Policy Roundtable: From Meadows to Markets: Advancing Seagrass Restoration and Sustainable Financing

Key Takeaways and Discussion Summary

- How can the EU scale up the restoration of Mediterranean seagrass meadows?
- What role can public and private finance play in achieving the ambitious targets of the Nature Restoration Regulation?
- Under what conditions could innovative financing mechanisms, such as nature credits, support marine ecosystem restoration?

These were the central questions explored during the online policy roundtable "***From Meadows to Markets: Advancing Seagrass Restoration and Sustainable Financing***", hosted by MEP Dimitris Tsiodras and co-organised by The Green Tank in the framework of the ARTEMIS Interreg Euro-Med project on June 25, 2026.

More than 80 participants joined the policy roundtable, bringing together representatives from EU institutions, the scientific community, financial organisations and civil society to discuss how to scale up the restoration of *Posidonia oceanica*, support the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, and mobilise innovative financing for healthier and more resilient Mediterranean seas.

The Policy Roundtable featured a welcome greeting from **MEP Dimitris Tsiodras**, a pre-recorded video message from **MEP César Luena**, Rapporteur of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, and an in-**depth panel discussion** moderated by **Ioli Christopoulou**, Policy Director, The Green Tank (ARTEMIS partner).

The panel included a presentation from **Eugenia Apostolaki,** Senior Researcher, Institute of Oceanography, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (ARTEMIS partner), and contributions from **Bettina Doeser**, Head of Unit, Natural Capital & Ecosystem Health, DG Environment, European Commission, **Eva Mayerhofer,** Head of Environmental Policy and Biodiversity, European Investment Bank, **Dominik Maczik,** Technical Analyst, Biodiversity Credits Alliance, and **Dimitra Syrou**, Nature Policy Associate, The Green Tank (ARTEMIS partner), **David Álvarez-García**, CEO, ECOACSA (ARTEMIS partner), and **Constantin Tsakas**, Chief Economist, Plan Bleu / Regional Activity Center of UNEP MAP (ARTEMIS project coordinator).

Key Takeaways

The implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation now enters its critical delivery phase. National Restoration Plans will provide the central framework for identifying restoration priorities, coordinating implementation, and guiding future public and private investment in marine ecosystem restoration.

Protecting existing *Posidonia oceanica* meadows and reducing the pressures affecting them remain the foundation of successful restoration. Active restoration should only be pursued where ecological conditions and scientific evidence demonstrate that natural recovery alone is insufficient.

Scaling up restoration requires moving beyond isolated pilot projects towards long-term public policy. This will depend on coordinated governance, streamlined permitting, common technical standards, effective monitoring, stable financing and knowledge exchange across the Mediterranean.

Public funding will remain indispensable for planning, implementation, monitoring and long-term stewardship. Complementary private finance, including innovative financing mechanisms, can help address the financing gap but cannot replace public responsibility for nature restoration.

Seagrass and marine ecosystem restoration should increasingly be recognised as an investment in natural capital rather than solely as an environmental cost. Achieving restoration targets will require mobilising a diverse financing mix, combining public funding with blended finance and other innovative financial instruments.

Nature credits have the potential to support marine and seagrass ecosystem restoration if developed within robust scientific, governance and environmental integrity frameworks. They should complement, not replace, public funding or regulatory obligations, respect the mitigation hierarchy, and ensure transparency, additionality, independent verification and long-term monitoring.

Growing investor interest in biodiversity finance presents an important opportunity, but scaling investment will require a stronger pipeline of investable restoration projects. Clear standards, credible methodologies, predictable revenue models, appropriate risk-sharing mechanisms and project aggregation will be essential to attract private capital.

The ARTEMIS project demonstrates how ecological restoration, ecosystem service valuation and innovative financing can be brought together in practice. Its experience provides practical lessons that can support the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation, inform the work of the European Commission and the Nature Credits Expert Group, and contribute to the development of credible financing mechanisms for seagrass ecosystem restoration.

Discussion Summary

Setting the scene: from policy ambition to implementation

Opening the roundtable, speakers highlighted the timely policy context in which the discussion took place. With the **Nature Restoration Regulation now in force** and Member States preparing their **National Restoration Plans**, attention is shifting from legislative ambition to practical implementation. At the same time, the European Commission is advancing the **Nature Credits Roadmap** through its Expert Group on Nature Credits, while discussions on the next **Multiannual Financial Framework** will shape future public investment for restoration.

Posidonia oceanica offers an important opportunity to explore how ecological restoration, biodiversity policy and innovative financing can come together to support biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable coastal economies. Throughout the discussion, restoration was presented not only as an environmental objective but increasingly as an investment in natural capital and long-term resilience.

Restoring seagrass ecosystems: scientific challenges and policy implications

The keynote presentation highlighted both the ecological importance of *Posidonia oceanica* and the scientific challenges associated with its restoration. Participants heard that **restoration success depends** first and foremost **on addressing the pressures responsible for ecosystem degradation** and that **increased financing alone cannot reverse biodiversity loss**.

Throughout the discussion, speakers repeatedly stressed that **protecting existing seagrass meadows and enabling natural recovery** wherever possible **must be the first priority**, with **active restoration reserved** for situations where ecological evidence demonstrates that passive recovery alone is insufficient.

Several scientific challenges were discussed, including establishing ecological baselines, defining meaningful indicators of ecosystem recovery, measuring biodiversity gains and monitoring restoration outcomes over the long term. Given the slow recovery of seagrass ecosystems and the additional pressures associated with climate change, participants emphasised that restoration requires **long-term monitoring, adaptive management and realistic ecological expectations**.

From pilot projects to long-term restoration policy

Building on the experience of the Interreg Euro-Med ARTEMIS project, panelists discussed how Posidonia restoration can move beyond individual pilot initiatives and become an integral component of long-term public policy. The project demonstrated how ecological restoration, ecosystem service valuation, natural capital accounting, policy development and innovative financing can be combined into an integrated framework. It was emphasised that the Nature Restoration Regulation creates a unique opportunity to embed restoration within National Restoration Plans, supported by **coordinated governance, streamlined permitting procedures, technical standards and long-term monitoring**. **Knowledge exchange across Mediterranean countries** was recognised as essential for scaling up restoration efforts and replicating successful approaches across different ecological and governance contexts.

Financing restoration: from funding to investment-ready projects

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the distinction between funding and financing. Participants agreed that **public funding remains indispensable** for restoration planning, governance, scientific research, monitoring and long-term stewardship. Existing EU funding instruments already provide important support but are unlikely to meet restoration needs on their own. The discussion, therefore, explored how **blended finance,** from various sources including philanthropy and donor institutions and private investment could help mobilise additional resources over time.

Panelists also emphasised that seagrass and marine ecosystem restoration should increasingly be recognised as an **investment in natural capital** rather than solely as an environmental cost, capable of strengthening climate resilience, biodiversity and sustainable coastal economies.

It was noted that the principal challenge is not the availability of capital but the limited pipeline of investment-ready projects. Developing investable restoration opportunities will require **robust scientific evidence, predictable implementation pathways, appropriate risk-sharing mechanisms and stable governance arrangements**. National Restoration Plans could address this missing link, as they could serve also as a **pipeline of publicly validated restoration projects**, increasing investor confidence by providing greater clarity regarding governance arrangements, restoration priorities and long-term implementation pathways.

Nature credits: opportunities and conditions for credibility

Nature credits were discussed as one possible mechanism for mobilising additional finance for biodiversity restoration. Participants broadly recognised their potential while emphasising that success will depend on scientific credibility, environmental integrity and public trust.

Throughout the discussion, several conditions emerged as essential. **Nature credits must**:

- **complement—not replace—public funding or existing legal obligations.**
- be grounded in **robust ecological evidence** and reward only **measurable, additional and durable ecological restoration outcomes**.
- be supported by **transparent governance, independent verification, long-term monitoring and publicly accessible registries**, and avoid **double counting and inappropriate offsetting**.

Panelists repeatedly referred to the importance of following the **mitigation hierarchy**, ensuring that organisations first avoid, minimise and restore their own impacts before using nature credits to contribute to wider nature-positive outcomes.

The discussion also highlighted the relevance of the **High-Level Principles for Biodiversity Credits**, which emphasise **verified positive outcomes, equity, fairness and good governance** as the foundations of credible nature markets. Several speakers noted that the gradual development of nature credit methodologies provides an opportunity to incorporate lessons learned from carbon markets by prioritising **transparency, stakeholder participation and environmental integrity** from the outset.

Panelists also recognised that marine ecosystems present additional challenges compared with terrestrial systems, including more complex governance arrangements, seabed use, permitting procedures, property rights and the higher costs associated with long-term ecological monitoring. In this context, the recently developed **Posidonia nature credits** by the **ARTEMIS Interreg Euro-MED** project as a tool to support Posidonia restoration efforts

across the Mediterranean offer valuable lessons for the next steps in the EU's effort to develop nature credits.

Scientific challenges and pre-conditions for nature credits in seagrass restoration

Although, nature credits constitute an alternative tool to finance *Posidonia oceanica* restoration, as showcased by the **ARTEMIS Interreg Euro-MED** project, **key scientific challenges** need to first be first addressed, as highlighted in the keynote presentation. Central issues include establishing ecologically meaningful baselines amid historical habitat loss and global environmental change, defining appropriate units of ecological gain, and developing monitoring frameworks that capture multidimensional ecosystem recovery. Existing European monitoring frameworks for *P. oceanica* provide valuable foundations, but restoration success cannot be assessed solely through simple indicators such as restored area or shoot survival. Instead, **robust assessment** should integrate metrics across multiple levels of biological organisation, including assessments of habitat condition, biodiversity trends and carbon dynamics, supported by technological advancements.

The presentation also highlighted the long timescales required for ecological recovery, uncertainties associated with climate change effects on restored meadows, and the need to distinguish genuine ecological gains from offsetting schemes that may fail to address the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss.

Nature credits could become an important financing mechanism **for seagrass restoration**, but only if they are grounded in **rigorous ecological science**, supported by strong governance, and designed to **complement**—rather than replace—**effective regulation** and **sustained public investment**.

Investor perspectives

Panelists noted a **growing interest among investors in biodiversity and nature-positive investments**, including marine ecosystem restoration. However, it was emphasised that the principal challenge is not the availability of capital but the limited pipeline of investment-ready projects. Investors require projects supported by robust scientific evidence, standardised methodologies, credible monitoring systems, stable governance arrangements and appropriate risk-sharing mechanisms. In this context, **public funding will continue to play a catalytic role** in reducing early-stage risks and creating the conditions necessary for complementary private investment to scale over time.

The discussion also explored opportunities to recognise multiple ecosystem services, including biodiversity, blue carbon, coastal resilience and water quality, within carefully designed financing models while **avoiding double counting** and **maintaining environmental integrity**. Such approaches could strengthen the business case for restoration by diversifying revenue streams, provided that clear methodologies and safeguards are established.

Looking ahead

The discussion concluded that implementing the Nature Restoration Regulation will require **continued collaboration** between policymakers, scientists, financial institutions, civil society and restoration practitioners.

Several **themes consistently emerged** throughout the exchange:

- prioritising protection before restoration;
- moving from isolated pilot projects to long-term public policy;
- recognising marine ecosystem restoration as an investment in natural capital;
- maintaining public funding as the foundation for restoration while developing complementary financing mechanisms; and
- ensuring that future nature credit systems are built on robust science, transparent governance and strong environmental safeguards.

As Member States prepare their **National Restoration Plans**, the European Commission continues the work of the **Nature Credits Expert Group** and related initiatives on marine restoration and blue carbon certification, while projects such as the **ARTEMIS Interreg Euro-MED** project provide valuable practical experience to inform future policy development.

Continued dialogue, pilot implementation and knowledge exchange will be essential to developing credible, investment-ready and environmentally sound approaches for financing seagrass and marine ecosystem restoration across Europe.

Closing Remarks

The organisers thank all speakers and participants for their valuable contributions to this timely discussion. The exchange of perspectives from policymakers, scientists, financial institutions and practitioners highlighted both the challenges and the opportunities ahead for scaling up marine ecosystem restoration in Europe and in the Mediterranean. The insights generated through the roundtable will continue to inform the work of the ARTEMIS project and the broader policy dialogue on implementing the Nature Restoration Regulation and developing credible financing mechanisms for nature restoration.

For more information:

- ARTEMIS Interreg Euro-MED project: https://artemis.interreg-euro-med.eu/
- Review of the Policy Roundtable: https://thegreentank.gr/en/2026/06/26/artemis-policy-roundtable-en/
- ARTEMIS Policy Recommendations: https://artemis.interreg-euro-med.eu/policy-recommendation-for-seagrass-restoration/

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