



Blue Circular Nets – Promoting Collection and Recycling of EOL Fishing Gear in the European North

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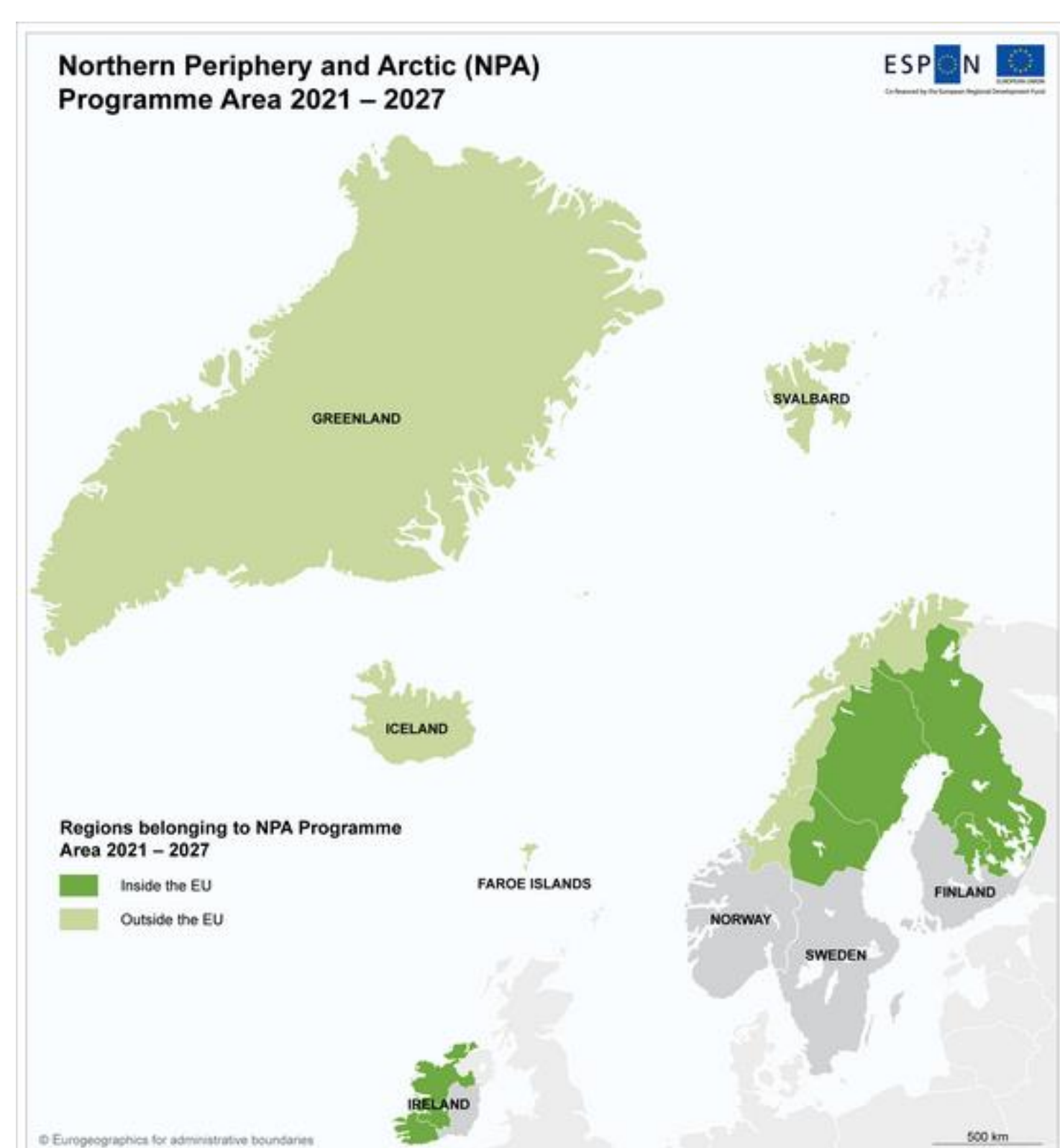
Background of the CIRCNETS project

Single use plastics (SUP) and fishing gear are the most important sources of marine plastic pollution in Europe. European Union has taken firm steps to improve the state of the marine environment. The most significant measure is the SUP directive, which has led to the replacing of plastic with more sustainable materials in many single use items. For example, plastic straws have been phased out and replaced with cardboard ones.

Since similar transition to non-plastic materials is not possible with fishing gear, the SUP directive requires that producers and importers of these items 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. Separate collection of fishing gear is already offered in some countries, but many are only now coming into terms with these requirements.

NPA region and the project partnership

The CIRCNETS project is funded by Interreg NPA, 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.



Map of the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme area 2021-2027.

The project is coordinated by University of Oulu, Finland, and besides UO there is two other academic institutions involved in the project, 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 includes also associated partners from partner countries & from Faroe Islands and Greenland.



www.oulu.fi/en/projects/blue-circular-nets



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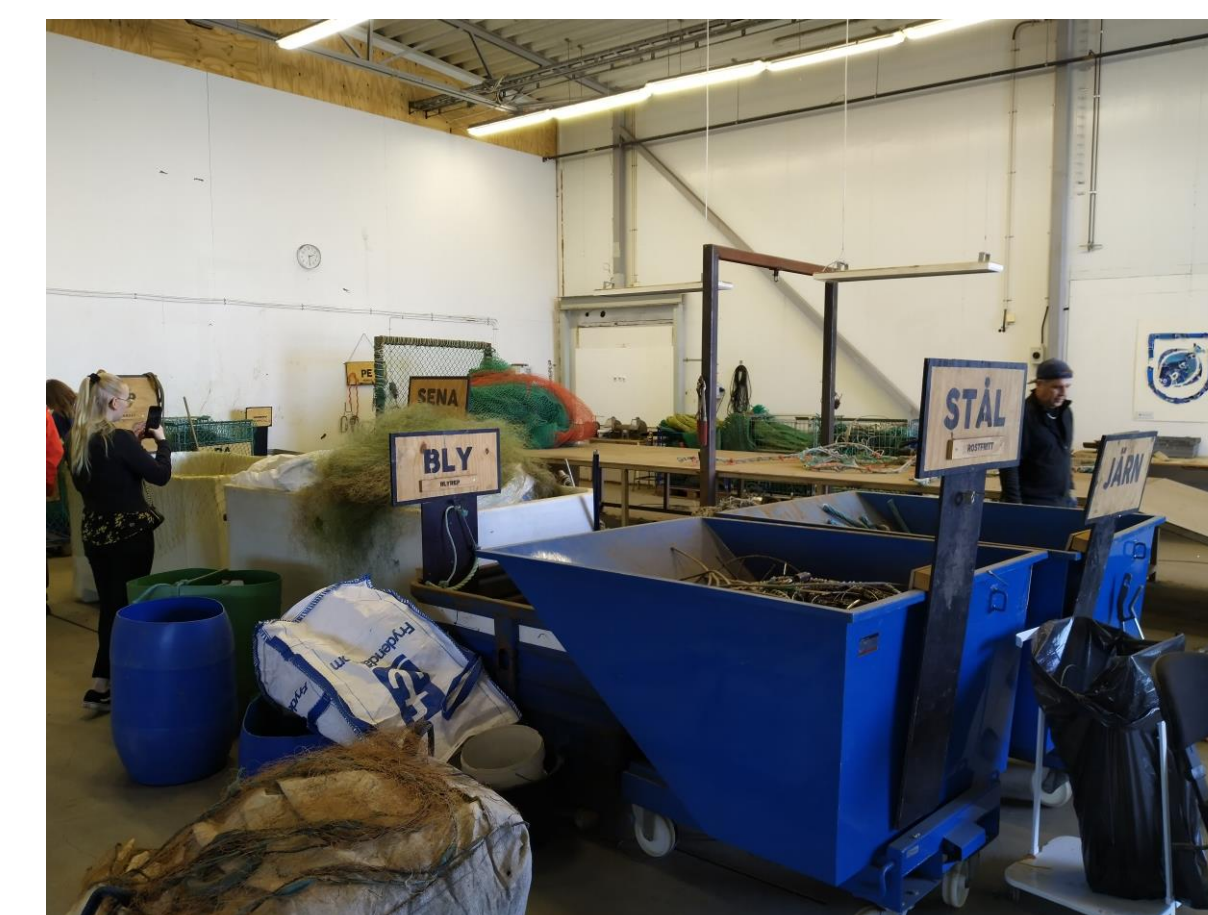
Overall aim of the project

CIRCNETS will map out the current EOL fishing gear situation in the NPA region, and give recommendations, how collection should be organised taking into consideration local circumstances and 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, and how this can 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 outcomes of these projects and taking them further.



Fishing nets laid out in a small fishing harbour in the NPA region.



Separating of materials from collected fishing nets at the Sotenäs Marine recycling center.

Project activities

WP1 Fishing gear volumes and collection responsibilities & practices defines the status quo. The partners will find out the situation in their region through surveys, interviews and literature search. The situation varies a lot country by country, there are countries with a lot of commercial fishing, but also others with hundreds of thousands of spare time fishers. The fishing gear waste generated by both groups 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.

WP2 Marine plastic mitigation model concentrates on the on the circular economy aspect of fishing gear waste. Collecting fishing gear is one issue, another one is recycling it and utilising it in production of new items. Fishing gears contain a lot of different kind of materials, and the gear needs to be striped apart to recyclable and non-recyclable materials. 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 with these materials, and what technologies are needed to process them?

WP3 EPR for EOL fishing gear focuses more closely on the EPR and its implementation on other waste sectors. Experiences from the other EPR schemes might come in handy as the 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.

Dissemination plays a central role in the project with several webinars, workshops and other communication activities planned to spread the best practices of collection, recycling and reuse of fishing gear waste. Gus the Gull –see the right top corner of this poster – is the spokesperson of the project, who will share this information with professional and spare time fishers as well as with SMEs wanting to utilize the collected fishing gear. Gus informs also the general audience about the dangers of marine litter.

