MEP Group on Climate Change,
Biodiversity & Sustainable Development

FINAL REPORT

CONFERENCE TO INITIATE SCALE-OUT OF PRO-COAST, A HORIZON PROJECT

PRO-COAST: A PROACTIVE APPROACH FOR COMMUNITIES TO ENABLE SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION - COORDINATED BY ESUG

Tuesday 13 October 2026 - European Parliament



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In his opening remarks, **MEP André Rodrigues** underlined that nature is protected best when the people living alongside it are actively involved and made part of the solution. He drew attention to the fact that European coasts are facing increasing pressure from both climate change and human presence, noting that communities most exposed to ecosystem degradation are often the least protected in policy frameworks. MEP Rodrigues emphasised that this reality is what makes the PRO-COAST project unique; a rising EU initiative built on social and behavioural science, bringing together 20 partners across 14 countries. He underlined that the primary goal is not to impose change, but to co-create it by integrating local stakeholders. Furthermore, he highlighted that while most environmental decision-support tools exist only in English, creating significant language barriers, PRO-COAST speaks the language of the people it serves through a platform available in 14 languages. He described this as a step towards a Europe where every community can participate in environmental governance. Finally, he pointed out that over the past years, the project has produced practical tools - including a new set of self-improving apps for environmental decision support hosted on a community sustainability platform that will continue serving communities well after the project ends - as it transitions into its next phase, to deploy these tools across 10 case studies in Europe.

Providing an introduction to the PRO-COAST initiative, **Dr. Julie Ewald** structured her presentation around three key pillars; ethos, logos, and pathos. Regarding ethos, she articulated how credibility, values, and trust are established within this diverse consortium by co-creating knowledge and restoring coastal ecosystems. She expressed particular enthusiasm for the shared vision to empower local communities and civil society, ensuring they can participate in local environmental governance while accessing co-created biodiversity tools in their own local languages. Turning to logos, Dr. Ewald stressed the real-world urgency facing coastal populations, presenting the project's framework for biodiversity conservation, inclusive local governance, and evidence-based evidence designed to drive behavioural change. Lastly, addressing pathos, she declared that societal transformation is the core emotional appeal and ultimate goal driving PRO-COAST's work, which is actively being put into practice across the project's 10 case studies.

Following the project introduction, **Prof. Robert Kenward** outlined the project's key conclusions, mentioning that a successful transition to sustainability requires combining top-down scientific knowledge with bottom-up local expertise. He observed that while local communities possess rich spatial knowledge of their areas - such as mapping species records - they often lack measures to track broader habitat changes. Consequently, Prof. Kenward explained that the initial stage of the project focused on building awareness among local residents and councils to foster genuine engagement in the transition process. He moved on to introduce the "Conservation and Human Use Index" which balances biodiversity conservation with human activities to identify both potential conflicts and synergies - also making reference to the Deep Change Manual (an 18,000-word effort,

which is already in English and German and may become very influential looking ahead). In conclusion, Prof. Kenward warmly welcomed the deployment of the multilingual platform to guide local communities toward long-term sustainability, while raising the critical question of securing continued funding once the project period concludes.

Taking the floor to provide the European Commission's perspective, **Lucie Vidonne** (Biodiversity Policy Officer, DG RTD) detailed the context in which PRO-COAST was conceived under Horizon Europe's transformative change topic, forming part of a broader cluster designed to supply the Commission's biodiversity policies with research-backed examples. Addressing future research funding, Ms. Vidonne noted that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028-2034) proposal sets an overarching 35% green target for the EU budget alongside a merged 40% target for Horizon Europe covering climate and biodiversity issues. Furthermore, she suggested key policy avenues where PRO-COAST results could be effectively mainstreamed, including: the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU Long-Term Strategic Research Agenda for Biodiversity, the Nature Restoration Regulation, the EU Strategy on Resilient and Thriving Coastal Communities and the new EC call on Transformative Change Towards a Nature-Positive Economy.

In his intervention, **MEP César Luena** insisted that effective environmental action requires a combination of science, European policymaking, local knowledge, and active community participation. He advocated for making policy with coastal communities, rather than treating them as passive recipients of EU decisions. MEP Luena observed that local experience must be valued alongside scientific evidence, stressing that lasting success is impossible without local understanding and acceptance of change. While commending PRO-COAST for bridging stakeholder participation with local policy formulation, he cautioned that its impact must not remain confined to limited case studies. To this end, he urged for continued action beyond the lifecycle of EU funding, stressing that solutions must be tailored to local contexts, rather than applied as a one-size-fits-all model. Finally, he commented that PRO-COAST should actively feed into the broader EU policy debate, specifically contributing to the EU Ocean Act to foster a coherent ocean policy, ensure a fair and credible transition for affected populations, and align environmental resilience with economic durability.

In his closing remarks, **MEP André Rodrigues** reiterated that true coastal resilience depends on the active empowerment and inclusion of local communities. He emphasised that the innovative tools and multilingual approach developed by PRO-COAST provide a concrete framework to bridge the gap between European policymaking, scientific evidence, and local governance. Looking ahead, MEP Rodrigues expressed strong confidence in the project's next phase, calling on all partners and EU institutions to ensure these scalable solutions continue driving a fair, lasting, and nature-positive societal transformation across Europe’s coastal regions.