

Putting the ‘Work’ back into Workshop – the EPHEMARE stakeholder workshop on microplastics in the marine environment

Kathrin Kopke * 1, Sophie Power 1, Camilla Catarci Carteny † 2

1 MaREI Centre, ERI, University College Cork – MaREI Centre, at Beaufort Building, Environmental Research Institute (ERI), University College Cork (UCC), Haulbowline Rd, Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork, Ireland, Ireland 2 SPHERE Group, Department of Biology, University of Antwerp – Campus Groenenborger, Groenenborgerlaan 171, 2020 Antwerp, Belgium, Belgium

The JPI Oceans-funded EPHEMARE (Ecotoxicological Effects of Microplastics in Marine Ecosystems) project invited 30 representatives from the fields of Industry, Research/Science and Regulation/Policy to Antwerp, Belgium, on February 21st, 2018. The workshop showcased the latest research findings on the topic, within the context of the existing and emerging EU regulatory, policy, and legal landscape; identified future research questions considering all stakeholders’ needs; and facilitated collaborative work to identify potential solutions - addressing adverse impacts of microplastics on marine life - that are deemed effective and implementable. Workshop participants learned about opportunities to provide scientific input on microplastics to the new cycle of monitoring for the MSFD Task Group on Marine Litter, towards the implementation of the newly-released Plastic Strategy, and the ECHA communication concerning REACH restrictions for microplastics intentionally added in products. EPHEMARE scientists highlighted that detection of micro- and nanoplastic effects may require dedicated approaches which are beyond the current standard methods (e.g. effects on animal behaviour), and the need for Environmental Quality Standards (EQS) for different size classes and types of plastics. The future direction of microplastic research was discussed in break-out groups of five, and was reported back to the room. Finally, groups worked together to formulate potential solutions to address adverse impacts of microplastics on marine ecosystems. The workshop adapted the World Café method (<http://www.theworldcafe.com/>), to create an environment fostering collaboration and inclusivity. Workshop participants voted as individuals and anonymously on the in the group work, identified potential solutions under the categories of perceived (a) effectiveness and (b) feasibility, to allow expression of individual opinions. Outcomes of this workshop, such as the current state and the future direction of microplastic research, were summarised in a briefing note, which has been utilised to inform funding agencies and policymakers.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement, project workshop, science policy interface, science industry communication, future research direction for micro, plastics

*Speaker †Corresponding author: camilla.catarcicarteny@uantwerpen.be