

# Coastline and Marine Environment in Metropolitan France

**Extract from France's 2021 Environmental Performance  
Review**



# Coastline and Marine Environment in Metropolitan France

**Coveted for their ecological, landscape and cultural wealth and natural resources, the French marine and coastal environments are territories where multiple economic activities coexist. These activities directly or indirectly affect marine and coastal ecosystems and their resistance to environmental change.**

## SPACES WITH MULTIPLE USES

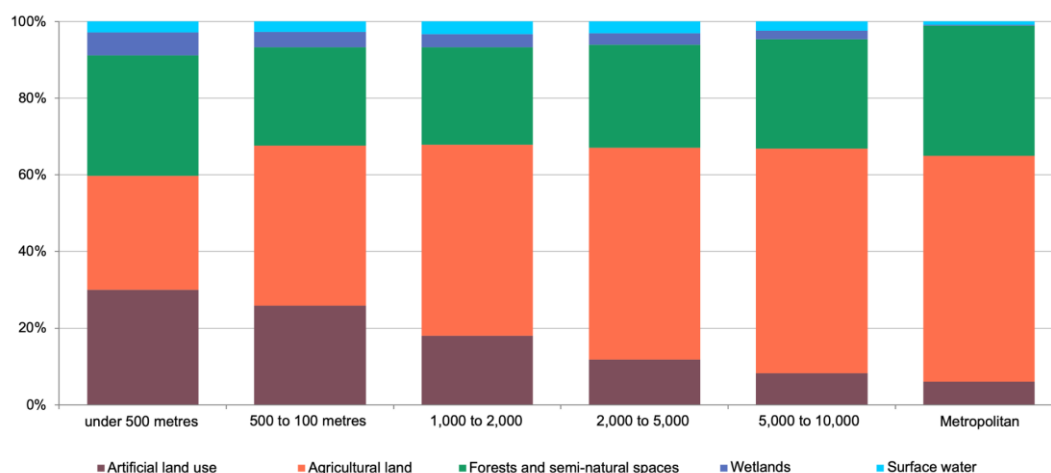
In 2020, the 842 coastal municipalities (excluding estuaries) were home to nearly 8 million inhabitants and covered 4% of metropolitan France. With 265 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, the average population density is 2.5 times higher than the metropolitan France average. This demographic pressure is explained by strong haliotropism on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines, with high net migration. Although situations vary from coast to coast, since the late 2000s the population has generally been growing more rapidly in the hinterland (non-coastal municipalities of coastal townships) than on the coast. This indicates a gradual preference of the population for the hinterland, due partly to the high cost of beach-front property. The coastal municipalities also have accommodation for over 8 million tourists, mainly in second homes. As a direct result of the pressure caused by such human activity, the density of residential buildings in coastal municipalities is high compared to the national average. This indicates a gradual transfer of the population to the hinterland, due, among other things, to the high cost of real estate by the sea.

The economy of these areas is closely linked to consumption by households, residents and tourists. The presentational sphere gather three quarters of employment in coastal municipalities. Many activities take place on both the coast and at sea: fishing, fish farming, maritime transport, marine aggregate extraction, marine renewable energies, boating, shipping, tourism, etc. These activities generate new jobs but also put pressure on ecosystems. Coastal tourism alone generated nearly 216,000 jobs in 2018, compared to 263,000 for all other maritime activities (seafood, transport, shipbuilding, etc.).

## FRAGILE TERRITORIES

As proximity increases to the coast, artificial surfaces increasing. So, less than 500 metres from the shore, artificial surfaces occupy 30% of the land, compared to only 8% between 5,000 and 10,000 metres from the sea. This is five times higher than the metropolitan average at 6% (source: CORINE Land Cover, 2018) – (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Land use by the sea and in metropolitan France in 2018**  
In %



**Sources:** SDES; CORINE Land Cover, 2018. Treatment: SDES, 2019

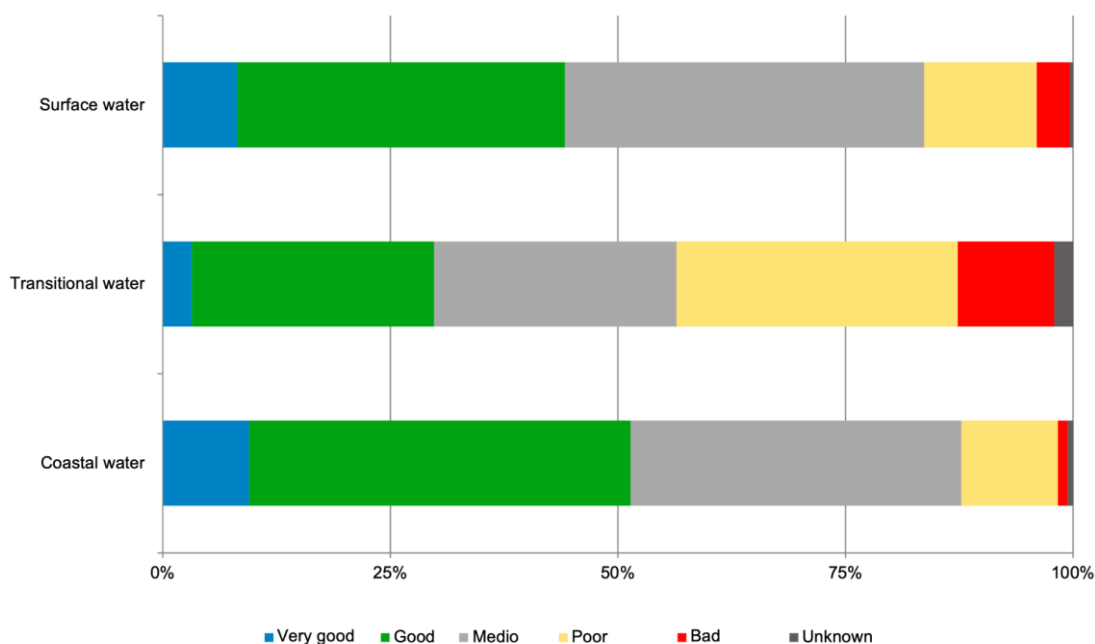
## Fact Sheet: Coastline and Marine Environment in Metropolitan France

Some of these areas are prone to coastal erosion. Approximately 30km<sup>2</sup> of land has been lost over the past 50 years. The areas lost in the departments of Charante-Maritime, Gironde and Bouches-du-Rhône (Camargue) represent more than half of the total area lost. Many areas also face the natural hazard of coastal flooding during adverse weather conditions and tides.

In 2015, 44% of the 273 transitional and coastal waters were in good or very good ecological status (51% of 179 coastal waters and 30% of the 94 transitional waters). The same applies to surface water (rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters) at 44% (Figure 2). The situation is worse for estuaries and lagoons, where only 30% are in good or very good ecological status. This observation is the same for the chemical status of water bodies.

**Figure 2: Ecological status of surface water bodies in 2015**

In %



Note: All surface water bodies (rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters ).

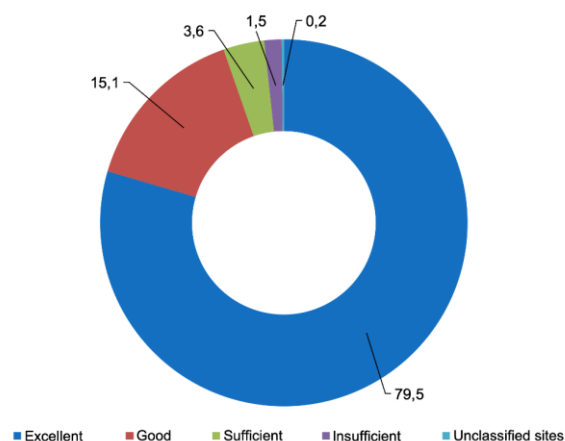
Scope: surface water in France.

Sources: Système d'Information sur l'Eau (SIE); DCE 2016 report based on 2015 data for the whole of France; Treatment: SDES

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94.5% of the 2,047 marine sites inspected in 2020 had excellent or good quality bathing water (Figure 3).

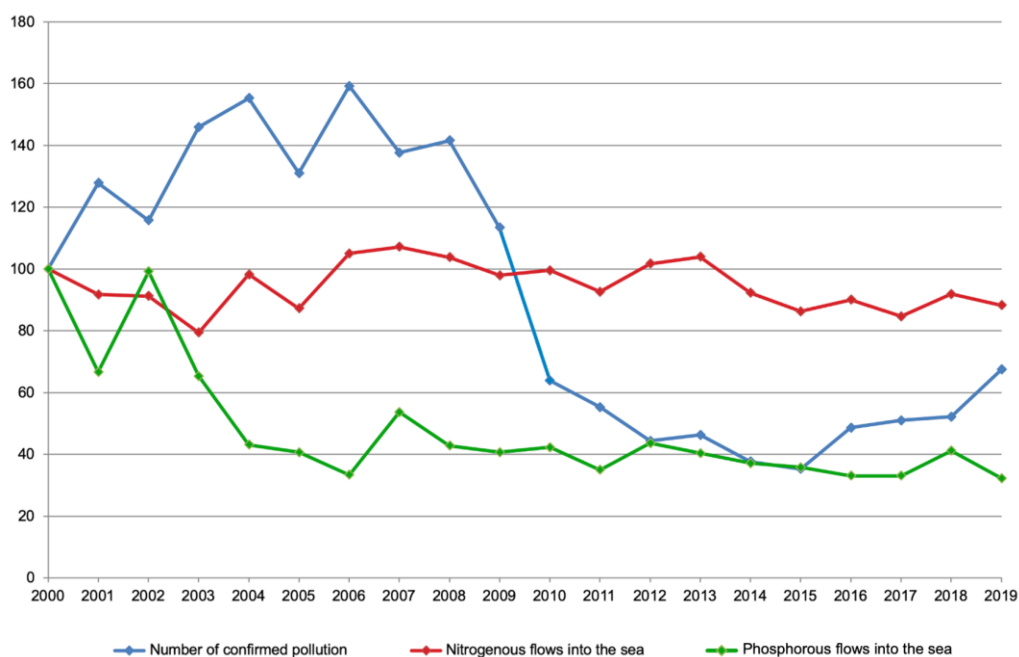
**Figure 3: Breakdown of bathing water quality at sea in 2020**  
In %



**Source:** French Ministry of Solidarity and Health Treatment: SDES, 2021

As a result of tougher legislation, marine pollution levels have fallen significantly over the past decade, but marine litter remains a major environmental concern (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Trends in marine pollution and nutrient flows**  
Base index value 100 in 2000



**Scope:** Metropolitan France and other waters under French jurisdiction.

**Sources:** Cedre; Schapi water board; Banque Hydro. Treatment: Cerema, Rtrend®; SDES, 2021

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## **Fact Sheet:** Coastline and Marine Environment in Metropolitan France

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The national strategy for the sea and coastline, broken down locally into strategic documents for the coastline which require compatible urban planning documents, aims to reconcile economic development and environmental preservation. All coastal municipalities were covered by an urban planning document, (Scot, PLU or municipal map) at the end of 2021.

The protection of natural land is more important in coastal municipalities, partly due to actions carried out by the Conservatoire de l'Espace Littoral et des Rivages Lacustres which has acquired 608 sites in Metropolitan France. At the end of 2021, all the coastal municipalities of metropolitan France were covered by at least one protection system (some Mediterranean municipalities have over 10). The policy of establishing protected marine areas (MPA) is also part of this objective to protect coastal environments in a sustainable manner. In 2021, 23.4% of the surface of French waters was covered by an MPA, thus exceeding the goal set by France in 2009 during the Grenelle de la Mer (20% by 2020).

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

- *La distance à la mer : principal facteur de caractérisation sociodémographique du territoire littoral*, SDDES, Datalab, May 2017, 52pp.
- *Les espaces protégés du littoral : entre zones urbanisées et grands espaces naturels*, SDDES, Datalab Essentiel, January 2020, 4pp.
- [Milieumarinfrance](#)
- [Géolittoral](#)
- [Les milieux littoraux et marins](#) - Notre-environnement