

Bridging the Gap - Scientists, Policy Makers and Stakeholders Meet to Talk about Deep-Sea Sponges

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Last week, on September 20th, the **EU-funded project SponGES** held its second science-policy panel, at the premises of the **Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV)**. The event, organized by **FAO** in the scope of SponGES' activities, was held just ahead of the meeting of the European Commission's Working Group on Good Environmental Status (WG GES).

The meeting was joined by a total of **23 participants representing the European Parliament, scientists and stakeholders, such as industry, inter-governmental organizations, regional fisheries management organizations, NGO's etc.**

Several SponGES partners presented the activities and preliminary results from the first 18 months of the project. Covered topics spanned from **biodiversity, functioning, connectivity and anthropogenic impacts, mapping and modelling through to blue biotech, and resource management**. SponGES researchers further highlighted how data and tools being generated in the project may inform and assist EU Member States in the assessment of the environmental status of deep-sea habitats in the context of the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)** specifically in reference to descriptors 1 "Biological Diversity" and 6 "Seafloor Integrity".

All participants were highly engaged and productive discussions were held e.g. regarding the assessment of "Significant Adverse Impact (SAI)" and "Bycatch Threshold Values" that are of particular relevance to the implementation of international agreements towards the protection and conservation of **Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)** and **Ecological or Biological Significant Areas (EBSAs)**, of which **deep-sea sponge habitats** are an integral part. The economic aspects for the biotech and pharmaceutical industries were also addressed. All convenors agreed on the importance of holding further science-policy meetings to reinforce collaboration and strengthen the positive societal impact of EU-funded research.

SponGES is grateful to DG ENV for the interest in, and the logistic support to the meeting, and to all participants for their useful insight throughout the day. Further supporting information about the meeting can be found on the **[specific page of the SponGES website](#)**.



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Deep-Sea Sponge Grounds Ecosystems of the North Atlantic - An integrated approach towards their preservation and sustainable exploitation
www.deepseasponges.org
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