Żibel, the young Maltese NGO fighting ocean waste

Every **change** has to have its start. And we don't need to have a significant individual to lead us to the change: the only thing you have to do is to Start. Starting the change from within yourself is the most inspiring thing for others.

Six years ago a change started in **Malta**. An idea of **cleaning coastal and underwater areas**. Throughout the years more than 5000 volunteers and some 900 divers got involved in the project. They reunited to do their part, and generate the change we all needed.



Zibel, a successful case study

Our name is **Zibel**, our motto '**It starts with you'**, and we're a non-governmental organisation proudly operating in Malta. Our common goal is to **create awareness and inspire action**.

The first years of activity were amazingly successful. Zibel organised over **80 full-scale cleanups** on which divers and coastal volunteers managed to collect more then **131 tonnes of garbage**. Constantly evolving, we introduced a system where all things recovered are properly sorted, catalogued, and everything that can be recycled is further taken care of. That system is letting us follow the changes in distribution of different types of garbage materials, and take more action in promoting the right approach in creating awareness.

Zibel completed multiple other projects. It has installed "**seabins**" that are automatically collecting garbage floating on the surface in harbour areas.



Another project we're proud of has to do with **ghost nets**. We collected over **80 fishing nets** and various lost fishing tools. Ghost nets are a huge problem in the world over. It is silently killing vast amounts of fish, in addition to polluting water. That's why we are constantly monitoring Maltese coastal waters, and unfortunately constantly finding more and more dangerous fishing nets and materials.

In a different project, we use special gear to **sample micro plastic and map plastic pollution around Malta**. Development of that project led to a revolutionary new way of **sampling micro plastic directly from underwater.** Plastic is one of the biggest problems in the sea water, as micro plastics reach the human body through the food chain.



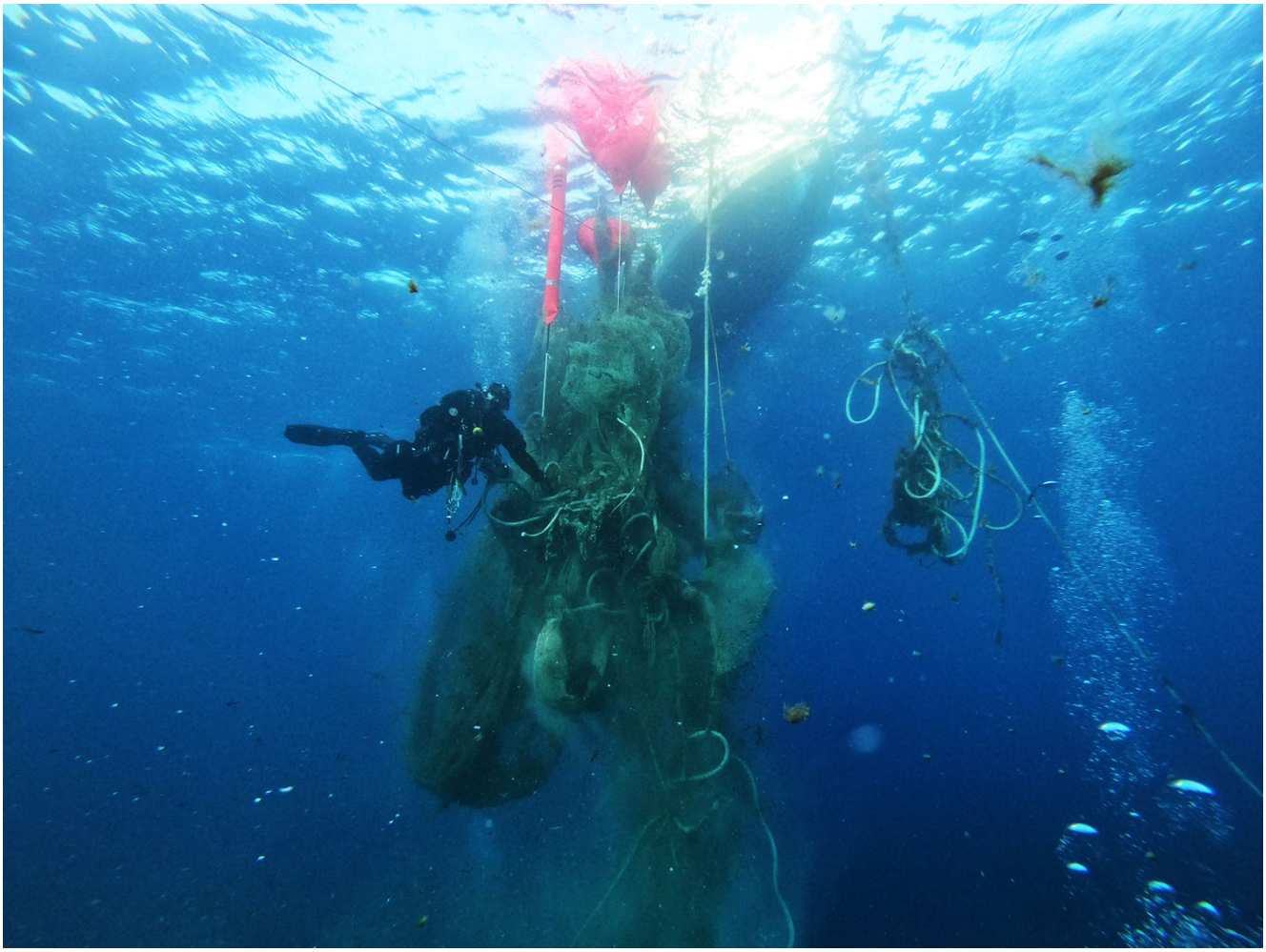
Zibel also organised a series of clean-ups in areas that are not easily accessible, where all drifting garbage is gathering. Garbage in the sea knows no borders, and we collected pieces from places as far as Africa, Italy and other countries within the Mediterranean.

We provided the proper training for divers and involved Maltese diving centres in collecting and recycling plastics. Ocean plastic needs a different way of recycling, which is not available everywhere.



All our actions didn’t go unnoticed and multiple governmental entities and private companies got involved and supported the cause. Today, Zibel is **one of the most respected NGOs in Malta**.

We are aware that all the waste that is found in the water, although bad, is also providing a **shelter** for marine life. That’s why we decided to start a new project and swap the polluting shelter with a safer one. We started a fund raising to build **artificial reefs**, 3D-printed from clay, that is perfectly safe for the environment and will be a new home for multiple species. Rebuilding and protecting underwater ecosystems is the most important thing to secure our own future.



Our role as divers

As divers, we're constantly reminded of the importance of protecting our underwater world. In my opinion this is a good sign. It means that all the efforts in spreading awareness are earning recognition. Now all we need to do is take action. **Everybody can help, and even the small things count**.

Divers can help by picking up garbage on a normal everyday dive, engaging and organising big clean-up events and participating in bigger projects protecting marine life and reefs. It is amazing to witness so many divers who are willing to help here in Malta, a prime diving destination.

Ideally, in popular dive spots you would never find so much garbage, as all of us divers are doing our part to keep it clean on a daily basis. However, not all diving destinations are the same, and reality can be much different.



The power of spreading knowledge

As a diver, you probably share pictures and videos of your underwater adventures to family and friends. You are probably the only person who can show them firsthand what is found underwater and how important it is to protect this environment. Maybe you can **take a step further**, and invite them to a clean-up event, or you can involve the company you work for to support the effort.

Those small steps are meaningful in spreading the knowledge. For over 40 years now DAN Europe has been supporting divers with scientific knowledge, which greatly helped the community build up in awareness, and become safer divers.



No it is also important to protect not only divers, but the oceans in general. DAN is actively involved in multiple initiatives providing support and knowledge. The mission is to protect what we all love, in a safe way. This is why Zibel and DAN Europe came together to promote a safe way of cleaning the seas. Soon we will share more content and guidelines in this regard.

Next time you visit Malta, would you consider joining one of Zibel's projects? All you need to do is get in touch and register for the next clean-up.

Stay safe and **become** the change!

About the author

Arkadiusz Srebnik is a diving instructor currently living and working in Malta. He is actively involved in marine conservation at NGO Zibel, which runs projects to clean the water of lingering garbage and ghost nets, as well as many scientific and educational projects in cooperation with government and scientific institutions in Malta. He puts safety above all else in diving and, as an ambassador for DAN Europe, actively promotes sustainable dive tourism. Underwater photographer and second year student of the ITS degree program in "Science in Dive Safety Management."



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