



Gull Bulletin 1/2023 (Fisherman's friend in circular issues)

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Let us introduce ourselves, meet Gus and CIRCNETS!

Let me congratulate you on receiving the first edition of the Gull Bulletin. This special newsletter has been prepared by me, Gus. You do not have to be an ornithologist to figure out from my image – yes, that's me there in the right corner of this page – that I belong to the family or Laridae, but I am often called as gull or seagull. I am a keen fisher and I just love seafood, and that is the reason why I have been selected as the spokesperson for CIRCNETS project. But what is this CIRCNETS then?

Single use plastics (SUP) and fishing gear are the most important sources of marine plastic pollution in Europe. The European Union wants to improve the state of the marine environment and they have put together this SUP directive, which you might have heard of already. Many single use items that were made of plastic are now made with more sustainable materials. For example, plastic straws have been phased out and replaced with cardboard ones.

This is a good step towards plastic free marine environment, but similar transition to non-plastic materials is not possible with fishing gear. Therefore this issue has to be approached from a different angle. SUP directive requires that producers and importers of fishing gear must take care of the fishing gear waste in the spirit of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). They have to form a producer responsibility organization, which provides a free of charge collection service for end-of-life (EOL) fishing gear. As there is a proper collection system in place, fishing waste should not be left into the nature and the impact of fishing on marine plastic pollution should decrease.

CIRCNETS, which is acronym for Blue Circular Nets, is a project that is funded by INTERREG NPA. The project tackles collection and recycling of EOL fishing gear in the programme area, which covers the Northern, peripheral and Arctic parts of Europe. The geographical area is vast and there is a lot of differences between the seven programme partner countries, but they share also common challenges, such as long distances, low population density, lack of critical mass, etc. Separate collection of fishing gear is already offered in some countries, but many are only now coming into terms with these requirements. CIRCNETS aims to find solutions to the collection and recycling of EOL fishing gear in the NPA region and to share these best practices.

Project partnership

The project is coordinated by University of Oulu, Finland, and besides UO there is two other academic institutions on board – Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU) and National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG). The partnership includes also Western Development Commission (WDC) from Ireland and Municipality of Sotenäs from Sweden. Sotenäs is the site for the only dedicated marine recycling centre in the Nordic Countries, whereas the Icelandic partner, MarEco Ltd, is an SME involved in production of fishing gear. The partnership has wide expertise on the matter and covers a lot of different angles.



Partners in sunny Sotenäs, Sweden, in end of April during the kick-off meeting. Sotenäs is home to the only marine recycling centre in the Nordic Countries.

Overall aim of the project

As mentioned, CIRCNETS has been set out to find out the current EOL fishing gear situation in the NPA region, and to give recommendations on how collection should be organised with regards to the local circumstances and national legislative requirements. This will help the regions to be ready when legislative changes enter force. The project will also point out the possibilities that the separately collected EOL fishing gear holds, as this can be used as raw material. This can create business opportunities and support a circular economy in the NPA region.

CIRCNETS project is following in the footsteps of previously implemented NPA projects of Circular Ocean, Blue Circular Economy and Blue Circular Tech, which have demonstrated, that this issue requires transnational approach. CIRCNETS is utilising the outcomes of these projects and taking them further. The project also includes partner countries, which have not been involved in the previous projects.

Project activities

The aim of the WP1 of the project is to form an overall picture of the status quo: What happens to EOL fishing gear, who is responsible for collecting it, how much fishing gear waste is generated annually and how much of it is recycled? The partners will find out the situation in their region through surveys, interviews and literature search. The situation varies country by country, there are very important commercial fishing nations in the project – such as Norway and Iceland – but on the other hand also countries with hundreds of thousands of spare time fishers as in the case of Finland and Sweden. The fishing gear waste generated by both should be collected. Some regions have progressed further in this field already, so sharing these best practices can help others in putting the collection system together. What works in one corner of the NPA region might be worth considering in other regions as well.



Fishing gear at the Sotenäs marine recycling center waiting for separating of materials.

Collecting fishing gear is one issue, another one is recycling it and utilising it in the production of new items. Fishing gears contain a lot of different kinds of materials, and the gear needs to be stripped apart to recyclable and non-recyclable materials. How much of these materials can be recovered from fishing gear waste annually, for which purposes they can be used, and what technologies are needed to process them? The focus of the WP2 is on the circular economy aspect of fishing gear waste. At the moment, a lot of the already collected materials are processed outside of the NPA region, but could this be changed? And what can be produced locally with these materials?



Separating materials from the collected fishing gear is very labour-intensive work.

WP 3 of the project focuses more closely on the EPR and its implementation on other waste sectors. The partner countries have experience of implementation of different EPR schemes, which might come in handy as the EPR system for fishing gear waste is planned. Lessons learnt from these other fields are important when the project compiles their list of recommendations for setting up a collection and recycling system for EOL fishing gear.

What are we up to next?

The first year of the CIRCNETS has been a busy one, as we have laid down the basis for our project and the upcoming activities and mapped out the current status of the EOL fishing gear. Surveys for ports and aqua culture companies were carried out and you will hear more about these in our next newsletter, which will be published in early 2024. There are a lot of other things coming along as well in the second project year. We are also preparing webinars about the economic potential of EOL fishing gear for the spring, and if you are interested in these upcoming events, or have something else to share with us, do contact us. You can find the contact details of the individual partners below and you can find the link to our temporary website in the footer.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a relaxing holiday season! May your year 2024 be blessed with bountiful catch and circulating nets!

Gus, on behalf of the whole CIRCNETS team

Contact details:

- ✂ Lead partner – University of Oulu, Niko Hänninen (niko.hanninen@oulu.fi, +358 (0) 29 448 74 22).
- ✂ MarEco, Atli Mar Josafatsson (atlimar@polardoors.com, +354 (0) 898 66 77)
- ✂ Municipality of Sotenäs, Maria Petterson (maria.petterson@sotenas.se, +46 (0) 73 664 02 12)
- ✂ National University of Ireland Galway, Paula Costa Domech (paula.costadomech@univeristyofgalway.ie, +353 (0) 89 201 92 83)
- ✂ Norwegian University of Technology and Science, Siv Marina Flø Grimstad (sika@ntnu.no, +47 (0) 70 161 263)
- ✂ Western Development Commission, Ciara Herity (ciara.herity@wdc.ie, +353 (0) 87 090 30 48)



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Blue Circular Nets (CIRCNETS)

<https://www.oulu.fi/en/projects/blue-circular-nets>

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