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## Rio 2016: Let's Win a Gold Medal for the Environment!

In the Rio de Janeiro area, a dauntingly high proportion of predominantly plastic waste can be found in the Guanabara Bay – either thrown in directly or arriving via the numerous watercourses that flow into it. The waterways and beaches are polluted, resulting in a 380 km<sup>2</sup> garbage cocktail that causes serious health problems to humans and animals.

The city of Rio de Janeiro has foreseen to clean up the Bay for the 2016 Olympics and is interested in high tech waste management infrastructure for the period beyond. Yet as the 2016 Olympics are approaching, the clean-up measures taken by the city so far have not been sufficient and Olympic athletes have expressed concern for the state of the water's pollution.



The heavily polluted Guanabara Bay

**WFO** would like to contribute to establishing a sustainable and long-lasting infrastructure so that the city of Rio de Janeiro and its surrounding regions will benefit from it for many years to come, long after the Olympics are over. Waste Free Oceans has called on all interested partners to jointly face this challenge.

With the help of local fishermen, recyclers, local authorities and the plastics industry, **WFO's** proposed action is to improve the systems to recover and recycle floating debris in the Bay, and, benefitting from existing European technology, producing useful products both out of mixed plastic waste and sorted plastics waste which would be used during the 2016 Olympics.

In March, **WFO** Co-Founder Bernard Merckx, worldwide renowned plastics recycling expert, joined the Dutch fact-finding mission in Rio, under the lead of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. **WFO** set out to look into pragmatic solutions to make Guanabara Bay much cleaner with the help of the local fishing community among others.

On top of that, possibilities have been investigated by **WFO** to turn collected waste back into raw material and useful products made from up to 100% recyclates by the local plastics recycling and converting industry.

**WFO** was very much encouraged with the findings and even more with the enthusiasm from the various local stakeholders on the **WFO** project proposal which has strengthened **WFO** in the further preparation of the upcoming Guanabara Bay cleaning project. Meanwhile, a pragmatic project proposal has been filed with the Dutch authorities and other stakeholders to begin with the concrete actions of the project as soon as possible.

The **WFO** proposal also opens doors for other fact-finding mission partners – such as the Dutch Plastic Soup Foundation, Water Observer, Deltares, Waternet, NVRD, Marisco and others – to work out additional joint initiatives. It is intended to become a blueprint for other multi-stakeholder projects around the globe. Most Dutch fact-finding partners involved are signatories of the Dutch Plastics Value Chain Agreement.

[Read more about the polluted Guanabara Bay on CNN here.](#)

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## Europêche and WFO Partner Together to Fight Marine Litter

In early March, **Waste Free Oceans** and **Europêche** announced their new partnership in the fight against marine litter. By joining forces with the maritime industry, the new partnership will help improve the environmental status of Europe's waterways, rivers, coastal areas and regional seas by reducing amounts of marine litter.



**Europêche**, the Association of National Organisations of Fishing Enterprises in the European Union, is the leading European organisation of shipowners, fishermen and employers that today counts 17 member organisations from 11 European countries. By uniting with **Waste Free Oceans**, an impact on marine litter can be made as the **WFO** foundation works to mobilize and unite the fisheries sector, public authorities, the international plastics industry and other stakeholders in combatting the growing issue of marine litter.

Improvements on many port reception facilities is a key element of the cooperation, as well as the establishment of a special harmonised pan-European waste landing fee in ports. Indeed, the unfair reality today is that in many cases fishermen still have to pay for landing any litter caught in their nets - whether it is theirs or not!

Javier Garat Perez, **Europêche** President, states: "There are already many good examples of improved sustainability and environmental awareness in our industry, yet we need to share our experiences more with our colleagues and the outside world. Formally joining forces with **Waste Free Oceans** will bring our environmental goals into a new dimension. We aim to apply for and establish several joint projects, among others, under the EMFF [European Maritime and Fisheries Fund]."



Fishermen in support of Fishing For Litter

Both **Waste Free Oceans** and **Europêche** will therefore support to organise modern, state of the art fishing for litter (FFL) schemes all around Europe with the help of the fishing industry. The projects will first begin in active **Europêche** member countries. These schemes will apply both passive and active FFL, as well as ghost net retrieval, thus following the examples of previous programmes initiated in Spain and Belgium aiming

to prevent marine litter, reuse and close material loops.

**WFO** Co-Founder Bernard Merckx says: "**WFO** has been increasingly involved in many international meetings on improving the environmental status of the European regional seas, waterways and oceans. Hardly any of those meetings included fishing and other maritime industries even though they have a key role to play in most of the remediation and some of the prevention actions. The partnership with **Europêche** and its members is expected to speed up the progress. In all projects around Europe where we worked intensely with fishermen, we found great commitment and willingness to assist on their part."

## WFO Wants Your Bottles

**WFO** is continuously inspired by the many volunteers taking part in numerous initiatives all over Europe, dedicated to cleaning up beaches, forests, waterways and other parts of nature. However, we find that an increasing number of organisations collecting litter are facing difficulties in disposing their collected litter.

Therefore, **WFO** has been calling on all stakeholders to collaborate and create better conditions for more systematic and sustainable waste clean-ups. To do so, we are asking organisations to set aside all plastic bottles collected via clean-ups and other events so that we may reprocess them into useful recycled products. Plastic bottles are #5 on UNEP's Top 10 debris items most commonly found along coastlines and waterways, but **WFO** sees them as potential, not trash.

Last year, **WFO** collaborated with Ecover in launching the first ever bottle made from plastic waste fished out of the ocean: the Ecover Ocean Bottle. Using **WFO**'s trawl technology, fishermen were able to collect ocean plastic which was then repurposed into new packaging, thus turning waste into value. As perfectly stated by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, "litter is a valuable resource in the wrong place".



The Ecover Ocean Bottle

**WFO** has held talks with **Let's Clean Up Europe!**, an initiative that helps organize clean-up actions as part of the European Week for Waste Reduction. This year, the hundreds of clean-ups will take place all across Europe from 8 - 10 May. **WFO** will continue its collaboration with Ecover and hopes to reach a wider audience and better raise awareness on the issue of marine litter, showing the existing solutions to closing the loops for a sustainable future. **WFO encourages all interested clean-up programmes to contact Marguerite at WFO to be a part of the project.**

## The Happy Seal Project: Recycling Obsolete Fishing Gear

In early January, a unique partnership was created between the Seal Rehabilitation and Research Center (SRRC) in Pieterburen, Groningen Seaports, **Waste Free Oceans (WFO)** and its partners Plastix, Daly Plastics and Green Wave Plastics. Together, they have initiated a project called “Happy Seal” in order to proactively clean up and recycle obsolete fishing gear lost along the Dutch coast.



The project is based on the experiences gained by **WFO** in close collaboration with Belgium's foundation for Sustainable Fishery Development (Stichting voor Duurzame Visserontwikkeling, SDVO) that began in 2012. Following Belgium's example, the activities will start in the first half of 2015 in the Dutch ports of Lauwers-oog, Delfzijl and Eemshaven. Other Dutch ports will also be involved in the months to come.

Both the SRRC and Groningen Seaports are located on the coast of the Wadden Sea, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site reaching from the northern part of The Netherlands, along the coast of Germany, all the way up to Denmark, an area famous for its population of seals.



**Happy the Seal, adopted mascot  
of the Happy Seal Project**

But certain fishing methods and ever-growing marine litter pose a big threat to the seals, who find themselves entangled in fishing nets, often resulting in death. On a regular basis, entangled, wounded seals are found and brought to the SRRC, which has been taking care of sick and injured seals since it was founded in 1971. One of these wounded seals is Happy, the adopted mascot of the Happy Seal Project. Recovered from her wounds, Happy was released back into the sea on 18 April in the presence of the very fishermen who rescued her.

Over the years, the SRRC, in close cooperation with local fishermen, has retrieved these ghost nets, which accumulated into a pile forming a mountain of more than **several hundred metric tons of gears**. Today, this mountain has been removed. Plastix will continue the collection

and process the waste into useful raw material at its clean tech facility in Lemvig, Denmark.

Groningen Seaports promotes responsible, sustainable economic activities and has, over the years, been recognised for its environmental programs and achievement, becoming a leading partner in the EcoPorts network, managed by the European Sea Ports Organisation.

**WFO** will actively involve both the fishing industry and the plastics industry in the Happy Seals project, which warmly welcomes the support of fishing and other maritime industries, fishermen and other stakeholders to jointly work towards a waste free Wadden Sea.



## WFO to Help Tackle Marine Litter in China

In February, an eye-opening study “Plastic waste inputs from land into ocean” by the Marine Debris Working Group from the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) was published in the journal *Science*, and, for the very first time, quantified the total amount of plastic debris entering our oceans on a global scale. The study found that between 4.8 and 12.7 million metric tons of plastic waste originating from land entered our oceans in 2010.

Researchers estimated that, out of the 192 coastal countries that were analyzed, China suffers the most from an inadequate waste management system, thus generating the greatest amount of mismanaged plastic waste that finds its way to our oceans every year. **Waste Free Oceans** is currently in the process of setting up a **WFO** entity in Asia Pacific in hopes of helping the region with its expertise and experience on cleaning up marine litter.

Asian nations make up 13 of the top 20 countries producing the most ocean-bound trash, with China being the first. The United States also finds its place on the list of the major sources of marine litter, in 20<sup>th</sup> position. The purpose of the study was not to point fingers however, but to use the global estimate to help find solutions. At **Waste Free Oceans**, we believe such results emphasize the importance of cross-sectoral partnerships when tackling the issue of marine litter, inviting all stakeholders to take action. Any interested organisations in Asia can contact [Marguerite](#) at WFO. Read the study [here](#).



## Fishing for Litter Expo at DG MARE

In May, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) will be holding an exhibition on Fishing for Litter in the event space of DG MARE offices. Programmed to speak on the issue of Blue Growth is the European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr. Karmenu Vella, as well as **WFO** Champion and Chair of the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee, MEP Mr. Alain Cadec. Mr. Ivan Victor, President of Belgium's foundation for Sustainable Fishery Development (Stichting voor Duurzame Visserontwikkeling, SDVO) will also be speaking, as will Bernard Merckx, **WFO** Co-Founder. The event will be hosted by Ms. Lowri Evans, Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries at the European Commission.

**Waste Free Oceans** will be putting on display efforts made with Fishing for Litter and showcasing the many possibilities available when closing the loops by reusing waste: backpacks, jackets, crates, bottles, etc. **WFO** will also be gifting DG MARE with benches made from recycled marine litter, which will be placed in DG MARE's green courtyard. Invited stakeholders from government institutions, recyclers, NGOs, plastics industry and brand owners are planned to attend.



Bench made from recovered plastic



Fabric made from recycled plastic bottles and fishing gear



Skateboard made from recycled fishnets

## WFO Calls for Action Against Roadside Littering

Cleanup initiatives shouldn't stop at coastlines.

Today, gas stations are turning more and more into supermarkets with increasing numbers of goods sold wrapped in convenience packaging. Inconvenient, though, is how to dispose of the subsequent trash. Instead of using trash bins, parking lots and densely travelled roads are turning into waste dumps.

From our highways to our waterways, roadside litter gets washed or blown into sewers, streams and rivers, eventually ending up in our oceans. Marine litter has become a well-known issue yet a high percentage of the problem originates on land.

So why aren't we taking preventative measures against land-based litter?

Piles of litter along motorways are growing by the minute. Rather than encouraging drivers to consume more, awareness should be raised: roadside posters and billboards; providing guidance, pocket trash bags and ashtrays; installing refund schemes throughout all service stations; regulation monitoring and active law reinforcement.

By raising awareness on the impact of the problem and providing immediate alternative disposal solutions, social norms can be positively changed for long-term beneficial effects.

All drivers alike are asked to stop using the roadside as their waste bin. Individual ownership may be for cars, but highways belong to everyone.

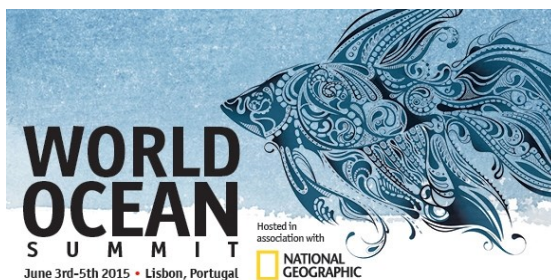
Let's be the drivers for change, together.



Litter thrown alongside European highways

## WFO in Portugal

In late January, **WFO** met with Mr. Ribeiro, Director-General of Maritime Affairs for Portugal, and Mr. Cunha, Counselor for Environment, Science and Maritime Affairs to the President of Portugal. Both were very pleased to hear the latest developments in **WFO** since our launch in Porto in 2012 and formally invited **WFO** to present a live demonstration at the opening event of the [World Ocean Summit](#). The World Ocean Summit will be taking place on June 3<sup>rd</sup> in Lisbon, Portugal. This year, over 250 global leaders will gather at the Summit to discuss Blue Economy; Blue Growth. The Summit will be taking place during Portugal's [Blue Week](#) from 3 - 6 June.



In Portugal, **WFO** also met with Mr. Caldeirinha, President of the [Port of Setubal](#), famous for its dolphin population. The decline in dolphin numbers a couple years ago was all the more reason for the local government to successfully tackle the amount of pollution and marine litter in the area. Mr. Caldeirinha and the local fishermen are very keen on using the **WFO** trawl to collect marine litter along the Port of Setubal.

## WFO at European Maritime Day 2015



**WFO** is proud to have been chosen to co-host a workshop during the European Maritime Day Conference, this year taking place on 28 and 29 May in Athens, Greece. The workshop, co-organized with [Seas At Risk](#), will look into the role of port authorities in waste management and will debate the topic of waste landing fees. The theme of this year's conference is ports and coasts as engines of Blue Growth. Public happenings and networking events will be taking place around the European Maritime Day from 28 to 31 May in Piraeus, Athens. Numerous government officials will be present and we hope you also stop by **WFO's** exhibition booth! For more information, visit the European Commission's [European Maritime Day](#).

## Seafood Expo Global in Brussels



The [Seafood Expo Global](#) is the world's largest seafood trade exposition and will be taking place in Brussels this year from 21 - 23 April. We're happy to announce that SDVO will be holding a stand (7-2019) at the Expo and has given the opportunity to **Waste Free Oceans** to showcase some of the products produced from Fishing For Litter. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr. Karmenu Vella will hold a debate on how the European Union can contribute towards a better global fisheries governance.

## Expédition 7<sup>e</sup> Continent



In January, **WFO** met with Gilles Broise of [Expedition 7<sup>th</sup> Continent](#) in Paris, an organisation whose objective is to raise awareness on the state of marine litter in our oceans by combining scientific knowledge with educational media. The team embarks on week-long expeditions to analyse the state of marine pollution and to test technical equipment to improve scientific research on the issue. Two expeditions are planned for the year 2015: from May 15 to June 15 in the North Atlantic and in December 2015/January 2016 in the South Atlantic. Together, **WFO** and Expedition 7<sup>th</sup> Continent hope to better raise awareness on the issue of marine litter and plan to work closer together on a project.

WASTE FREE OCEANS FOUNDATION

Avenue de Cortenbergh 71, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

To subscribe to the WFO Newsletter send your e-mail address to [info@wastefreeoceans.eu](mailto:info@wastefreeoceans.eu)