already taking place through a combination of technological innovation, responsible resource

management, cooperation, skills development and improved governance. Their main contribution is therefore not to provide a fixed model for replication, but to offer practical reference points that SMEs can adapt to their own context when developing their ESG approach.