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Further Reading: Britton, E., McHugh, P. & Domegan, C. (2019) [Our Oceans & Human Health Citizen Conversations Summary Report](#), EU SOPHIE Project, Whitaker Institute, NUI Galway, Ireland.

H2020 SOPHIE Consortium (2020). [A Strategic Research Agenda for Oceans and Human Health in Europe](#). H2020 SOPHIE Project. Ostend, Belgium.

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Read More About: The SOPHIE project: www.sophie2020.eu

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Citizen Priorities for Oceans and Human Health

The ocean is under increasing pressure from climate change, biodiversity loss, further degradation through human impacts, and other global changes, resulting in unpredictable, uneven and uncertain outcomes for society including varied risks for human health. In response, the EU Horizon 2020 project SOPHIE (Seas and Oceans for Public Health in Europe) asked European citizens: *How do we protect public health and the health of the marine environment for a more sustainable future?* These discussions identified key priorities and actions for OHH that informed the [Strategic Research Agenda for Oceans and Human Health \(OHH\)](#) in Europe.

Following an online, pan-European citizen survey in 14 countries, generating over 14,000 priorities for OHH, a randomly selected sub-sample of 740 priorities were analyzed into 23 priority categories. Next, 14 citizens from 10 European countries participated in a consensus-building workshop around the 23 priority categories, to provide deeper insights into how they perceived the priorities for OHH to be interconnected. This workshop was based on a Collective Intelligence (CI) systems methodology making use of interpretative structural modelling software.

Research Findings

The top ten most voted for OHH priorities were: stronger legislation and regulation of marine industrial activities, education, create a culture of care, raise awareness, invest in OHH, balance human actions with marine protection, eliminate plastic pollution, develop technologies, reduce global warming and increase the knowledge-base on OHH. Citizens also generated a structural priority map for OHH in Europe. The map not only revealed priorities for OHH, but also illustrated how the citizens considered the priorities to be interrelated. For example, the need to 'increase the Knowledge-Base on Oceans and Human Health' significantly impacts the need to 'Eliminate Plastic Pollution', which in turn significantly impacts the need to 'Balance Human Actions with Marine Protection.'

In addition, citizens identified actions for the successful protection of ocean and public health. The top voted for actions included:

1. *Education – Educate about the importance of oceans for human health for all, and*
2. *Create a culture of care – Promote care and respect for the environment.*

Policy Implications

Dynamic governance systems, integrated with adaptive management in response to increasing and more rapid changes in the ocean, could successfully allow policy makers and managers shift from marine to 'ocean policy'. Such a re-orientation would recognise the dynamic interplay of how the various priorities play out at local and global scales, by taking the marine and human health in its totality into consideration.