



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Healthier oceans and human beings: Sponges as “engine” of the deep sea

Tuesday 6 November 2018

11:00-12:30

ASP 3H1, European Parliament, Brussels

Hosted by

Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP

Chair of the working group on “*Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services*”
Member of the EP Committee on “*Fisheries*”

Co-organized with the

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Sponge grounds are one of the most diverse, ecologically and biologically important and vulnerable marine ecosystems of the deep-sea but have received very little research and conservation attention to date.

Latest findings give proof of the remarkable potential of sponges, not only for the health of our Ocean, but also for human beings, as anti-cancer and anti-malarial compounds have been found in the organisms.

The [SponGES project](#), funded under the H2020, aims at developing an integrated ecosystem-based approach to preserve and sustainably use deep-sea sponge ecosystems of the North Atlantic. This initiative, supported by a consortium of international and interdisciplinary research institutions, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations aims at strengthening the knowledge-base on North Atlantic sponge ground ecosystems by investigating their distribution, diversity, biogeography, function and dynamics; Improving innovation and industrial application by unlocking the biotechnological potential of these ecosystems; Improving the capacity to model, understand and predict threats and impacts and climate-driven changes to these ecosystems; Advancing the science-policy interface and developing tools for improved resource management and governance of these ecosystems from regional to international levels across the North Atlantic.

The event will gather stakeholders and policy-makers to further discuss how the potential of sponges can be unlocked and how this research can support key policies and legislation, such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), EU Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area, the Galway Statement on Atlantic Ocean Cooperation, as well as international agreements established to conserve Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) and Ecologically or Biologically Sensitive Areas (EBSAs).

Participation in the meeting will provide you with an understanding of the importance and fragility of deep-sea sponge ecosystems, their potential and the need to take appropriate management measures to sustainably use and protect such areas from potential impacts due to other uses, such as e.g. fishing.

Contact: Stella Reschke, Intergroup Secretariat - stella.reschke@ebcd.org, + 32 2 230 30 70



DRAFT AGENDA

11:00-11:15 **Introduction**

- Welcoming from **Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP**
- **Marco Weydert**, Senior Policy Officer, Marine Resources Unit, DG RTD
- Introductory remarks by **Claus Hagebro (FAO)**

11:15-11:25 **The importance of studying deep sea sponges**

Hans Tore Rapp (University of Bergen)

11:25-11:40 **Biodiversity and the relevance to conservation**

Javier Cristobo (Spanish Institute of Oceanography)

Exchange and discussion with the audience

11:40-11:50 **Understanding function and importance of sponge grounds**

Anna de Kluijver (Utrecht University)

11:50-12:05 **Threats and impacts; Effects of fisheries and climate change**

Ana Colaço (IMAR & University of the Azores)

Exchange and discussion with the audience

12:05-12:20 **Biotechnology potential (BlueTech) - creating new options for economy and employment?**

Tiago Henriques da Silva (University of Minho, Portugal)

Questions and concluding discussion

12:20-12:30 **Concluding remarks by the Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP and Claus Hagebro (FAO)**

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