

# Policy solutions for management of contaminated sediments in the EU

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## Introduction:

LIFE SEDREMED project aims to promote the interinstitutional debate to develop a uniform and clear legislative framework for the identification, classification, and management of contaminated sediments. The Environmental Quality Standards directive and the Italian law fail to provide extensive sediment-specific pollutants concentrations limits.

Unfortunately, as of today the Italian law only foresees detailed guidelines for dredging interventions and thus does not answer the needs of environmental operators when working in an area that has contaminated sediments but does not need dredging (as in Bagnoli). A specific divulgation event was organized on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February in Brussels and saw the participation of DG ENV, the Italian Ministry of Environment, the Swedish Geotechnical Institute, Rijkswaterstaat (NL), the Flemish Waste Management Agency (OVAM), the Wallonia Ministry of Environment, the Finnish and Italian Permanent Representations to the EU together with other experts from industry and academia. This event was also the occasion to build on the work realized by SedNet and summarized in the CIS document connected to the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The main question that was addressed by experts is: **Do we need an EU-wide intervention on sediment management or are national policy and regional cooperation more suitable to address the topic?** The European Commission confirmed that *“Defining EU restoration thresholds at European level concerning environmental assessment, unfortunately, wouldn't take into consideration the other environmental and socio-economic impacts of restoration intervention”*.

It also sponsored regional cooperation as an excellent tool for policy coordination at sea-basin level recognizing however that there is a high disparity between the activities of HELCOM (Baltic sea) and OSPAR (North sea) compared with the Barcelona Convention (Mediterranean sea) where, given the presence of several non-EU countries, *“it could be very difficult to set standards higher or more detailed than what is required by EU legislation”*.

Sweden, Flanders and the Netherlands confirmed that they share the same kind of approach, through determination of sediment specific EQS and “trigger

values” at national level but also by developing site-specific risk analysis that allows to take into consideration also different aspects that cannot be taken into account at EU level such as area destination, specific pollutants and financial expenses.

**Methods:** The SedNet conference will allow us to organize a second roundtable to deepen the thematic and continue the discussion in order to better integrate the expertise from SedNet and prepare the work for the next LIFE SEDREMED institutional event that will be organized in Rome together with the Italian Government in the first semester of 2024.

## Expected Results and Discussion:

More detail on the event will be soon accessible on our website, but in the meantime, we report hereafter our preliminary discussion: We consider as useful an inter-institutional debate to evaluate the definition of sediment-specific EQS at European level to align all Member States on a common benchmark for sediment classification and management. These pan-European EQS could be completed with EU targets for the prevention of sediment contamination that include pollution reduction plans specifically dedicated to sediments. Then at regional level (sea-basin cooperation) and national legislation can provide the possibility of defining more stringent limits and including additional specific substances associated with more detailed management guidelines. At the national level, EQS could be transformed into “intervention thresholds” and the application in parallel of site-specific risk analysis processes to define the details and objectives of intervention projects according to final use of the areas and the socio-economic aspects. This could enable to implement decontamination/management plans using the BATNEEC approach (Best Available Techniques at Not Exceeding Excessive Cost). The objective is to integrate and support SedNet work in the process for policy innovation in the field of sediment management.

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