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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

The European Ocean Pact

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The European Ocean Pact

The Ocean and seas are crucial for Europe's and the world's prosperity, security and sustainable future. Many features of our daily lives would not be possible without these immense areas around our continent.

The European Union has the responsibility of stewarding the world's largest collective maritime area, with 25 million km² of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) across its Member States and overseas territories. With a 70,000 km coastline and 40% of its population living within 50 km of the sea, the EU has a critical interest in maritime matters. Its blue economy supports more than 5 million jobs and contributes over €254 billion in gross value added annually. Maritime routes carry over 70% of the EU's external trade, while underwater communication cables carry 99% of inter-continental internet traffic. However, 70% of aquatic food consumed in the EU is imported, exposing dependencies in food security. The ocean is critical for energy, data, security and strategic resources.

At the same time, the ocean is under increasing pressure. The health of our ocean is deteriorating, driven by the cumulative impacts offshore on and of climate change, including rising sea temperatures, acidification, and sea level rise. Widespread pollution—from plastics and chemicals to untreated wastewater—continues to choke marine ecosystems. Overexploitation of marine resources is depleting biodiversity at alarming rates. These environmental challenges are further compounded by growing geopolitical tensions, which hinder cooperative governance, the protection of shared marine assets and spaces, our security and strategic autonomy as well as our competitiveness and economic growth.

The European Ocean Pact, as called for in the Conclusions of the European Council of 20 March 2025, is a strategic initiative to protect the health of our ocean and fully optimise Europe's maritime assets to serve the EU's economic and security objectives. The Ocean Pact provides a holistic and coherent approach across all policy areas related to the ocean, providing a single reference framework, streamlined coordination processes, simplification of reporting obligations and a strategy for implementation of existing legislations across sectors. It lays the groundwork for an **Ocean Union** and leverages its immense potential for Europe's resilience, food sovereignty, energy supply and competitiveness.

The Pact puts in place a reinforced governance framework to streamline implementation and align efforts across sectors and levels of governance across the EU. It will support six strategic priorities:

1. restoring ocean health and productivity through integrated governance and regenerative practices,
2. accelerating sustainable competitiveness in the blue economy,
3. supporting coastal and island communities in their development,
4. enhancing maritime security and resilience,
5. advancing ocean research and innovation,
6. strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international rules-based governance.

The ocean has gained visibility and importance in EU policies since the launch of an integrated maritime policy by the Commission in 2007. EU initiatives in various policy sectors aim to protect the health of the ocean or use ocean resources sustainably for the benefit of people, coastal communities and our economies. These initiatives protect marine resources and the environment. They boost our scientific capacity and marine knowledge. They support innovation and create economic prosperity. They support a framework for maritime security. But they do not amount to a coherent European Union strategy on ocean policy and governance. The European Ocean Pact integrates and sets out how these various policy initiatives and actions can work better together. Through bringing together all ocean related policies, the Pact will contribute to simplification and enhance both the coherence and implementation of existing EU ocean related policies and legislation. The Pact aims at a commitment, a holistic approach and collaboration across Member States, relevant stakeholders including fishers, innovators, investors, scientists, and civil society. The European Ocean Pact is accompanied by an initial roadmap of flagship actions and measures to accomplish its objectives and measures and it will be updated as needs evolve.

1. A Strengthened Governance Framework

The European Union needs a governance framework that ensures that EU policies account for their impact on the ocean and promote sustainable resource use while supporting competitiveness, strengthening security at sea, reinforcing our prosperity and addressing more effectively climate change and its impact. Effective governance must align ocean-related actions at Union, regional, national, and local levels through the various sea basins, involving both EU and non-EU countries.

1.1. Implementation of ocean related objectives

Beyond directly relevant legislation like the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive or the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, various EU legislations include targets related to ocean preservation and sustainable management, such as the Nature Restoration Law, the Plastics Directive, the TEN-E Regulation, the Fuel EU Maritime Regulation and the Climate Law. In order to bring more clarity and to simplify processes for marine stakeholders, the Commission will aim at simplifying and supporting implementation of the existing legislation on the ocean.

This should happen with a holistic approach, via setting out a more effective process for coordinating the planning and the implementation of the activities that take place at sea:

- bring together in one place existing targets that are essential to accomplish the objectives of the Ocean Pact; as well as simplify and facilitate reporting obligations relating to the ocean in existing legislation, by aligning them and synchronizing timelines. This will help increase legal clarity and policy coherence, while reducing administrative burden;
- support and facilitate the implementation of existing legislation across sectors, and an enhanced coordination and monitoring process;

- aim at increased coordination across Member States in the preparation and implementation of maritime spatial plans, through a better organised sea basin approach, at the image of the Greater North Sea initiative;
- optimise ocean observation activities with a view to coordinating them better and gaining in efficiency to increase further knowledge on our ocean.

To monitor progress, the Commission will create a public **EU Ocean Health and Blue Economy dashboard**, reporting on relevant indicators and targets, together with a regular State of the Ocean Report.

1.2. Working together at EU level

At EU level, the European Parliament, Council and Commission all initiated more comprehensive exchanges on the Ocean since the last EU elections, through the creation of a dedicated group at the Parliament, the European Council conclusions of 20 March 2025 and the coordination at all levels within the Commission. There is a clear need to continue such cross-sectors exchanges. The Commission, calls on the **Council to review progress on the Ocean Pact regularly**, encourages each Presidency to hold Council meetings to discuss Ocean policies, and calls on the European Parliament to regularly review progress as well.

Close work with the relevant stakeholders on all ocean-related policies will be of crucial importance. To that extent, drawing inspiration from the European Board on Agriculture and Food, the Commission will support the creation of an **Ocean Board** composed of different stakeholder representatives from the blue economy sector, for high-level strategic policy advice.

In addition, the Commission will continue consulting stakeholders more widely in the frame of the Fisheries and Ocean Dialogues, ensuring the Pact's implementation at all levels.

1.3. Working together at regional level on our shared maritime space

The growing number of maritime activities—offshore energy, fisheries and aquaculture, shipping, conservation, and more—is creating increasing pressure on limited ocean space. While some activities require dedicated areas, the future lies in forward-looking, coordinated planning that balances individual and shared use of the sea, fostering the co-existence of various maritime activities in a crowded maritime space.

The EU has long supported regional cooperation in fisheries, the wider blue economy and environmental protection through various regional frameworks, such as the Regional Sea Conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. These Conventions are central to implementing respectively the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The four sea basin initiatives in the field of maritime policy have also contributed to advancing the sustainable blue economy. Additionally, flexible cooperation frameworks like the Union for the Mediterranean, Eastern Partnership, and Black Sea Synergy further strengthen these efforts.

To produce food from the ocean, clean energy, to transport goods, to avoid and mitigate environmental impacts, the EU needs to optimise its marine space.

The Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning supports Member States in optimising planning of their maritime space at national level through structured dialogue that helps build mutual understanding and develop joint solutions.

The Commission calls on Member States to develop multi-use practices and include multi-use areas when updating their maritime spatial plan. This is key to build on pilot projects. Multi-use involving offshore wind, with other clean energy technologies, conservation and restoration practices, fishing or aquaculture is promising. The Commission launched in 2024 an [online multi-use and co-existence compendium](#) which is continuously updated.

In addition, Member States are encouraged to **move beyond national-only approaches and plan activities at sea basin level** (Mediterranean, North-East Atlantic, Baltic, Black Seas, and the Arctic Ocean), on the model of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative, across existing regional cooperation bodies, alongside neighbouring countries and supported by the EU Mission Ocean and Waters basin-scale lighthouses. The Commission will enhance regional sea basin cooperation and coherence, including on maritime spatial planning, with an emphasis on improving governance and ecosystem-based approaches. To achieve this, the Commission will be conducting an evaluation study of the existing sea basin initiatives to integrate new priorities and increase synergies, including with the EU macro regional strategies. In addition, the Commission will support the exchange of best practices to help **scale successful examples across regional sea basins by promoting coherent solutions**.

Specific attention will be provided to:

- The **Baltic Sea** as an urgent priority: the Commission will organise a **high-level event** in 2025 as the starting point to a renewed, holistic approach to tackle ecosystem challenges, strengthen security, environmental and fisheries management, and support coastal communities in this sea basin.
- The **Eastern Mediterranean** currently lacks a dedicated structure for cooperation other than the broader context of the Union for the Mediterranean. Building on **the Pact for the Mediterranean (UfM)**, the Commission will explore developing a **dedicated sea-basin strategy** taking the format of the WestMed Initiative as an inspiration, and with the support of the UfM.
- **For the Black Sea, a new strategic approach** will be proposed by the Commission and the High Representative in 2025 to enhance resilience, and prosperity, addressing challenges through coordinated regional action.
- For the **Atlantic Strategy, first established in 2011, the Commission** will propose to enhance cooperation through a review of its Action Plan to ensure it continues to drive innovation, economic growth, and sustainability, with increased attention on its international dimensions. Cooperation on sustainable fisheries management in the Northeast Atlantic will be particularly important in this context, with almost 60% of EU TAC-regulated species being jointly managed with coastal states such as the United Kingdom and Norway.
- The **Arctic Ocean**, essential to the global climate system: the EU's Arctic policy serves as a model for European ocean diplomacy, cooperation and multilateralism and sustainable blue economy development. The Commission will continue engaging with

Greenland, Iceland, and Norway on ocean matters upholding EU standards and sharing best practices globally. The Commission will prioritise stable and predictable access to all neighbouring waters, ensuring the fair and equitable use of marine resources.

1.4. Unlocking Financial Support for the Ocean

The Future of Ocean Funding

The goals and initiatives in the Ocean Pact will need to be supported by investments and funding from private and public sources including the future Multi Financial Framework (MFF¹). An integrated approach to funding and supporting fisheries and ocean-relevant policies under the Ocean Pact will cover a broad range of elements: from the conservation of marine biological resources as one of the five EU exclusive competences, the management of fisheries and aquaculture activities to ocean knowledge, the activities on implementing the CFP, maritime security, food security, further developing and scaling-up a competitive European blue economy, including offshore and ocean energy, as well as supporting our European blue economy sectors and industries to decarbonise and deploy smart solutions to help achieve carbon-neutrality, and to also support to maritime spatial planning (MSP), which is central to the integrated approach of the Ocean Pact. As regards the broader aspects of the blue economy, support shall be necessary for investments on innovative projects, emerging blue economy sectors (e.g. marine based bio-techs with important potential), aquaculture, new sustainable management activities for fish stocks, a resilient and competitive fisheries sector etc.

To further foster synergies, transparency and flexibility, the transfer of all external activities such as the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs), the compulsory and voluntary contributions to Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) as well as the actions for IOG and international aspects of maritime policy, will also need to be adequately covered under the MFF.

Finally, new and existing own resources for the ocean should be mobilised. For example, revenues generated from the inclusion of maritime transport in the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) could be directed toward decarbonising blue economy sectors. Moreover, the expansion of the ETS2 to cover other maritime activities, such as fisheries, will further boost available funding at the Member State level, providing a significant opportunity to support the transition to a more sustainable and low-carbon ocean economy.

Coherent implementation of current ocean funding

The **current European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) is well-suited to drive the green and digital transition** of our ocean-related sectors, while also enhancing their resilience and competitiveness. The Commission will continue cooperating with Member States to support the full and effective implementation of their **EMFAF programmes**. This will ensure that available resources are utilised to their full potential. Furthermore, the Commission will work with Member States to better coordinate EU and

¹ (COM(2025) 46).

national funding policies for the ocean, exploring opportunities to leverage additional resources under the Cohesion Funds, Next Generation EU, and the EU research framework.

For energy infrastructure, projects falling under the TEN-E Regulation, CEF-E can provide grants to prioritized projects (Projects of Common Interests or Projects of Mutual Interest). Many of these projects represent investments in infrastructure at sea, such as offshore electricity grids, hydrogen pipelines and permanent CO2 storage in decommissioned gas fields. If such projects are not bankable, CEF grants can leverage the funding needed to make the projects become a reality.

Investing in the blue economy

EU **start-ups, SMEs, and scale-ups** driving blue economy innovation face significant challenges, such as limited access to risk capital and regulatory barriers. The financing gap for blue economy innovation has been estimated to be at least EUR 70 billion. Available EU funding instruments in support of blue economy investments are customarily oversubscribed, reflecting a persistent mismatch between available resources and entrepreneurial needs.

The Commission in collaboration with the European Investment Bank Group will launch a study to explore innovative financial solutions for supporting ocean-related technologies. It will also develop an investment strategy that mobilises both public and private finance for blue economy innovation and ocean health, in line with the next multiannual financial framework.

A key tool has been the **BlueInvest platform**, which has mobilised around €1 billion in public and private investments since its launch by the Commission in 2019 by, inter alia, supporting 10 venture capital funds focusing on blue economy innovation through anchor investments via the European Investment Fund's InvestEU equity products. BlueInvest accelerates business growth, supports fundraising, and mobilises private investment—particularly from venture capital and private equity. Critical support is further provided to blue economy scale-ups through its project pipeline is supported by European Investment Fund (EIF) InvestEU equity products, EIB Venture Debt (through the Blue Champions initiative), and the EIB's blue economy credit line for SMEs via intermediated lending to local banks.

To enable the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group play a larger role in supporting the blue economy, the Commission will provide additional backing by:

- **Increased Guarantees for supporting Blue Technology Companies under the EIBs Venture Debt instrument.**
- **Increased European Commission Guarantee Mandate** under InvestEU or a tool that will success, pending decisions on the next MFF (to support more blue economy ventures.
- **Providing guarantees and Technical Assistance** to foster financing opportunities through inter-mediated lending windows, particularly in non-EU countries in key regions and sea basins.

EU guarantees and/or grants that can be blended with bank financing are vital to de-risk investments and enable companies to scale up. Additionally, mobilising large asset owners—such as pension funds, insurers, family offices, and impact funds—will be critical in driving further investment into the blue economy.

Furthermore, the EU will work with Member States and regional governments to leverage more national and regional public investments, including from the European Structure and Investment Funds, into the blue economy and blue economy innovation ecosystems, including through, for instance, allowing Member States to channel unused funds from NextGenerationEU and other EU programs into InvestEU.

The Commission is also working with the EIB Group to deploy the **TechEU investment programme**—backed by InvestEU—to address the financing gap for disruptive innovation, industrial capacity, and company scale-up. In the ocean sector, TechEU could support investments in RDI for strategic technologies, digitalisation, AI applications, advanced manufacturing, supply chain capabilities, and scaling up competitive technologies.

Furthermore, as part of the Clean Industrial Deal, around EUR 50 billion additional investment will be mobilised under InvestEU to support key EU policies, with the EIB Group playing a prominent role in scaling up the clean and ocean technologies.

New Flagship actions – governance:

- Develop a new EU ocean governance model
- EU Ocean Health and Blue Economy dashboard
- Ocean Board

Projects:

At sea basin level: high level event on the Baltic, exploring development of a sea basin strategy for the Eastern Mediterranean, Pact for the Mediterranean, implementation of the Arctic policy, new strategy for the Black Sea, review of the Atlantic Strategy action plan, Future MedFish4Ever Ministerial commitments post 2027 and Sofia Declaration

[Placeholder for a visual on the governance]

2. Integrated approach for ocean health and prosperity

Significant EU objectives have been set and we already witnessed progress making the ocean healthier and cleaner. Nevertheless, the health of our ocean and the diversity of life it supports remain vulnerable, highlighting the need for continued and coordinated efforts. Coral reefs, for instance—home to a quarter of all marine species—are increasingly affected by warming waters and changing ocean chemistry, which weakens their resilience. Many marine habitats, from seagrass meadows to mangroves, continue to face pressures from human activity and environmental changes. While progress has been made, these ongoing challenges remind us that sustaining the ocean’s vitality requires commitment, innovation, and collaboration across all levels.

2.1. The ocean as an ally in the fight against climate change

The ocean is the biggest carbon sink on our planet, absorbing 30% of global carbon emissions and it plays a vital role in regulating the planet’s climate. It plays a critical role in sequestering carbon and mitigating climate change. But this capacity is notably endangered by rising temperatures, acidification, and deoxygenation.

In turn, restoring marine ecosystems and rebuilding biodiversity can contribute to the objective of achieving carbon neutrality in the EU by 2050², by increasing the ocean's carbon capture function.

The Commission will support Member States in the planning and implementation of measures to restore degraded coastal and marine habitats, with a view to reach the EU legally binding target of restoring at least 20% of sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050 under the Nature Restoration Law.

The Commission will also develop a **Blue Carbon Action Plan by 2026** that sets out steps towards a joint programme for mapping and monitoring blue carbon habitats and advancing research on their carbon sequestration, to improve greenhouse gas inventories, develop robust and trustworthy methodology, support carbon certification and provide new economic opportunities for coastal communities. Improving the data availability for marine environment and the setup and implementation of an appropriate monitoring, based on more coordinated ocean observation among the Member States, has the potential to shorten the duration until the establishment of robust blue carbon certification schemes. This will then guide further exploration of feasible business models and potential EU support mechanisms for them once the monitoring is operational and the relevant data has been acquired.

2.2. Protecting marine life and essential ecosystem services of the ocean

Healthy marine life provides essential services like food, oxygen, and well-being. Pressures on the ocean, by harming marine ecosystems and biodiversity, affect coastal communities, fisheries and other and sea-based activities, including fisheries. The Commission will support future developments towards a regenerative blue economy that go beyond sustainability by actively restoring marine ecosystems while supporting resilient coastal communities and economic innovation.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

MPAs play a crucial role in restoring ecosystems and supporting coastal communities and fishers by helping rebuild fish populations. The EU has expanded its MPA network to 12.3% of its waters but must accelerate efforts to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 target of 30% protection, with 10% under strict protection. This requires **designating MPAs** in ecologically significant areas, including seagrass and seaweed meadows, coral reefs, and deep-sea ecosystems, while ensuring better funding, enforcement, and integration into maritime spatial plans. The Commission will therefore pay particular attention to the effective **implementation of existing EU legislation, notably the Habitats Directive, and will propose a strategy to support Member States to that extent.**

Protection of marine areas beyond MPAs

Beyond marine protected areas, an ecosystem-based approach to the management of activities at sea, as well as those on land that affect the sea, is crucial. This is the approach taken by the

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality ('European Climate Law').

Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)³ in order to achieve clean, healthy and productive seas, and ultimately reach the goal of 'good environmental status'⁴ (GES) for all EU marine waters.

Despite progress, a recent evaluation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) highlighted that further steps are needed to fully achieve GES across all 11 descriptors of the MSFD, including increasing financial investments to implement the necessary measures^{5,6}.

The Commission intends to **revise the MSFD** to accelerate progress and simplify implementation

Tackling marine and freshwater pollution

Marine and coastal ecosystems face significant threats from pollution, including nutrients from activities both on land and at sea: agricultural runoff, chemical contaminants, plastics and microplastics. This is why measures need to address the water cycle in its entirety, both on land and at sea. To address land-based pollution sources, the Commission will strengthen a source-to-sea approach, via the **Water Resilience Strategy**, in the approach to land-sea interactions, and support coastal communities in the fight against land-based pollution, recognising their roles as gatekeepers between land pollution and the degradation of marine ecosystems.

Building on the requirements to reduce pollution to achieve the good environmental status of EU seas, the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan already sets ambitious targets, such as reducing plastic litter in the ocean by 50% and nutrient losses by 50% by 2030. Besides, Member States will implement stricter controls on nitrogen and phosphorus discharges through the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive supports sustainable agricultural practices through the Common Agricultural Policy's Eco-Schemes and precision farming tools. The Commission will also provide clarity on PFAS, the "forever chemicals", working with sustainability, competitiveness, security and safety considerations in mind. The Commission will expand **research** on circular bioeconomy approaches, such as nutrient recovery technologies.

Regarding sea-based pollution sources, maritime transport remains a major pollution source, contributing to emissions, waste, and underwater noise. Transformative change in the maritime transport sector towards climate neutrality and zero pollution can both limit impact on marine life and help retain and grow competitive edge⁷. While existing laws have reduced pollution, further action is needed to curb air and water discharges, prevent plastic pellet spills, and mitigate noise pollution. The Commission will **enhance CleanSeaNet** so that it can alert the Member States on more types of pollutants e.g. sewage, garbage, 'lost containers.

³ Directive 2008/56/EC of 17 June 2008 establishing a community action in the field of marine environmental policy.

⁴ As defined in Article 3(5) of Directive 2008/56/EC and further specified in Commission Decision (EU)2017/848 laying down the criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters.

⁵ Commission Staff Working Document, Evaluation of Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive), Brussels, 6.3.2025, SWD(2025) 50 final.

⁶ REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT on the Commission's assessment of the Member States' programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC), Brussels, 4.2.2025 COM(2025) 3 final

⁷ EEA-EMSA Joint Report 15/2024: European Maritime Transport Environmental Report 2025.

New Flagship actions on ocean health and prosperity:

- Revision of the MSFD
- Water Resilience Strategy
- Blue Carbon Action Plan
- Enforcement strategy

Project:

- Research on circular bioeconomy approaches

3. Steering the European Blue Economy towards greater sustainable competitiveness

The EU's blue economy is a powerhouse of economic and transformational potential, supporting around 5 million jobs and generating over EUR 250 billion in gross added value⁸. It is integral to Europe's broader industrial and security strategy. It is wide spanning and diversified with (i) its traditional sectors in fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, and coastal tourism; (ii) its emerging sectors in renewable energy, blue biotechnology, underwater robotics, and ocean observation, and (iii) its global ocean technologies champions, driven by innovations in AI, cleantech, and deep tech. Overall, the EU sustainable blue economy has an immense untapped potential. It bears the promise for increased contribution to EU's economic growth, to job creation, of highly skilled and well-paid jobs.

To enhance competitiveness of the EU single market and accelerate strategic transitions, especially decarbonisation, the EU must scale up innovation across traditional and emerging blue economy sectors. This means further supporting our fisheries and aquaculture sectors, fast-tracking the deployment of clean blue technologies, supporting business models that preserve or restore ocean ecosystems and biodiversity—through nature-based solutions and carbon-negative products—and creating the right conditions for growth. Achieving this requires a smart mix of public funding, private investment, enabling regulation, skills development, knowledge sharing, and effective maritime spatial planning.

3.1. Supporting the fisheries and aquaculture sectors for sustainable Aquatic Food, Food Security and Sovereignty

Fisheries and aquaculture are key blue economy sectors. They are vital for the availability of food supply and EU food security, yet 70% of aquatic food consumed in the EU today is imported. It is a priority to ensure stable supply for the EU market through the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)⁹ and increasing aquaculture production, while safeguarding marine resources. As announced in the **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, the comprehensive **evaluation of the CFP Regulation, including the provisions of the Common Market Organisation (CMO)**, and the **Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture** will mark a significant milestone ensuring fisheries and aquaculture sectors' long-term competitiveness and

⁸ European Commission: The EU Blue Economy Report 2025.

⁹ Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy.

resilience, underpinning a sustainable EU food system. It is a priority to also promote EU principles globally and to strengthen the sustainability of imports.

The Commission will pay dedicated attention to the following actions:

- Through the **Energy Transition Roadmap** the Commission, supported by the Energy Transition Partnership for the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector¹⁰, will facilitate the introduction of energy efficiency measures and the utilisation of clean energy sources to create a more sustainable, modern and resilient fisheries and aquaculture sector.
- **Small scale fisheries**, through the issuance of a **vademecum** on the implementation of Article 17 of the CFP Regulation, a dedicated discussion on small scale fisheries, including Article 17 of the CFP Regulation, in the context of the upcoming Implementation Dialogue, and the creation of **dedicated sessions in the established Inter-Advisory Councils**.
- Unlocking the **aquaculture** potential – including through the establishment of an **EU Partnership on Aquaculture**, involving, inter alia, Member States' authorities, representatives of the sector, other interest groups, research and innovation institutions, business accelerators, and financial institutions. This Partnership will build on the Open Method of Coordination under the CFP and the 2025 mid-term assessment of the strategic guidelines for EU aquaculture. However, it will bring cooperation to a different level, by setting concrete targets and actions, including the development of projects aimed at multi-use of the space, as well as cooperation between Member States sharing the same sea basin. This cooperation will be framed by the strengthened governance framework established under the Ocean Pact. Actions could relate, for example, to aquaculture development further offshore and integrating aquaculture with other uses, notably with offshore wind farms and with nature restoration and protection. Bringing back the EU's aquatic food self-sufficiency to 46%, last achieved in 2014, through an increase in aquaculture production by 2050, would require targeting an *annual* production increase of at least 120.000 tons (~11%) across the EU. The EU Partnership on Aquaculture will be key to enabling this ambition.
- Scaling up European **algae** production, including through the **new Bioeconomy Strategy** to be adopted by the end of 2025 and the launch of a **Blue Bioeconomy Innovation Partnership by 2027**, focusing on marine fisheries and aquaculture by-products, as well as algae turning them into new, low-emissions products.
- A dedicated policy initiative on **Non-Indigenous Species (NIS)** threatening fisheries and aquaculture, and in order to offer opportunities for valorisation of these species
- A guidance document on managing **predators**, in the frame of the implementation of the Strategic Aquaculture Guidelines.
Raising consumers' attention, through a **voluntary public information system introduced in 2025** on the sustainability of fishery products, **sustainable public procurement guidelines** to support responsible sourcing, transparency, and competitiveness, as well as through launching an **EU-wide campaign** communicating the benefits and the value added of "Aquatic food", revalorising EU products and promoting European value chains.

¹⁰ Partnership set up following the Commission Communication On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector (COM/2023/100 final).

3.2 Strengthening the EU's Maritime Industrial base and Ports as critical nodes

Europe's *maritime manufacturing sector* is essential to the EU's strategic autonomy, prosperity, and security. European shipyards, suppliers, and technology providers have the expertise to build high-value vessels—from military and cruise ships to ferries, icebreakers, and specialised platforms. EU equipment manufacturers hold a strong global position in key technologies such as engines, safety systems, propulsion, and navigation—critical for decarbonising vessels. To maintain this competitive edge and lead the global transition to clean tech, the Commission will develop an **Industrial Maritime Strategy**. In line with the Competitiveness Compass, this strategy will boost the sector's resilience, sustainability, and technological leadership.

To accelerate the EU's leadership in sustainable, digital maritime technologies, AI-driven innovation, and resilient supply chains, the Commission will, by the end of 2025, identify the most effective tools to foster existing and new European value chain synergies in selected blue economy sectors, in close consultation with stakeholders.

A new Blue Economy Alliance for value chains will serve as a catalyst for enhanced cooperation and joint action across selected sectors. The Alliance will deliver on a Green Corridor in the North Sea, integrating clean technology standards for vessels and scaling supply chains and onshore infrastructure for clean propulsion. This will be a **bottom-up movement led by blue economy businesses** to strengthen business cases and scale value chains for maritime assets (vessels) and blue technologies in lead or strategic markets and strategic sea basins—supported by commitments from both supply and demand sides. Our *ports* are strategic assets for the EU's competitiveness and security, acting as gateways for global trade, the internal market, and military and civilian mobility. Many are evolving into hubs for decarbonisation and innovation, supporting their role as industrial clusters. To reinforce this function and strengthen port value chains, the Commission will adopt a new **EU Port Strategy**.

Accelerating the decarbonisation of the EU *maritime transport* sector to meet the 2050 targets requires a robust greenhouse gases pricing mechanism to stimulate investments, develop alternative fuel infrastructure in ports, effectively implement EU regulations such as FuelEU Maritime and to coordinate efforts across the supply chain to achieve economies of scale. Simultaneously, the EU will push for global measures at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to ensure a level playing field. The recently signed IMO Net-zero Framework is an important global step to combine mandatory emissions limits and GHG pricing across an entire industry sector.

Significant investments in fuel production, energy infrastructure, and shore-side electricity are crucial to driving resilience, decarbonisation, innovation, and competitiveness in the sector.

3.3. Strengthening further blue economy sectors

Offshore **wind and ocean energy technologies** are key assets in achieving climate goals, enhancing energy security. Accelerating their roll-out requires significant investments in grid **infrastructure**, including cross-border offshore transmission and energy technologies, alongside improved regional cooperation and solutions for spatial constraints and co-existence

with other activities. To maintain competitive supply chains, access to raw materials, skilled labour, and tailored technologies is essential.

A dedicated **High Level Task force on ocean energy** will aim at gathering support from Member States and the Commission in leveraging the untapped potential of ocean energy.

The ocean can be an important source of **raw materials**. Sea brines, as a potential source for magnesium, lithium, boron, vanadium and others, have the potential to contribute to the security of supply of these metals if cost effective technologies to recover and concentrate these metals are developed. With the increasing need of efficient desalination plants to meet the needs for human consumption of freshwater and green hydrogen production, the recovery of metals from sea brines will be further explored through **dedicated research programmes**.

Coastal and maritime tourism is the largest sector of the EU Blue Economy, with EU coastal areas being highly sought-after destinations. Over half of the EU bed capacity is located in regions with a sea border. Tourism is a major source of income for coastal areas, diversifying livelihoods especially in rural and island communities. At the same time, it can also cause imbalanced development through seasonality, over-tourism, rising housing costs, and environmental pressures. Jobs in the tourism sector often suffer from poor productivity.

Building on the progress achieved within the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the European Agenda for Tourism 2030, the Commission will present a **Sustainable Tourism Strategy**, to address challenges such as climate resilience, ensuring balanced tourism, embracing digital innovation, and making sure jobs are attractive. By supporting SMEs, better tourism management, preparedness, and by re-branding Europe as a sustainable, innovative, inclusive and safe destination to visit, the new strategy will promote practices that benefit both the sector and coastal and island communities.

3.4. Attracting younger generations to the blue economy

A new **Blue Generational Renewal Strategy, foreseen for 2027**, will foster a skilled next-generation workforce in marine research, ocean tech, and sustainable fisheries. It will promote education, ocean literacy, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. As noted in the communication on a Union of Skills, the Commission will intensify its efforts to promote STEM education, which should support more advanced knowledge on marine sciences such as environmental engineering, marine biology and chemistry. STEM promotion and alliances of European universities and schools should pay increased attention to the blue economy and its potential. This also pertains to more technical skills.

In fisheries and beyond skills, the focus will be on generational renewal, fairness, better communication, and training, including integrating the revised STCW-F convention into EU law.

To boost digital and entrepreneurial skills, the strategy will align with the **EIT Water and Ocean Knowledge Innovation Community (KIC)** which provides a structured, EU-wide framework for connecting blue economy ecosystems, and the **Union of Skills**, supporting cross-sector partnerships in the blue economy, as well as with the **Flagship Strategy for Intergenerational Fairness**.

New Flagship actions: blue economy towards greater sustainability and competitiveness

- Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture
- EU Partnership for Aquaculture
- Launch of an EU-wide communication campaign on “Aquatic food”
- Energy transition roadmap for the fisheries and aquaculture sector
- Industrial Maritime Strategy
- Blue Economy Alliance
- EU Port Strategy
- Blue Generational Renewal Strategy
- High Level Task Force on Ocean Energy
- Sustainable tourism strategy

Project:

- Green corridor in the North Sea by 2030

4. Protecting and empowering coastal communities and islands: a path to resilience and prosperity

Ocean health and the prosperity of coastal communities are deeply interconnected. A healthy ocean provides livelihoods, protection, and a sense of identity to coastal populations. With 40% of the EU population and half of its GDP concentrated within 50 km of the sea, coastal communities are at the basis of our prosperity. They host vital blue economy sectors, including fisheries and aquaculture, port activities, maritime transport, tourism, and offshore energy. This way, they contribute to food security, the supply of sustainable and affordable energy and are the access point for Europe with the rest of the world. Despite challenges, coastal communities hold untapped potential for growth, long-term sustainability, and enhanced resilience. Their role of stewardship, as key stakeholders and actors in marine governance should be acknowledged.

4.1. Resilience-building in coastal communities

Climate change disproportionately impacts coastal communities. Coastal and marine ecosystems are at the highest risk, facing rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, and the depletion of biodiversity, including fish stocks. Local adaptation is a priority in the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy, and coastal communities are expected to take the lead in crisis preparedness, responding to disasters, displacement, and damage to infrastructure. Solidarity is needed with many coastal communities who cannot equipped themselves alone to do this.

By the end of the century, annual damage from coastal floods alone in Europe could exceed EUR 1 trillion without additional protection measures. **Nature-based solutions in particular hold enormous potential for strengthening coastal resilience** whilst at the same time delivering ecological, economic and social benefits to coastal communities. Investments in coastal protection and adaptation operations are however lagging compared to the challenge. Considering that every billion euro invested in adaptation against coastal flooding results in a EUR 14 billion reduction in ulterior economic damages, coastal resilience investments could be enhanced by having such investments. **EU grant financing complemented by loans from**

the EIB, facilitated by technical assistance can help to identify and develop priority bankable investments.

The Commission will evolve the Copernicus Marine Service to enhance its ability to describe, monitor, and predict ocean changes, from global scales to the coastal zone. The Commission will continue to actively mainstream climate resilience considerations and will support coastal communities in their local implementation of adaptation strategies and planning, in line with the **EU Climate Adaptation Plan**. Improving early warning systems is furthermore essential to react timely to disasters. The Commission will empower coastal communities to better anticipate, prevent and prepare for crises, as new global threats and insecurities emerge, in line with the **Preparedness Union Strategy**.

4.2. Supporting economic development in coastal communities

Coastal communities are diverse and include coastal cities as well as remote rural areas, with varying levels of economic development, governance structures, and challenges. Some rural and outermost coastal regions have not benefited from the same economic growth as others, leading to concerns over job security, income, and access to public services like healthcare, transport, and education. Remote rural areas face significant socio-economic challenges, with 2% experiencing good conditions, and many suffering from low broadband speeds, infrastructure gaps, and population decline. In some of those communities, especially remote and island communities with less diversified economies, fisheries, aquaculture as well as tourism are vital for local employment.

At the same time, the current challenges open opportunities to develop new regenerative business models in the blue economy that can provide new sources of income and jobs in coastal communities whilst restoring coastal and marine ecosystems.

Such regenerative practices, for example regenerative mariculture do not only produce food but also actively improve ecosystem health and contribute to nature restoration, such as artificial reefs, fisheries nurseries, or low-trophic and multi-trophic aquaculture. The Commission will support income diversification opportunities, e.g. via enabling mechanisms including by developing new seaweed farming toolkit for local blue economy actors, including fishers. The Commission will prioritise and incentivise the inclusion of regenerative and restoration activities, including in the selection of pilot projects and in the preparation of the national aquaculture plans and maritime spatial plans. Blue economy investments could be located in more remote areas, for which good transport and digital connectivity is needed.

4.3. Stepping up support to coastal communities

In 2026, the Commission will propose a new **EU Coastal Communities Resilience and Development Strategy** to enhance the resilience of coastal communities and address their social and economic development challenges. It will aim to foster sustainable economic activities whilst at the same time protect and restore the marine environment. This way, coastal communities should become catalysers of social change and of economic growth.

The strategy will increase funding for climate adaptation and local economic development in coastal communities, utilising existing structural and investment funds, including the Interreg programmes.

For islands and coastal communities, tailored policies are needed for each area, as noted by the mid-term review on a modernised cohesion policy. The EU's cohesion policy will continue to support areas that face stagnant or negative growth. The mid-term review aims to create better synergies between actions supported by cohesion policy and by rural development programmes. Similarly, better synergies are needed between the various EU support measures for coastal communities and islands, with the aim to promote economic diversification and countering depopulation trends where relevant. Islands and outermost regions face additional and specific challenges, which is why the Commission decided to launch a **consultation on a new strategy for islands** and an **updated strategy for outermost regions**. Specific attention herein is needed for the blue economy and small-scale fishery.

The strategy will promote governance models that place coastal communities at the centre of economic development, such as through piloting transition pathways for coastal economic ecosystems, with a focus on the blue economy. It will also build on the successes of the Mission Ocean's basin lighthouses, including living labs, and Community-Led Local Development¹¹ projects since 2014. Special attention will be given to islands and outermost regions, considering their vulnerability and unique assets. The Commission will encourage these regions to develop their own transition pathways with a strong maritime dimension.

New Flagship actions :coastal communities and islands, a path to resilience and prosperity

- EU Coastal Communities Resilience and Development Strategy
- New EU Island Strategy
- Updated strategy on outermost regions

5. Maritime security and defence as a fundamental condition

Maritime security is fundamental to the EU's economic stability, geopolitical resilience and economic security. However, the growing complexity of threats - including attacks on submarine infrastructure, cyber threats, risks posed by shadow fleets, and strategic contestation over maritime spaces - demands a coordinated, technology-driven, and future-proof response covering the external and internal dimensions, military and civilian dimensions. Maritime security is key for internal and civilian aspects such as border management, critical infrastructure and supply chains.

The European Maritime Security Strategy and its action plan provide the framework for the EU to safeguard its interests at sea, protect its citizens and territory, and promote its values and economy. They also reinforce the international rules-based order, ensuring full compliance with international instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Along those priorities, and in line with the Communication on Cable Security, the Communication on ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy¹², the White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 and with the European Internal Security Strategy (ProtectEU), the EU and its Member States should focus on strengthening coast guard cooperation, enhancing maritime domain awareness, investing in cutting-edge maritime

¹¹ [Inforegio - Community-led Local Development](#)

¹² COM(2025)148 final, 1 April 2025

technology, strengthening critical infrastructure protection, expanding naval defence capabilities, and reinforcing European presence and partnerships.

Investments in maritime defence are dual-use, as naval assets are of multi-use: they enhance both maritime security and economic resilience, strengthening blue economy competitiveness. Military capabilities not only safeguard the ocean and maritime space but also contribute to disaster relief, climate change mitigation, and environmental restoration, such as demining and support for pollution cleanup. In the maritime domain, defence should be green and innovative, reducing the environmental impact of armed forces and operations.

5.1 Strengthening EU coast guard cooperation and border security

With the world's largest Exclusive Economic Zone and a 70,000 km coastline, EU coast guard functions are critical. The Commission will promote coastguard cooperation by expanding successful models like the European Coast Guard Functions Forum and the Med Coast Guard Functions Forum to areas like the Black Sea. Investment will focus on a **pilot European unmanned fleet (UxV)**, integrating AI and advanced sensors for real-time maritime monitoring, supported by Frontex and EMSA. This enhances detection and response, complements NATO initiatives, and protects critical submarine infrastructure.

Multi-purpose maritime operations (MMOs) involving navies and inter-agency cooperation will be scaled up. These operations, backed by new-generation vessels, in line with the priorities of the Industrial Maritime Strategy will ensure flexible responses to security and environmental risks. EU-wide coast guard collaboration will benefit from more training, digitalisation, and real-time information sharing.

Investment in capacity building and trainings for interoperability, digitalization, and real-time information sharing, for example, through the exchange programme for coastguard personnel run by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) in cooperation with the Member States, will further reinforce EU-wide coast guard collaboration.

The annual EU maritime security exercise, first carried out in 2024, involving navies, coast guards, and other relevant authorities, will be expanded to further enhance preparedness and test joint crisis response mechanisms in the maritime context. The possibility to support Member States through a crisis management centre to facilitate cooperation among the various maritime authorities will be explored in the framework of this annual exercise.

Further emphasis should be given to safety, security, environmental, welfare and insurance inspections and related training for coast guard and other relevant personnel, with Member States stepping up efforts to tackle shadow vessels. The EU is committed to work within the G7, which highlighted common objectives, including those addressing the protection of critical maritime infrastructure and the increasing threat from shadow fleets in its March 2025 Declaration on maritime security and prosperity.

5.2 Advancing technology for security and defence

Maintaining maritime superiority depends on innovation in autonomous systems, cyber defence, and real-time awareness. The EU will leverage instruments like the EDF, PESCO, ReArm, and EDA to modernise naval forces.

Maritime defence investments support both security and sustainability. Naval assets aid in environmental protection, disaster relief, and pollution response. The EU aims to make defence greener and more innovative. The European Investment Bank will boost funding for defence and security maritime technologies, mobilising private capital for security-focused innovation.

A **new European Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) initiative** will connect sensors, unmanned systems, and patrol aircraft to form an integrated surveillance network. Stronger MDA is essential for addressing threats and supporting emergency responses. The large number of Member State authorities involved in maritime surveillance makes information exchange both a daily necessity and a critical factor during emergencies. Recent incidents affecting critical maritime infrastructure underline the need for seamless cooperation among all actors.

The Commission will also continue to support the full implementation of the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) for the maritime domain, with the assistance of EMSA and in close coordination with Member States. CISE enables interoperability among existing surveillance systems and facilitates secure, real-time information exchange across borders and sectors.

The Commission will actively encourage all relevant national and EU maritime authorities and agencies to connect to CISE, taking a sea-basin approach to drive regional integration. It will also explore, in cooperation with Member States, options to extend access to CISE to like-minded non-EU partners, thereby strengthening collective maritime situational awareness and resilience.

Recognising the evolving nature of maritime threats, the Commission is committed to enabling the exchange of classified information within the CISE framework and to ensuring connection with European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) and its interoperability with the Maritime Surveillance network (MARSUR), which facilitates secure communication among EU naval forces. This will reinforce the civil-military interface, improve shared situational awareness, and enable faster, coordinated responses to threats across the EU maritime domain.

5.3 Protecting critical maritime infrastructure

In addition to surveillance, cybersecurity and resilience of IT systems will be a key area of focus. With 99% of global data flows relying on submarine cables, securing digital infrastructure against cyber threats will be essential. A central component of this strategy is the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Cable Security¹³, which will enhance surveillance, deterrence, and response mechanisms, as outlined in the EU Action Plan on Cable Security.

Protecting infrastructure like cables, pipelines, ports, and wind farms is key to EU security. **The Action Plan for the Security of Cables should be extended to all CMI and across all EU sea basins**, complemented by **setting up regional hubs for Integrated Surveillance Mechanisms**. Smart cables, sensors, and unmanned underwater equipment will enable constant monitoring and rapid threat response. Research will be expanded in this area.

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) in EU waters threatens ecosystems and infrastructure. **A coordinated UXO removal strategy, starting in the Baltic and North Seas and expanding**

¹³ JOIN(2025) 9 final

to the Black Sea, will utilise advanced detection and disposal technologies. Partnerships with HELCOM and other regional bodies will enhance implementation.

5.4 Reinforcing EU Naval Operations and Global Partnerships

Navies support security and environmental goals, including demining and pollution response. A regional approach across the Baltic, Black, North, and Mediterranean Seas will align civil and military assets, strengthening preparedness and maritime stability.

The EU will bolster its naval operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy, including Atalanta, Aspides, and Irini. These missions will see expanded mandates and upgraded capabilities, focusing on maritime situational awareness and protecting critical infrastructure.

The Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) framework will be strengthened, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. Additional military exercises involving non-military actors will improve interoperability and crisis readiness. Continuous naval presence in EU waters will be critical to deter illegal activities.

Maritime tensions are rising globally, and the EU will deepen cooperation with partners like the UK, Canada, Norway, India, Southeast Asian countries, and Arctic States. Enhanced partnerships will focus on CMI protection, cable security, and domain awareness.

The Arctic, increasingly exposed to geopolitical competition, holds vital environmental, economic, and security relevance for the EU. Climate change is opening new sea routes and heightening the risk of resource competition, environmental degradation, and hybrid threats. As highlighted in the EU Arctic policy, the Union is committed to ensuring that the Arctic remains a region of peace, low tension, and sustainable cooperation.

The EU will strengthen operational cooperation with Nordic Member States (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) and close partners such as Norway, Iceland, and Canada, particularly on maritime surveillance, search and rescue, and protection of critical maritime infrastructure. The Union will operationalise Arctic-specific tools under its security and defence framework and explore dedicated Arctic components within the Maritime Domain Awareness and CISE systems. Building resilience in the Arctic aligns with EU priorities on climate, security, and multilateral cooperation.

New Flagship actions – maritime security and defence:

- European Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) initiative
- A comprehensive UXO strategy to integrate cutting-edge detection and disposal technologies
- Develop a cooperation partnership mechanism with the EU, its Arctic Member states and like-minded Arctic States

Projects:

- Development of a pilot for a European (UxV) unmanned fleet, equipped (surface, underwater and space) with state-of-the-art systems and technologies
- Set-up of regional hubs for Integrated Surveillance Mechanism

6. Innovation: the crucial role of ocean research, knowledge and literacy

The ocean and the blue economy offer many opportunities to make the European Union a home of cutting-edge technologies and innovation, attracting more private entities to invest in new products in the blue bioeconomy and biotechnology, such as novel medications or bioremediation techniques, underwater robotics and autonomous devices, new sources of energy beyond offshore wind, waterborne transport, maritime security, innovative fisheries and aquaculture methods, and decarbonisation of economic activities at sea.

Seizing these opportunities requires further supporting research and filling the gap to innovation. It also requires introducing artificial intelligence as stressed by the AI continent action plan and its emphasis on strategic EU sectors such as agri-food, robotics and biotechnology. The Commission will ensure that the blue economy gets sufficient attention in its structured dialogues on AI with industry representatives.

A pre-requirement is to increase our knowledge on the ocean – as we know far less about deep seas than about the Moon surface.

6.1. Ocean research and innovation for global leadership

EU and national policies that support ocean research and innovation are spread over various programmes. With more coordination, simplification and rationalisation, the effectiveness of funding could increase, complexities for potential beneficiaries be lifted

The Commission will adopt a new EU Ocean R&I Strategy to support the implementation of the Ocean Pact by end of 2026. Building on the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’, the strategy will aim at improving the current governance by addressing the fragmentation of EU R&I initiatives, and by filling the gap between research and innovation through seamless financing for development and deployment of new knowledge. Over time, it will also aim at integrating further the work of national research institutes to further position the EU as a global leader in ocean research, technologies and innovation.

In addition, it will establish a **European network of ocean technology testing sites** to accelerate innovation and deployment of key ocean technologies.

6.2. Developing the marine knowledge value chain to foster a healthy ocean and a sustainable blue economy

The European Ocean R&I Strategy is fundamentally linked to the development of a robust *EU marine knowledge framework*, creating bi-directional synergies between research and data-driven decision-making, notably through (i) ocean observation, (ii) marine data and (iii) their use for informed decision-making on the blue economy and the sustainable management of marine and coastal areas.

The planning of ocean observation is the foundation of marine knowledge. The coordination and organisation of the monitoring programmes and of the data collection campaigns are very fragmented at EU and Member State level. This impedes the collection and sharing of the marine data needed for informed decision making and business creation. For this reason, the Commission will propose a process to coordinate **ocean observation, aiming at creating a coherent, standardised approach to planning ocean observation in the EU**. This will bring benefits in terms of overall costs, data availability, usefulness, transparency and administrative

burden reduction as well as **eliminating the barriers** across national, regional, EU, and international levels and accelerating licencing and permitting for ocean economy. The adoption of common observation standards will boost the investments and competitiveness of the EU ocean economy and create a market for the ocean observation technologies.

Data collected from ocean observation is processed, transforming it into actionable knowledge. The Commission contributes in various ways to making such data available. EMODnet, the European Marine Observation and Data network, aggregates in-situ ocean observation data on hundreds of parameters. The Copernicus Marine Services provides satellite data and state-of-the-art marine forecasting services. The Commission will work further on **integrating the two services** and ensuring their further development. Herein, the use of Artificial Intelligence to gather and organise high-quality data will be essential, as stressed by the Commission's Communication on an AI continent action plan.

EMODnet and Copernicus Marine provide data and services to the **European Digital Twin Ocean (DTO)**, an ambitious near real-time virtual representation of the ocean accessible to all citizens, scientists and innovators, which should be operational by 2030 and which will support policy-making and private sector decisions on investments through scenario assessment. It is developed in a way that will make it interoperable with the Destination Earth initiative.

The coordination of ocean observation campaigns, and the further integration of data provision services will support the completion of the DTO, as well as the establishment of the wide **ocean observation project "Neptune"**, in cooperation with Member States, third countries and private stakeholders.

In addition, fisheries data is collected by Member States at national and regional level under the Data Collection Framework Regulation to provide a sound scientific basis for the fisheries management measures. This "best available scientific advice" is delivered by dedicated scientific bodies such as ICES and STECF, using widely recognised methodologies. Further efforts will be dedicated by the Commission, in cooperation with these scientific bodies, for the operationalisation of the **ecosystem-approach to fisheries management**, which will enable a more integrated perspective on managing the relevant waters, including from a socio-economic perspective.

Stakeholders will be invited to further contribute to the scientific process with a view to increase transparency and usability of science. Over time, these various sources of data and scientific knowledge should become a more integral work strand of a broader ocean observation strategy.

This work will also **benefit the international community** which the Commission will continue to support by making science and knowledge available through the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainability, science diplomacy, international collaborations on data interoperability and sharing and by supporting capacity development in marine knowledge.

6.3. Strengthening ocean literacy

Ocean literacy is central to the objectives of the Ocean Pact and essential for a whole-of-society approach to the ocean. It fosters an understanding of the ocean's influence on us and our impact on the ocean, empowering citizens to make informed choices and policymakers to make responsible decisions that balance economic needs with long-term sustainability.

The Commission will **scale up the European Coalition for Ocean Literacy (EU4Ocean)**, which engages thousands of organisations, businesses, youth, and schools. Through education, awareness-raising and established tools such as the European Atlas of the Seas, EU4Ocean will aim to highlight the importance of the ocean for environmental conservation, innovation and prosperity, climate action and global security.

The **Network of European Blue Schools** will continue ensuring that young people in the EU – from schoolchildren to teenagers – are actively engaged in ocean education. It will consolidate its role as the European arm of IOC-UNESCO’s new Global Blue Schools Network, with a goal to reach at least 1,000 schools by 2030. Local authorities will be invited to establish Blue School Municipalities, reinforcing the Pact’s focus on community involvement and the connection between education, marine knowledge and sustainable economic growth.

Building on the Youth4Ocean Forum, the Commission will establish an **EU Ocean Youth Ambassador Network** to engage more young advocates in ocean sustainability across the EU and globally. The Commission will host **annual Youth Policy Dialogues** and implement youth checks for any new ocean-related policies, ensuring that the voices of young people are effectively integrated into policymaking.

Through citizen science initiatives, the Commission will offer citizens opportunities to gain practical experience in collecting, sharing and using marine data, thereby enhancing their understanding of the ocean. In addition, a **new internship programme** under the EU4Ocean coalition will offer young people hands-on experience in jobs that contribute to a competitive and sustainable blue economy. This will not only equip young people with the skills necessary for future careers but also reinforce the link between ocean literacy and the private sector.

New Flagship actions – research and innovation:

- EU Ocean R&I Strategy
- European network of ocean technology testing sites
- Completion of the Digital Twin of the Ocean

Project:

- Ocean observation project “Neptune”
- EU Ocean Youth Ambassador Network

7. International ocean governance and reinforced ocean diplomacy

By strengthening international ocean governance with its partners, the EU can produce mutually beneficial outcomes. European ocean diplomacy will intensify actions to protect the ocean, as well as safeguard and promote EU interests and values on ocean affairs, while building effective ocean-related political, economic, cultural and scientific relations with countries, nations and relevant organisations. **Stronger international partnerships** and the promotion of multilateral diplomacy and outcomes are more important than ever. They are necessary for effective marine resource protection and management, especially in fisheries where efforts to create a better and fairer international level playing field will **help both EU fisheries and global sustainability**.

7.1. Strengthening International Ocean Governance

The EU aims to drive effective international ocean governance, ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. It is committed to upholding international law, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and reinforcing the rules-based multi-lateral order that benefits all nations and peoples.

Recognising the need for global cooperation and dialogue, the EU will seek to **position ocean governance at the forefront of international agendas**, fostering partnerships and promoting cohesive frameworks. Aligning international legal frameworks and enhancing coherence is essential to contribute to a robust global system for ocean prosperity, sustainability and regeneration.

All marine ecosystems are interconnected, and for this reason, the Commission will prioritise strengthening biodiversity protection frameworks globally. The EU is committed to driving the **swift ratification of the BBNJ¹⁴ Agreement**, advancing its rapid entry into force, supporting its implementation, and ensuring the High Seas are governed sustainably. Similarly, the EU advocates for an **ambitious Plastics Treaty** to curb ocean pollution and remains committed to concluding the negotiations and engaging with other parties to achieve the treaty's conclusion as soon as possible.

The entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement will represent a pivotal moment for international ocean governance. It will provide a unique opportunity for enhancing collaboration among international agreements, bodies and frameworks such as RFMOs, ISA, IMO, CBD, CITES, and UNFCCC. The EU, along with its Member States, will pursue coherent actions and synergies within these bodies to address key issues identified by the BBNJ Agreement and ensure a coordinated global response to ocean challenges. Furthermore, the EU will promote the protection of 30% of the High Seas by 2030. The EU is transposing the BBNJ agreement into EU law, aimed at ensuring our compliance with the agreement.

¹⁴ Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction

The Commission reaffirms its precautionary stance on deep-sea mining, emphasising the need for more research into its potential environmental, biodiversity, and socio-economic impacts. Until sufficient scientific evidence is available to confirm that deep-sea mining poses no threat to marine ecosystems, the Commission calls for a precautionary pause on such activities, and calls on the Council to confirm this approach.

In parallel, the EU is committed to a precautionary principle regarding emerging technologies that intervene in marine environments for climate change mitigation, such as marine geoengineering and carbon dioxide removal technologies. The EU recognises the critical role of international cooperation in addressing the multi-level impacts of climate change on the ocean. The Commission will keep promoting the implementation of nature-based solutions, which bring multiple benefits regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as reducing coastal risks or increasing resilience of ecosystems and communities.

The EU advocates for the establishment of an International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), designed to enhance the science-policy interface on ocean issues. IPOS will drive evidence-based decision-making, strengthening global knowledge and understanding of ocean systems to enable more effective protection and sustainable management. The Commission also supports initiatives for more scientific cooperation like the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA).

The EU's advocacy and leadership in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) is critical to ensure sustainable fisheries management. It will continue to push for improved global fisheries governance in global and regional processes, from the BBNJ and the Plastics Treaty to the regional sea conventions. The EU should also develop tailor made regional strategies on fisheries that reflect its strategic interests in specific sea basins, supported by a bespoke mix of EU instruments and policies.

The Commission is currently working on the possibility to include sustainability criteria for imported fishery products to support a level-playing field for EU producers

The EU must continue to lead by example through its zero-tolerance approach to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing through dialogues with third countries to support their monitoring and enforcement mechanisms and to promote the adoption of international standards as well as through strengthening the implementation of the EU catch certification scheme by use of electronic means (CATCH).

The EU will continue to engage for fuller ratification and implementation of the Port States Measures Agreement and to promote the implementation of its updated fisheries control rules on the global stage. Ensuring stability and predictability of access to neighbouring waters is a critical part of this, contributing to both sustainable fisheries and regional cooperation.

A new generation of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) will align with the EU's wider regional strategies and priorities, most notably for Africa and the Indo-Pacific. This new generation will contribute to a coherent EU approach for sustainable fisheries and ocean governance.

While the EU seeks to foster cooperation with third countries on fisheries management, it remains steadfast in its commitment to the sustainability of ocean resources. This is precisely why the Commission has proposed amending Regulation 1026/2012 which reflects the

European Union's commitment to leveraging its market power to promote sustainable fisheries management. As the second-largest market for aquatic products, the EU has a unique opportunity to influence global fisheries practices. The regulation enables the EU to adopt measures, including import restrictions, against third countries engaged in unsustainable fishing of shared stocks, reinforcing the EU's role in fostering sustainable fisheries. The amendments to the regulation proposed by the Commission in September 2024 further enhance its effectiveness by clarifying its application and strengthening dialogue with third countries. These efforts align with the EU's broader objective of integrating sustainability into its trade policy for aquatic food, ensuring that global fisheries and aquaculture practices contribute to long-term environmental health.

Moreover, the Commission will seek the ratification and full implementation of international instruments such as the **WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement** on prohibiting harmful subsidies, the ILO Conventions relating to seafarers and fishers and the **Fishing Vessel Safety Standards** established under the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

In fisheries and beyond, a major challenge is the fulfilment of **flag state responsibility** as reflected by the law of the sea. The EU will intensify efforts to address challenges with "flags of convenience," ensuring transparency in vessel ownership structures to hold accountable those responsible for illegal practices in maritime industries, including transport, fisheries, and environmental management.

These EU efforts will be outlined in a **new strategic approach to EU fisheries external action**. The approach will aim at closing gaps in global fisheries governance and reinforcing the EU's commitment to sustainable ocean stewardship.

7.2. A Strategic Ocean Diplomacy Fit for Purpose

The EU is a major diplomatic actor on the ocean, representing the interests of the Union and its Member States. Speaking with one voice, the EU seeks to mobilise action on ocean issues in multilateral, regional and bilateral settings. In view of a changing geopolitical landscape, the EU must redouble its efforts to ensure its ocean diplomacy is strategic and fit for purpose and upholds its ambition to maintain and reinforce a rules-based multilateral order. Moreover, as the second-largest market for aquatic products and a leader in blue technologies, the EU plays a crucial role in setting global standards and establishing best practices. The Commission is currently exploring different alternatives to improve the **sustainability of imports of fishery products** to support a level-playing field for EU producers.

Ensuring the **sustainable governance of ocean resources, particularly fisheries**, will require enhanced cooperation between the EU, third countries and global actors. The EU's strategic relations with partner countries and organisations will be critical to safeguard European interests and promote sustainable ocean use. **The EU's network of bilateral engagements and strategic initiatives with partners in regions such as the Mediterranean and Black Sea, Arctic, Africa and the Indo-Pacific will help advance ocean governance and sustainable blue economic development globally.**

In its external actions in partner countries, the EU will adopt a seascape approach. This approach constitutes a key tool for ensuring effective impact and synergy in advancing sustainable ocean governance, conservation, and economic development in partner countries. It involves identifying key areas to be conserved, mapping stakeholders and activities

impacting them, and addressing system-wide interactions, ensuring long-term environmental health and economic benefits for local communities.

Through its **Delegations** worldwide, the EU will act as a key advocate for its ocean goals, engaging with governments, international organisations, and civil society to promote and project EU priorities in global ocean governance.

The EU will use its diplomatic channels to push for the further inclusion of ocean issues on the agendas of the G7 and G20, working as well with all international partners to elevate the importance of ocean governance in other relevant fora.

European ocean diplomacy will focus on promoting adherence to **international governance standards** while assisting developing countries in ratifying and implementing key international agreements related to fisheries management, biodiversity protection, and vessel registration and meeting the SDGs. The EU will also continue to support the socio-economic growth of partner countries through instruments like NDICI-Global Europe and Global Gateway, ensuring that ocean-related activities contribute to sustainable development and capacity building worldwide.

In addition to being the biggest donor globally, the EU and its Member States are now the biggest global donors for the High Seas and are committed to support ocean biodiversity. The EU welcomes the agreement on the strategy to raise the funds needed to protect biodiversity and achieve the action targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), with which the world has given itself the means to close the biodiversity funding gap, including in the ocean.

Bringing together the strengths and advantages of the Union and its Member States, **the EU will promote internationally its vision and approach for the sustainable development of the blue economy**, stressing the connections with critical sectors such as energy or trade, and highlighting the European model. Objective will also be to give a new impetus to the EU-Africa partnership by scaling up our cooperation on the blue economy, the contribution of which is vital to the economy, food nutrition and security, and the sustainable development of both continents.

New Flagship actions – international ocean governance and ocean diplomacy:

- Strategic approach to EU fisheries external action, including a new generation of SFPAs
- Adoption of the amendments of Regulation 1026/2012 of 25 October 2012 on certain measures for the purpose of the conservation of fish stocks in relation to countries allowing non-sustainable fishing
- Swift ratification and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement
- Ambitious Plastics Treaty
- Implementation of WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement
- An Ocean diplomacy for the twenty first century

Project:

Establishment of an International Platform for Ocean Sustainability

8. Next Steps

In the face of accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, and geopolitical tensions, the EU must act with resolve to safeguard its ocean and maritime future. By mobilising the full range of tools and partnerships at its disposal, the EU can lead by example—driving a more resilient, sustainable, and secure ocean space.

The Ocean Pact outlines a strategic and coordinated response to these challenges. It brings together governance reform, innovation, investment, and international diplomacy under a unified vision for ocean health and prosperity. To drive this agenda forward, the Commission will propose to make 2028 the **European Year of the Ocean**, both to contribute to the fourth United Nations Ocean Conference and to take stock ahead of the target date of the UN Decade of Ocean Science in 2030.

This Pact is not only a roadmap—it is a call to action. The Commission will work hand in hand with Member States, stakeholders, and international partners to deliver concrete results. Together, we will secure the ocean's role as a climate ally, an economic engine, and a shared heritage for generations to come.