



# Recommendations on strengthening the science-policy interface

(Executive Summary)

May 2018



Working for a Sustainable Mediterranean,  
Caring for our Future.



In the recent decades of European policy-making it has been recognized more and more that bringing science and policy in tune and bridging the gap between the scientific community and society at large is very important if we want to build an effective, democratic and knowledge-based European society.

Within the EU there is consensus that the information and knowledge produced through the many research projects supported by EU funds must be suitable to address the knowledge needs of the various stages of the policy cycle and sufficiently exploited. Achieving this is at the heart of the so-called 'science-policy' projects.

This document has been developed within the framework of the EU funded SWIM-H2020 Support Mechanism<sup>1</sup> and encompasses the results of a desk study aiming to address the need for a strengthened research to policy / practice interface and ultimately, an enhanced interaction between the efforts for a cleaner Mediterranean and the important outcomes of relevant EU funded research projects.

More specifically, the results of this study provide:

- insights on research results which could feed policies and practices important for water management and marine pollution prevention and reduction in the Mediterranean;
- a better interaction of research and policy that will directly support the Research Component of the H2020 Initiative for a Cleaner Mediterranean, but also the work of the European Environment Agency (EEA), Mediterranean Action Plan of UN Environment (UN Environment/MAP and the Union for Mediterranean (UfM).

Within this study a thorough screening of the most important research and innovation results and knowledge outputs<sup>2</sup> was conducted, followed by an assessment and analysis. More information on the methodological approach, criteria, case studies, etc. can be found in the [full version of the report](#).

The main **recommendations** drawn by this exercise are the following:

### Improving the calls, design and implementation of EU science-policy projects

1. When designing research projects aiming to feed into policy processes, it is important to apply a balanced multi-disciplinary approach involving researchers from the humanities (e.g. sociology, etc.) to natural sciences, technical and applied ones. In addition, the criteria for the selection of a project should incorporate **provisions for inclusion within the consortia members, of partners with demonstrated policy oriented expertise and skills** e.g. for the 'translation' and integration of knowledge into policies and for active

---

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Water Integrated Management and Horizon 2020 Support Mechanism (2016-2019). This regional project aims to contribute to reduced marine pollution and a sustainable use of scarce water resources in the Mediterranean region with emphasis on the countries of North Africa and the Middle East (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, [Syria] and Tunisia). This specific deliverable was developed by consortium member MIO-ECSDE ([www.mio-ecsde.org](http://www.mio-ecsde.org))

<sup>2</sup> EU funded Research and Innovation Framework Programmes ([ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation_en)); EU Eco-Innovation programme ([ec.europa.eu/environment/eco-innovation/showcase/map/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eco-innovation/showcase/map/index_en.htm)); LIFE+ projects ([ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/lifeplus.htm)); ENPI-CBC MED projects ([www.enpicbcmed.eu](http://www.enpicbcmed.eu)); INTERREG MED projects ([interreg-med.eu](http://interreg-med.eu)); IPA Adriatic ([www.ipadriaticbc.eu](http://www.ipadriaticbc.eu))



promotion, application and monitoring of these policies. These policy competent actors can be, for example, Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations, including unions, who have within their regular agendas, mandates and practices, the task of strengthening the science-policy interface. Such actors help to frame and address the broader policy context of the project. They are often well-equipped to assist in (i) identifying the issues that scientists should consider; (ii) putting into context and effectively communicating any new evidence/knowledge into the policy formulating processes of communities.

2. **Good project coordination needs combined competencies** on (i) the environmental domain addressed by the project, (ii) the strategic policy context and (iii) the management of projects. The in-depth assessment of the profile of the coordinating institution is therefore crucial and should also take into account the personal qualities of the proposed project Coordinator.
3. In order to effectively transfer project outputs in a policy relevant way, calls for proposals should make clear the requirement for a **policy outreach strategy**. Such a strategy serves as a valuable reference document for all partners to understand the principles and tools of providing timely and meaningful advice to policy and decision makers. It should include guidelines on how to communicate the project methodologies, findings and knowledge outputs by providing clear and balanced information on the environmental issue at stake. The policy outreach strategy should **clearly define the target audience** and the **tailor-made tools to address them**.
4. All policy relevant knowledge outputs of the project should concisely **describe the process through which the knowledge outputs were developed** in order to support their proper interpretation and the transparency and credibility of their formulation.
5. Multidisciplinary partnerships usually require considerable time before they evolve into a unified taskforce sharing the same vision and aspirations. In this respect **the duration of strategic projects with actions on the science-policy interface should be adequate**. Ideally, five-year projects should be foreseen.
6. Given that most strategic and policy relevant projects inevitably develop their policy recommendations towards their end, **adequate time and resources for the dissemination of the policy related project results** should be foreseen by dedicating the needed time for the policy outreach related component of the project.
7. In an effort to strengthen the science-policy interface at project level, research projects are increasingly required to set up a project governance scheme (e.g. in the form of a Steering Committee or an Advisory Board, etc.) that includes actors involved in policy formulation. Meaningful interactions that go beyond the standard administrative matters of the project, for example in the form of **dedicated short science-policy sessions, should be designed and foreseen within the project governance meetings**, in order to facilitate the early and direct involvement of the policy actors in truly steering the project activities and providing strategic policy guidance.
8. All projects deliver a synthesis report at the end of their lifespan and in some cases a final publishable summary report. Science-policy projects should also submit a short **summary report reflecting on the policy relevance and impact of the project achievements**.



This increases the chances for policy-makers to learn and capitalize on the policy relevant results of the project.

9. Project managers within the EU institutions (or other monitoring mechanisms in place) should have **adequate knowledge and know how to oversee not only the operational delivery of the project outputs but also to objectively and critically review their quality**, particularly when it comes to the relevance and contribution of the outputs to policy and decision making.
10. Similarly to the 'Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions', an **EC manual should be produced to set out the requirements and guidelines for designing and implementing successful science-policy interactions within EU research projects**. This manual should cover all issues related to the science-policy interface and provide guidance on how to develop policy briefs and other policy relevant materials, organize conferences and other events targeted to policy and decision makers, tips on how to showcase project actions and results in a way that increases the potential of their uptake, design genuinely participatory science-policy-society interactions so that new knowledge is developed ('co-creation'), etc.

### Enhancing access to outputs and results of science-policy projects

11. Each EU-funded project normally has its own website. Measures should be in place to ensure that they are up-to-date, attractive and user-friendly for policy and decision makers.
12. Beyond project websites, policy and decision makers need to be able to access policy relevant knowledge outputs produced by science-policy projects through **centralized user-friendly and up-to-date web-based databases** that systematically collect and upload main project outputs and findings. This is important for the overall sustainability of the impacts of such projects.
13. The key barriers that decision and policy makers face in accessing information are: information overload vs the time available for finding what they need, and information not sufficiently accentuated or 'flagged' or even clear. In response to this, the aforementioned centralized databases should have **webpage modules or smart add-ons** to facilitate quick and easy access to well-articulated and highlighted outputs.
14. It should be obligatory for the science-policy projects to **share their data**, either in existing EU data-sharing platforms or in publications of peer reviewed journals **within a realistic but tight timeframe of the project** (e.g. maximum one year after its completion).

### Making the science-policy interface more 'fit-for-purpose'

15. One of the top challenges on the science-policy interface is the growing volume, complexity and speed of data generation, due to advances in sequencing and computing technologies. Processing this data and transforming it into meaningful information requires sophisticated data analysis tools. EU data sharing platforms (e.g. the EEA/Eionet) have been designed specifically for processing data and converting it into comprehensive, fit-for-purpose information to feed into the various stages of the policy cycle. Therefore,



**science-policy projects should be required to share their data through these platforms.**

16. Research calls for tenders and projects need to well reflect policy needs. This could be facilitated by (a) setting up **a scheme for frequent, regular mapping of research needs** to feed research call programming; (b) enhancing the **exchanges of relevant institutions**, e.g. of the Directorates General of the European Commission to better streamline policy needs within the research calls and better inform policy formulation with research and innovation results.
17. **New mechanisms for dialogue** have be developed to allow research projects and policy actors to interact more, be more aware of the strategic policy contexts of projects, and jointly identify ways in which evidence and research outcomes can be incorporated into the management process<sup>3</sup>. Existing structures could host such **'hubs' for science and policy** where scientific networks and policy makers would be brought together to ensure that information and knowledge flows in both directions.

### More effective data gathering, management and sharing

18. In order to ensure that data produced by research projects is comparable, accessible and 'fit-for-purpose', **overarching guidelines should be developed on data gathering, data management and data sharing. Such guidelines must be aligned with those already used by EC agencies** (e.g. the EEA, Eurostat, JRC, Eionet, etc.), key EU and international initiatives (e.g. SEIS, INSPIRE, Eye on Earth, etc.), common standards, rules and conditions for data and metadata generated. The ownership and timing of publicly sharing the data should be well defined so that data produced within the framework of EU funded research projects is immediately accessible for EU policy purposes.
19. Nowadays, it seems that every science-policy project is developing a Geographical Information System (GIS) to make its data available. The result is a large number of GISs that are incompatible and cannot be interconnected or integrated. There should be **instructions within the call for proposals for existing relevant GIS databases (e.g. EMODNet) to be used by the projects for sharing their produced data** rather than develop new ones.

### Enhancing science to policy communication

20. In several science-policy projects, capacity building activities targeting policy and decision makers are foreseen. It would however be of added value for calls to encourage provisions in project design for **building the capacity of the partners to communicate research results in a policy-relevant way.**

---

<sup>3</sup> An example is the Multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU