

renew europe.

A EUROPEAN OCEAN PACT

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Introduction

A healthy ocean is as vital to a thriving economy as it is to life itself. As the primary climate stabiliser, the ocean is fundamental to sustain the standards of living that humanity has grown accustomed to, particularly in Europe. Yet, this key element has long been neglected in global climate discussions.

The Ocean Pact must be an **actionable guide for the EU and its Member states** to achieve tangible results towards environmental sustainability while addressing the other two key priorities for this EU mandate: economic competitiveness and boosting our defence capabilities.

Preparedness pays. The cost of continued inaction is far greater than the cost of preventing damage. Extreme weather events, as we saw with recent floods in the EU, or submarine cable disruptions are two examples where investing in preparedness costs orders of magnitude less than recovering from the damage to life and livelihoods.

Effectively mitigating environmental threats opens Europe to greater **opportunities for the future**. The EU and its Member States are the world's largest maritime area, owning the largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). With a coastline more than twice the length of Africa's, the EU's maritime strength drives its dominance in key sectors. The EU controls around 40% of the world's shipping fleet, while European companies lead the way in autonomous vessels, green shipping innovations, and LNG-powered ships.

The EU also serves as a vibrant hub of biodiversity, is the world's largest seafood market, and stands at the forefront of offshore wind energy innovation, particularly in the North Sea, driving the global transition toward renewable energy. All of these activities firmly establish the EU as a dominant global maritime power.

Renew calls for an Ocean Pact that reflects Europe's commitment to turning its oceanic resources into a cornerstone of climate action and biodiversity, as well as of economic growth and geopolitical stability. The Commission must prioritise implementation, alignment and simplification of existing policies, and take legislative action only where critical gaps need to be addressed **to achieve the Pact's ambitions and objectives**.

Objective

Given the vast scope of the Ocean and its impact across multiple sectors, the European Ocean Pact must adopt a comprehensive approach focused on three main pillars:

1. Environmental sustainability

The ocean is earth's primary climate regulator and home to eighty percent of global marine biodiversity. Yet, it remains overlooked and is under severe threat. Rising sea temperatures and shrinking of ice coverage due to climate change, acidification, overfishing, unsustainable practices and pollution jeopardise ecosystems, fisheries, tourism and coastal livelihoods.

The Ocean Pact must prioritise preserving ocean health and resilience, restoring marine ecosystems and supporting coastal areas. We must employ an ecosystem-based management of the seas, in order to fully and sustainably benefit from the economic opportunities that the Ocean can provide.

European Overseas Territories, which host over 80% of the EU's biodiversity, need to play an important role in the Pact. The ocean is at great risk of the effects of climate change, rising sea levels and biodiversity loss. Therefore, the Pact should align closely with the forthcoming European Climate Adaptation Plan.

The Pact must facilitate strong enforcement of existing legislation for tackling waste and water pollution and ensure water quality. A cornerstone of the Ocean Pact must be a clear cross-sectoral and "source to Sea" approach to tackle marine and freshwater pollution from all different sources.

The Ocean Pact should also reaffirm and ensure the effective implementation of already existing objectives, commitments and targets, such as the Nature Restoration Law, the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the EU contributions to the UN Global Biodiversity Framework targets (restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems; conserve and manage 30% of land, waters and seas by 2030) and the "zero pollution" objective.

KEY Renew Europe PRIORITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Marine and Biodiversity Protection

- Promote the use of effective tools and investments, for protecting biodiversity and especially Marine Protected Areas (MPA) as well as of coastal protection projects and ensure that biodiversity targets are fulfilled.
- Enable conditions for co-management involving all relevant stakeholders and sea users in MPA-related decisions, including protection measures as well as cooperation networks for MPAs, particularly in the EU's outermost regions and overseas countries and territories.
- Apply a precautionary approach to deep-seabed mining projects until their effects on marine environment and biodiversity have been sufficiently studied and researched, in order to ensure that no avoidable or irreversible damage is inflicted on them. This will allow

the EU to continue participating in the global competition for exploring the deep sea, while setting the highest standards for sustainable resource management. We furthermore support an international agreement with third countries on this common precautionary approach towards deep-seabed mining.

- Ensure effective implementation of the EU environmental crimes directive to bolster prevention and deterrence strategies against environmental crime to better protect marine environment, species and their populations.
- Halt the spreading and proliferation of invasive alien species through effective management by all relevant players, including fleets and port authorities.

Pollution Reduction and Water Quality Improvement

- Improve monitoring and support innovative solutions to tackle water pollution and marine litter in EU seas, especially plastic waste and use these best practices and innovative solutions to support developing countries in their efforts to tackle plastic waste.
- Develop a comprehensive plan with all relevant stakeholders tackling nitrogen discharge to the marine environment from all sectors.
- Align with initiatives such as the Water Resilience Strategy framework to enhance cooperation among Member states and improve seawater-freshwater connections by using data-driven water management.

Climate and Blue Carbon Preservation

- Preserve and map the European blue carbon sink, establish a blue carbon reserve and explore the possibility to include blue carbon projects within the EU emissions trading or other possibilities to facilitate private investments.
- Increase efforts to advance research into blue carbon sinks to better understand their potential and optimise their role in combatting climate change.

2. Blue Economy and growth

The Ocean is a source of prosperity and a crucial driver of economic growth, providing opportunities across multiple sectors, including the blue economy sectors such as transport, energy, tourism, food production, as well as scientific research, technological innovation and international trade.

The Ocean is our ally to deliver on European reindustrialisation, green transition and competitiveness goals. Therefore, the Ocean Pact and the Clean Industrial Deal roadmap must be coherent and align especially regarding the transition of the maritime industry, decarbonisation and job creation, particularly in the EU.

Decarbonising the shipbuilding industry requires enhancing and encouraging the use of sustainable and low-carbon fuels, wind propulsion and adaptation of ports.

We regret the departure of European shipping companies to North Africa ports to avoid the EU Emission Trading system (ETS) levies, which results in carbon leakage and loss of competitiveness for our EU ports.

While contributing to our food security and sovereignty, the EU fisheries' sector is facing multiple challenges (including resource depletion, reduction of fishing zones and changes affecting fish populations, rising fuel prices and generational renewal). We must grasp the potential of fisheries and aquaculture within the Blue Economy by enhancing the transition towards more sustainable, socially fair and competitive practices. We must better protect and guarantee a level playing field for small-scale fisheries, as they contribute to ecosystems management and provide benefits to coastal areas and communities. The ongoing evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) offers a chance to reinforce the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) and address identified challenges, including by better and simplified implementation of its rules in line with the outcome of the review.

Additionally, we need to improve the maritime spatial framework to ensure greater efficiency, coherence, cross-border coordination, and better synergies among different activities while considering environmental, economic, social and safety aspects.

KEY RENEW EUROPE PRIORITIES ON BLUE ECONOMY AND GROWTH

- Develop a European Agenda for a sustainable blue economy. Fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, tourism and marine renewable energies are key in implementing this transition towards more sustainable practices as they are the main sectors affected, taking into account the benefits for coastal areas and communities.

Sustainable Maritime Transport and Industry

- Implement the adopted Fit for 55 legislation, especially the FuelEU Maritime and AFIR legislations and the updated ETS Directive and address implementation challenges such as carbon and business leakage in some Member States, as is the case with the issue of trans-shipment ports.
- Recognise liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a stepping stone in the maritime sector's transition away from more polluting bunker fuels, highlighting especially the potential in bio-LNG.
- Facilitate the installation of sustainable Onshore Power Supply (OPS) in ports addressing cost and energy grid development challenges.
- Ensure that the upcoming European Industrial Maritime Strategy complements the Green Deal objectives to regain sector competitiveness.
- Couple EU environmental action with equivalent measures at IMO level to maintain fair competition in maritime transport.
- Support the modernisation of ports and maritime logistics with a "Green Ports Initiative" in order to attract investments and private capital into low-carbon, automated port infrastructure, including OPS and hydrogen refuelling stations.

- Promote the relevance and attractiveness of European ports vis-a-vis North African ports.
- Focus the upcoming European Industrial Maritime Strategy on ports as energy hubs, underlining the need to adopt a value chain approach, both in terms of ships and fuels.

Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

- Support a renewed ambition for the future of fisheries, with measures developed together with the sector and with a specific focus on sustainability as well as working conditions and safety at sea, the launch of a Strategic Dialogue on Fisheries, should support this work.
- Innovation-measures with the aim to better facilitate the approval and deployment of new fishing tools to make fishing more selective and sustainable.
- Ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the management and outcomes of funds allocated under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), including results achieved.
- Strengthened rules on transparency and traceability of seafood imports into the EU, in particular on IUU and non-sustainable fishing, especially by our coastal neighbors and third countries, including better consumer information through labelling and promotion of sustainable EU seafood products.
- Recognise and support sustainable aquaculture, algae and shellfish farming sectors in the Ocean Pact as key sectors, especially for the transition to more sustainable protein sources, with dedicated measures, also in terms of maritime spatial planning and the land-sea nexus.

Innovation, Research and Marine knowledge

- Believes that long term development, deployment and planning of marine renewable energies projects, including off shore wind, ocean wave energy and green hydrogen production, should be improved and simplified and be based on an ecosystem and multi-functional spaces- approach, ensuring tangible benefits for coastal communities as well as the marine environment, fishers, aquaculture professionals and all stakeholders relying on access to sea and its resources.
- Enhance data collection, research and innovation in order to ensure the respect of the technology neutrality principle and develop future-proof solutions for all Blue Economy sectors.
- Establish a dedicated program to support the foreseen EU Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy.
- Support partnerships between businesses, private sector, researchers, scientists, universities and NGOs, in order to enhance marine knowledge research programs and investments.
- Create a “One-Stop Blue Economy Platform”: a centralised EU platform to provide businesses with single access to guidance, and technical assistance for blue economy initiatives.

- Leverage of the EU Starfish mission, notably the European Digital Twin of the Ocean to advance ocean knowledge and research, support private sector innovation, and provide open, real-time data to optimise blue carbon markets.

Decarbonisation and Emission Reduction

- Create a roadmap for the reduction of emissions and the decarbonisation of ships and the maritime sector, supporting an EU strategy to sustain and strengthen our position as a maritime giant, with a focus on EU made decarbonisation projects. The decarbonisation measures that will be proposed in the roadmap could be supported, among others, by adequate funding from existing sources such as the Innovation Fund as set up by the revised EU ETS Directive, as well as other financial instruments and means, such as European Investment Bank (EIB) financing opportunities, EU programmes and funds. In addition, the EC should commit to making the decarbonisation process attractive for private investors.
- Invest in up-skilling and re-skilling of seafarers to work with new technologies and systems, to meet the challenges of the dual - green and digital transition.

Maritime Spatial Planning and Sector Coordination

- Develop a strategic vision for maritime spatial planning addressing the challenges faced by fisheries, aquaculture, energy, maritime transport and tourism sectors. This vision must involve all the relevant stakeholders and sea users at all levels.
- Ensure better cooperation and coordination between national spatial plans under the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive, with a more inter-regional and sea-basin approach.
- Harmonise operational rules and ensuring equal enforcement across Member States to ensure a level playing field and streamlined regulatory frameworks for cross-border operations, reducing administrative bottlenecks, and facilitating seamless transport of goods.

3. International governance and security

Strengthening the EU's maritime power is key in addressing current geopolitical and defence challenges as well as enhancing European strategic autonomy. In light of geopolitical threats, especially from Russia, the EU must strengthen its strategic independence by, ensuring food security and energy sovereignty. A well-managed ocean will serve as a foundation for these priorities, supporting environmental sustainability, economic resilience and geopolitical stability.

Therefore, we must foster leadership in international ocean governance and diplomacy, while strengthening Europe's role as a global standards-setter. We must grasp the momentum created by the upcoming third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC) in Nice in June 2025.

We must give priority to regional partnerships and deepened cooperation with third countries and neighbouring regions, including Africa and Latin America. This will help boost economic

ties, stabilise supply chains, cooperate in environmental protection, promote sustainable fisheries and combat maritime crime.

KEY Renew Europe PRIORITIES ON INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY:

International Agreements and Cooperation

- Push for swift ratification and entry into force of the High Seas Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement.
- Advance the ratification of the WTO agreement on harmful fisheries subsidies.
- Promote the signature of an ambitious and effective Global Plastics Treaty.
- Strengthening the cooperation with third countries to tackle IUU fishing.
- Enhance international support for SDG 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).
- Strengthen and foster partnerships with third countries on Ocean, fisheries and resource management, in particular through RFMOs and SFPAs.
- Support new international scientific tools or bodies to help decision-making on Ocean, as the International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS).

Maritime Security and Surveillance

- Protect strategic maritime routes, vital trade corridors and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) for Europe, in the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as strengthening EU naval and coast guard capabilities to secure critical maritime routes, thereby ensuring safe and uninterrupted access to global markets. The capabilities for monitoring human activities at sea must be enhanced by means of innovative services based on AI, satellites and autonomous shipping.
- Enhance integrated maritime surveillance by EMSA, with the support of ESA, establishing shared methods for exchanging information and data among authorities responsible for various surveillance tasks, such as border control, maritime pollution, marine environment protection and law enforcement.
- Support and enhancing international cooperation on mine clearance in the Black Sea after the end of the war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine.
- Develop a coordinated maritime presence in disputed maritime areas, especially in the Asia-Pacific to secure freedom of navigation.
- Emphasise the growing strategic significance of the Arctic region and adopt dedicated policies to meet the new strategic security challenges in the area.
- Ensure that Arctic shipping strictly adhere to environmental safeguards to minimise risks to fragile polar ecosystems, including ensuring that vessels operating in the region meet the safety and maintenance standards to prevent accidents and pollution.

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- Combat piracy and trafficking, which requires closer cooperation between merchant navies, national navies and European operations.
- Ensure the implementation and extension of targeted EU sanctions and measures against the vessels that are part of Russia's "shadow fleet", taking into account the security and environmental risks posed by these vessels.
- Prohibit the sale of European ships when there is a risk that they become part of the Russian shadow fleet. Oblige buyers of European ships to enshrine in the purchasing contract, that the purchased tanker may not be used to carry Russian oil.
- Include EU's outermost regions and overseas countries and territories as strategic outposts for security and international influence, enhancing maritime presence, maritime surveillance, and cooperation frameworks to combat illegal activities and address transboundary challenges.

Protection of infrastructure and regulatory measures

- Protect critical infrastructures, such as ports, shipyards and strategic submarine cables from concerted hybrid attacks and prioritising and facilitating investment in subsea backup cables, repair ship fleet expansion, advanced monitoring systems, thus ensuring resilience and swift rerouting capacity in case of disruptions.
- Strengthen coherence between EU civilian and military instruments and police cooperation, as well as the coordination between EU Services and Member States, and promoting sharing of best practices, risk analysis and threat information, as well as training and education among all relevant civilian and military fora.
- Recognise ports as strategic infrastructure for both civilian and military purposes addressing both physical and cybersecurity infrastructure in EU military and security planning, ensuring better cooperation between relevant actors on all levels as well as with third and neighbouring countries.

Way forward

The European Ocean Pact must be a joint effort between the EU institutions and stakeholders who work and live in close proximity to or on the sea. It must involve and be implemented by everyone that will have to act based on the Pact's initiatives in order to ensure optimal success.

Therefore, we must be ready to explore new methods of engaging with stakeholders, citizens and the wider community to ensure that this initiative will secure meaningful change on the ground and at sea.

Governance and coordination

- Establish a Project Group in the European Commission on the Ocean Pact for the relevant Commissioners to prepare and coordinate the proposals and initiatives.

Roadmap Development

- Develop a roadmap for initiatives and actions shaped and co-designed in collaboration with the European Parliament and the Council as well as relevant stakeholders. This roadmap should ensure that the implementation of the Ocean Pact is developed within a year of the launch of the pact and agreed by policy-makers as well as by involved stakeholders. It should integrate the results of the consultations within the Fisheries and Ocean Dialogues.

Assessment and Evaluation

- Conduct a mid-term assessment of the implementation of the Ocean Pact by the European Commission to be presented by 2028.

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