

THE PLASTISPHERE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: EXPÉDITION MED SETS SAIL TO STUDY THIS ALARMING ECOSYSTEM

Novamont is supporting the initiative

Novara, 22 June 2017 – The Expédition MED 2017 scientific campaign sets sail today from the port of Fiumicino. For two months the crew of the Ainez will sail the waters of the central and southern Mediterranean in order to study the so-called plastisphere, the new ecosystem of marine microorganisms and bacteria which colonise and live on micro-fragments of degraded plastic. These microorganisms and bacteria feed on plastic particles and can transform themselves into microbial barriers which are entirely distinct from surrounding biological communities.

According to marine biologists **Linda Amaral-Zettler and Erik Zettler, whose research led to the discovery of the plastisphere**, thirty minutes after reaching the sea plastic waste is colonised by these microorganisms, contaminating any fish farms it floats into. The interdisciplinary team of Expédition MED 2017, composed of scientists, oceanographers and volunteers, will study this alarming habitat which can play a key role in the aggregation and transport of toxic chemical substances and microorganisms which invade ecosystems and are harmful to humans.

From 22 June until 19 August, Expédition MED will cover around 2,000 nautical miles between the south of the Tyrrhenian Sea, the southern Mediterranean (particularly around the island of Lampedusa), the Ionian Sea and finally the Adriatic Sea, one of the areas with the highest density of plastic waste.

EXPÉDITION MED

Founded in France by Bruno Dumontet, the Expédition MED NGO conducts scientific research into plastic in the Mediterranean Sea through maritime expeditions and by creating an international network of collaborators. In addition to supporting scientific research by creating a Citizen's Laboratory of

participatory science, Expédition MED also aims to develop an international network composed of research centres and environmental associations involved specifically in studying plastic waste. It has also joined the fight to reduce plastic waste, raising awareness and mobilising the general public and decision makers as to the damage caused by plastic waste in the sea, as well as supporting alternative solutions to plastics from fossil sources.

Novamont has supported the initiative for a number of years as part of the citizen science project, which also involves collaborating with Goletta Verde of Legambiente and Plastic Buster from the University of Siena.

The team on board Expédition MED 2017:

RESEARCHERS AND SCIENTISTS

Linda Amaral-Zettler, NIOZ Marine Royal Dutch Institute for Sea Research

Erik Zettler, NIOZ Marine Royal Dutch Institute for Sea Research

Stéphane Bruzaud, University of Bretagne Sud

Enrico Zambianchi, University of Naples

Cristiana Guerranti, Bioscience Research Centre, University of Siena

Jean-Louis Brunet, JLBA Médical, Lyon

Bruno Michel, Henri-Pierre Aberlenc, CIRAD, Montpellier

Cédric Audibert, Museum of Natural History, Lyon

François Dussoulier, Museum of Natural History, Toulon

Yvon Perrin, IRD - Institut pour la Recherche et Développement de Montpellier (Montpellier Research and Development Institute)

CREW

Giulio Cesare Giuà, skipper

Bruno Dumontet, expedition leader

Tosca Ballerini, scientific coordinator

Laura Frère, researcher

Jérémy Mansui, oceanographer

Marion Philippon, volunteer

Thomas Defrance, volunteer

Justin Masson, volunteer

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