



Measuring Plastic Pollution to Drive Real-World Solutions

From Monitoring to Policy Implementation in Europe

3rd REMEDIES Policy Workshop Report and Policy Recommendations

6 March 2026 | Brussels, Belgium

VITO

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Introduction: Purpose and policy relevance of the workshop

The 3rd REMEDIES Policy Workshop, titled “Measuring Plastic Pollution to Drive Real-World Solutions: From Monitoring to Policy Implementation in Europe,” was organised on 6 March 2026 in Brussels within the framework of the REMEDIES project.

The workshop focused on one of the most important challenges in plastic pollution governance: how scientific monitoring can be translated into regulatory indicators, measurable targets and concrete policy action. While plastic pollution monitoring has advanced significantly through European research projects, the workshop highlighted that further work is needed to ensure that monitoring systems are robust, harmonised, comparable and usable by policymakers.

The event brought together researchers, policymakers, industry representatives and European project partners working on plastic pollution monitoring across marine, freshwater, urban, industrial and wastewater environments. The discussions were closely linked to major European policy frameworks, including the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the EU Plastics Strategy and emerging regulatory obligations related to microplastics.

A key message from the workshop was that monitoring is not only a scientific activity. It is a necessary bridge between evidence and implementation. To drive real-world solutions, monitoring data must help identify pollution sources, assess trends, evaluate whether policy measures are effective and support remediation or prevention actions when targets are exceeded.

Workshop overview and agenda

Field	Description
Title	Measuring Plastic Pollution to Drive Real-World Solutions: From Monitoring to Policy Implementation in Europe
Workshop	3rd REMEDIES Policy Workshop
Date	6 March 2026
Location	Brussels, Belgium
Venue	Hendrik Conscience, Bd Roi Albert II 15, 1210 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode
Main format	Presentations, policy roundtable, breakout discussions and reporting session
Main focus	Translating plastic pollution monitoring into policy indicators, targets and implementation mechanisms

Structure

Opening and policy framing: Welcome and framing of the role of scientific monitoring in supporting European environmental policy.

Part 1 - Insights from European research projects: Presentations from REMEDIES, INSPIRE, UPSTREAM and PHAROS on plastic pollution monitoring, source identification, remediation, prevention and Mission Ocean-related action.

Part 2 - Harmonised monitoring framework: Presentation on the development of a harmonised microplastics monitoring framework in Flanders and its relevance for regional and European policy implementation.

Part 3 - From data to decisions: Policy roundtable and breakout groups addressing the question: How can scientific monitoring be translated into regulatory indicators and measurable targets?

Breakout Group 1: Marine and freshwater environments.

Breakout Group 2: Sources and prevention, including industry, wastewater, ports and product regulation.

Closing session: Reporting back from group discussions, policy-relevant recommendations, closing remarks and next steps.

Methodology and participants

The workshop combined:

- expert presentations from European research and innovation projects;
- policy framing linked to EU environmental regulation;
- a concrete regional case study on harmonised monitoring;
- moderated discussion between scientific, policy and industry actors;
- breakout sessions focused on translating monitoring into regulatory and operational use;
- final synthesis of lessons and policy recommendations.

The methodology was designed to connect science with policy application. Rather than focusing only on technical monitoring methods, the workshop explored how monitoring data can become useful for decision-making, enforcement, regulatory reporting, prevention strategies and remediation planning.

Participants included representatives from European research projects, environmental monitoring experts, policymakers, industry stakeholders, Mission Ocean actors and organisations working on plastic pollution reduction. The diversity of participants allowed the discussion to address both scientific reliability and the practical conditions needed for policy uptake.

Part 1: Monitoring plastic pollution in European research projects

The first part of the workshop presented work from several European projects developing methods, tools and evidence to better understand plastic pollution across different environments.

The REMEDIATION project presented its work on monitoring plastic pollution in marine and freshwater environments, with a focus on supporting remediation and prevention. The discussion underlined the importance of connecting monitoring with real-world solutions, including clean-up, source reduction, circular economy approaches and stakeholder engagement.

The INSPIRE project contributed insights on harmonised and policy-ready measurement approaches for plastic pollution. Its work is particularly relevant to the need for comparable datasets, standardised methods and monitoring approaches that can be trusted by regulators.

The UPSTREAM project presented work on identifying and quantifying plastic pollution at source. This is especially important for prevention policies, because effective intervention requires knowing where pollution originates, whether from industry, wastewater, urban systems, ports or specific products.

The PHAROS project contributed a Mission Ocean perspective, focusing on the protection of marine ecosystems, pollution reduction and the transition towards a carbon-neutral and circular blue economy by

2030. The discussion also explored how demonstration sites and aquatic systems could potentially integrate microplastics monitoring, provided that methods are feasible, affordable and aligned with wider monitoring frameworks.

Together, the project presentations showed that Europe has a growing evidence base on plastic pollution. However, they also confirmed that monitoring approaches still need stronger harmonisation, clearer policy alignment and better integration into regulatory implementation.

Part 2: Harmonising microplastics monitoring frameworks

A dedicated session focused on the development of a harmonised microplastics monitoring framework in Flanders. This case provided a practical example of how regional monitoring systems can contribute to broader European policy implementation.

The presentation highlighted the importance of developing monitoring frameworks that are scientifically credible but also operationally realistic. Harmonisation is essential because fragmented monitoring methods produce data that cannot easily be compared across territories, sectors or time periods.

The case of Flanders demonstrated that monitoring frameworks need to define:

- what should be measured;
- which size fractions should be included;
- which sampling methods should be used;
- how results should be reported;
- how blanks, detection limits and uncertainties should be handled;
- how regional data can align with EU policy frameworks.

The discussion also highlighted that monitoring obligations are becoming increasingly relevant in the context of microplastics regulation. Participants noted that if different actors report emissions using different methodologies, it becomes difficult to assess whether regulatory measures are working. This creates a direct link between methodological harmonisation and policy effectiveness.

Part 3: From monitoring data to policy decisions

The second half of the workshop focused on the central policy challenge: how to move from monitoring data to regulatory indicators, measurable targets and practical decisions.

Participants discussed that monitoring concentrations alone is not enough. Policymakers also need to understand:

- when pollution levels become unacceptable;
- which sources are responsible;
- which measures are effective;
- how monitoring results connect to ecological impacts;
- what action should follow when targets are exceeded.

A key issue raised in the discussion was the difference between research monitoring and policy monitoring. Research may aim to go deeper, detect smaller particles and test advanced methods. Policy monitoring, however, requires methods that can be applied consistently, affordably and at sufficient scale across many laboratories, regions and countries.

This led to discussion around minimum common monitoring parameters, including the possible use of size thresholds such as 300 micrometres as a practical starting point for wider monitoring. Participants recognised that smaller particles may be highly relevant scientifically, but also noted that policy monitoring must begin with methods that are feasible and comparable across different contexts.

The discussion also addressed the importance of understanding the limits of each method. Monitoring frameworks should not only report results, but also explain what they do not capture, including smaller particles, additives, leachables, polymer-specific detection limits, blanks and methodological uncertainty.

Cross-cutting insights

- Monitoring must be policy-ready. Scientific data should be robust enough to support regulatory indicators, enforcement, reporting and decision-making.
- Standardisation is essential. Without harmonised methods, reported data cannot be reliably compared across countries, sectors or projects.
- Methodological limits must be transparent. Monitoring results should clearly state detection limits, size ranges, assumptions, blanks and uncertainties.
- Research and monitoring serve different purposes. Research can explore smaller particles and advanced techniques, while regulatory monitoring needs practical and widely applicable methods.
- Source attribution is crucial. Monitoring should not only measure pollution but also help identify where it comes from, including products, wastewater, ports, aquaculture systems and industrial emissions.
- Targets and thresholds remain a major gap. Monitoring data must eventually be connected to ecological impacts, acceptable limits and clear policy responses.
- Industry data and reporting obligations need alignment. If actors report emissions using different methodologies, it becomes difficult to evaluate whether restrictions and policy measures are effective.
- Demonstration sites can support innovation in monitoring. Projects such as PHAROS could offer useful test environments for linking monitoring with real-world marine and freshwater systems.
- International cooperation is important. Global and European initiatives, including methods used by international organisations and regional monitoring networks, should be considered when developing harmonised frameworks.

Policy recommendations

Recommendation No1

Develop harmonised monitoring protocols for microplastics and plastic pollution.

EU and regional authorities should support the development and uptake of standardised methods for sampling, analysis and reporting, ensuring that data are comparable across projects, countries and policy frameworks.

Recommendation No2

Clarify the distinction between research monitoring and regulatory monitoring.

Policy frameworks should recognise that advanced research methods and operational monitoring systems have different purposes, costs and levels of feasibility.

Recommendation No3

Establish minimum common parameters for monitoring.

A shared baseline should be defined for particle size ranges, reporting units, polymer types, blanks, limits of detection and quality assurance requirements.

Recommendation No4

Connect monitoring data to regulatory indicators and measurable targets.

Monitoring should support not only data collection but also the development of thresholds, limit values, trend assessment and policy evaluation mechanisms.

Recommendation No5

Strengthen source identification and prevention-oriented monitoring.

Monitoring systems should help identify pollution sources, including industry, wastewater, urban systems, aquaculture, ports and product-related emissions, in order to support targeted prevention measures.

Recommendation No6

Ensure transparency around methodological limitations.

All monitoring results should clearly report what the method captures and what it excludes, including particle size limits, uncertainties, blanks and assumptions used for conversion or interpretation.

Recommendation No7

Align reporting obligations with standardised methodologies.

Where regulatory reporting is required, especially in relation to microplastic restrictions and emissions, authorities should avoid allowing fully fragmented reporting methods that make policy evaluation difficult.

Recommendation No8

Use demonstration sites and EU projects as testbeds for policy-ready monitoring.

Mission Ocean and related projects should be encouraged to test monitoring approaches in real-world environments and share lessons with regulatory bodies.

Recommendation No9

Promote collaboration between science, policy, industry and local implementation actors.

Policy-ready monitoring requires cooperation between researchers, regulators, industry representatives, project partners and local authorities.

Recommendation No10

Translate monitoring results into action pathways.

When monitoring shows high pollution levels or exceeded targets, there should be clear mechanisms for remediation, prevention, enforcement or further investigation.

Next steps identified during the workshop

- continue collaboration between REMEDIES, INSPIRE, UPSTREAM, PHAROS and other related projects;
- explore how monitoring approaches can better align with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Water Framework Directive;
- support further dialogue on harmonised microplastics monitoring at EU and regional level;
- examine how emission reporting obligations can be linked to standardised methodologies;
- identify demonstration sites where monitoring approaches can be tested in real-world conditions;
- explore possible links with international monitoring initiatives and organisations using isotopic, nuclear or other advanced methods;
- develop clearer pathways for translating monitoring results into policy decisions, prevention measures and remediation actions.

Conclusion

The 3rd REMEDIES Policy Workshop showed that Europe is making significant progress in plastic pollution monitoring, but also that scientific progress must now be translated into policy-ready systems.

The workshop highlighted that effective monitoring requires more than advanced methods. It requires harmonisation, transparency, standardisation, source attribution and clear links to regulatory indicators and measurable targets. Participants underlined that monitoring should help policymakers understand not only what is present in the environment, but also where it comes from, whether policies are working and what action should follow.

By bringing together research projects, policymakers, industry actors and Mission Ocean stakeholders, the workshop contributed to an important discussion on how plastic pollution data can support real-world solutions. The next step is to ensure that monitoring frameworks become practical tools for prevention, remediation and policy implementation across Europe.