

Empowering citizens for marine and aquatic science: multi-level commitment to ocean literacy and monitoring of European seas and waters

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ABSTRACT

Citizen science is a powerful tool for involving the public in marine and aquatic research, science literacy and engagement. Since 2015, the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) in Belgium has built robust citizen science programs that empower volunteers to contribute meaningfully to marine and aquatic monitoring. Besides being a citizen science coordinator, VLIZ also contributes to good practices, roadmaps and policy on marine and aquatic citizen science, both at the national and the international level.

Through projects like SeaWatch-B, the Big Seashell Survey, and RecVis, a monitoring program involving recreational fisheries, citizens are trained and supported to collect scientifically valuable data. VLIZ also coordinates international citizen science initiatives such as Plastic Pirates & CoastSnap (in Belgium) and Collect (Africa, Asia). While participating in EU-funded projects like PREP4BLUE and CS-MACH1, VLIZ participates in defining best practices for marine citizen science.

These efforts have led to long-term, high-quality datasets on coastal, marine and riverine environments, to widespread community involvement, and to recognition of VLIZ as a national hub in international networks on marine citizen science. In this way, VLIZ demonstrates that marine citizen science can be both locally embedded and globally connected, contributing to sustainable ocean stewardship.

Useful links

Big Seashell Survey: <https://www.groteschelpenteldag.be/nl> | data: <https://minka.vliz.be/groteschelpenteldag>

SeaWatch-B: <https://www.vliz.be/projects/seawatch-b/> | data: <https://minka.vliz.be/seawatchb>

Plastic Pirates-Belgium: <https://www.plastic-pirates.eu/dt>

CoastSnap-Belgium: <https://www.kustportaal.be/en/coastsnap-belgium>

Collect - Citizen Observation of Local Litter in Coastal ECosysTems: <https://pogo-ocean.org/innovation-in-ocean-observing/activities/collect-citizen-observation-of-local-litter-in-coastal-ecosystems/>

RecVis - recreational fisheries monitoring in Belgium: <https://www.recreatievezeevisserij.be>

PREP4BLUE: Inventory: <https://wavelinks.eu/explore/citizen-science> | roadmap: <https://prep4blue.eu/portfolio/prep4blue-report/>