

Business Brief: AQUACROSS Recommendations for tourism in relation to aquatic ecosystems

WHY IS AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANT FOR TOURISM OPERATORS?

Aquatic biodiversity is the range of wildlife, plants and other living organisms in seas, coasts, lakes, rivers and wetlands. Many tourism businesses depend on the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity - diverse wildlife, clean water and beaches, and beautiful natural environments are critical attractions for tourism in these environments and for the sector's long-term sustainability.

However, tourism activities can put aquatic biodiversity under threat, making it challenging to continue offering high-quality tourism experiences. For example, the AQUACROSS Lough Erne case study ([see Case Study: Lough Erne, Ireland](#)) identified that tourism is a source of invasive alien species introductions, which affect native species in the lake. The presence of invasive alien species, such as Nuttall's pondweed, also restricts access to the lake for recreational boating and fishing. Other tourism-related impacts on aquatic biodiversity include boat traffic, litter, pollution, water withdrawals and tourism infrastructure (e.g. hotels).

The tourism sector benefits from efforts to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems. Such efforts help to reduce risks to operations, for example from reduced recreational access, loss of the wildlife that attracts tourists, or polluted environments. Engaging in ecosystem protection also offers corporate social responsibility benefits and competitive advantages in eco- and sustainable tourism markets.

AQUACROSS identified ecosystem-based management ([see Introducing Ecosystem-based Management \(EBM\)](#)) as a cost-effective way of protecting aquatic biodiversity while maintaining sustainable economic activity. Ecosystem-based management involves any management or policy options intended to restore, enhance and/or protect the resilience of the ecosystem.

AQUACROSS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TOURISM OPERATORS

- **Tourism operators should understand both how their business depends on aquatic biodiversity and the negative impacts of their operations.**

Tourism businesses can impact biodiversity in many ways, for example introduction of invasive species, litter and pollution, water withdrawals, and pressures on the environment from construction. Understanding this is the first way to minimise impacts. For example, the AQUACROSS case study in Lough Erne ([see Case Study: Lough Erne, Ireland](#)) found that tourism boats introduced an invasive pondweed, which then made it difficult for recreational boaters and fishers to access the lake. Local codes of conduct educate tourist boaters and recreational anglers on how to reduce such invasive alien species introductions. Relevant businesses could invest in promoting the codes with their clients.

- Tourism operators should build coalitions with other companies and sectors, particularly those introducing risks for tourism, such as fisheries and renewable energy.**

This can help to coordinate the institutions and regulations that govern the environment and these sectors. For example, in the AQUACROSS case study in the Azores ([see Case Study: Azores](#)) tourism operators (e.g. diving companies) collaborated with the fisheries sector and suggested increased monitoring and enforcement of biodiversity regulations. Both sectors agreed that this would better protect the biodiversity on which both sectors rely.
- Tourism operators should participate in local policy discussions.**

This allows their interests to be taken into account in a way that protects both aquatic biodiversity and sustainable tourism growth. For example, In the AQUACROSS case study in the Azores ([see Case Study: Azores](#)) tourism operators supported expansion of the local marine protected area to protect and promote it as a tourism destination and to maintain their own access.
- Tourism operators reliant on a good quality environment can contribute to financing efforts to protect it.**

For example, in the AQUACROSS case study in the Azores ([see Case Study: Azores](#)), it was estimated that a per-night tax of 0.25EUR would generate 57 500 EUR per year (excluding administrative costs), which would cover the direct costs of the proposed plan to manage the ecosystem. While this would imply some loss of income for tourism operators, it would finance other management efforts to protect biodiversity and the ecosystems in which the tourism sector operates, thus supporting the industry’s longer-term sustainability.
- Tourism operators can provide knowledge to support protection of aquatic biodiversity.**

Some relationships between human activities, aquatic ecosystems, and the benefits they provide to human society can only be understood with knowledge from private sector tourism businesses. Providing this knowledge supports effective management.

 <p>Go to Brief #34: EBM: Why involve stakeholders?</p>	<p>www.aquacross.eu/results</p>	<p>Go to Brief #36: Recommendations: Agriculture</p> 
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Further information

This is one of 38 short briefs summarising the key results of the AQUACROSS Project. For more detailed information on the topics covered in this brief, see the following:

- [AQUACROSS Business Brief: The business benefits of engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals.](#)



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