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Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture

{SWD(2026) 750 final} - {SWD(2026) 751 final} - {SWD(2026) 752 final} - {SWD(2026) 753 final}

1. Why a Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture

Fisheries and aquaculture are, together with their value chains, vital to the European Union and have a key role to play in the transition towards a sustainable and competitive food system. They can support jobs, provide high-quality food, and are an indispensable part of the EU's cultural heritage and the identity of its rural and coastal communities.

Improving the sustainability and competitiveness of these sectors requires a holistic strategy with immediate, medium-term, and long-term measures. This approach should take into account the circumstances in which these sectors operate and the challenges they face. This rationale underpins the European Ocean Pact, within the framework of which the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture (hereinafter 'the Vision') is being developed.

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation[1] evaluation highlights[2] the progress made in reducing fishing pressure towards maximum sustainable yield (FMSY) although this has not translated into consistent stock rebuilding. In addition, the socio-economic performance of the sectors has not improved as expected. Profit margins in fisheries have not increased as anticipated and returns on investment remain low, with aquaculture production stagnating. The sectors' fleets and workforce are ageing, and it is difficult to attract young people. Climate change, the energy transition, increasing spatial competition and geopolitical developments reinforce the need for the sectors to adapt and transform.

A healthy aquatic environment is crucial for the socio-economic performance of EU fisheries and aquaculture, as there is no alternative to operating within environmental limits. This is a critical prerequisite for viable business models that can provide stable incomes and food supply and sustain livelihoods.

Alongside healthy fish stocks, there are other factors that play a critical role and can be influenced by policy and business behaviour. A key determinant of profitability is how the economic value of available fishing opportunities is distributed in relation to the fishing capacity. Profitability is also affected by fossil fuels, a substantive component of the operational costs in the sector, and the soaring volatility of oil prices puts the fleet's competitiveness under pressure. Delivering the energy transition is essential for the competitiveness of the sectors, to reduce their vulnerability to fuel price shocks (exacerbated by the current geopolitical context, i.e. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the conflict in the Strait of Hormuz) and to support their sustainability, including through a shift towards sustainable fuels, electrification and other clean energy alternatives, while also contributing to the EU's objective of climate neutrality by 2050 in a just manner.

[1] Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013
[2] SWD(2026)120.

Moreover, the triple planetary crisis – climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution – is affecting the distribution of fish stocks and reducing the economic base of some traditional fisheries while creating opportunities around shifting stocks. Aquaculture's sustainable growth and long-term competitiveness depend on a mix of important factors, including enabling conditions such as a predictable and effective framework for licensing and access to space, innovation, adaptation to climate change, increasing resource efficiency and environmental performance, and fair competition on a level playing field.

Growing reliance on global value chains and stocks under shared management requires the promotion of sustainable fisheries globally, ensuring a level playing field safeguarding the EU's interests, and promoting international ocean governance, including with its presence globally via its outermost regions and overseas countries and territories.

The Vision 2040 is structured around three interconnected dimensions – supply, demand and key enablers – and sets out the path to competitive, resilient and sustainable sectors. It is based on extensive consultation with stakeholders[3] and embeds two key initiatives: the Energy Transition Roadmap for fisheries and aquaculture and the EU strategy for fisheries external action. These initiatives are set out in the annexes, and their analytical underpinning is detailed in the accompanying staff working documents (SWD).

The Vision contributes to broader Commission priorities, as reflected in initiatives such as the European Ocean Pact [4], the EU Industrial Maritime Strategy[5], the EU strategy towards a climate target for 2040[6], the Vision for Agriculture and Food[7], the Bioeconomy Strategy[8], the strategic approach to research and innovation for competitive, resilient and sustainable agriculture, forestry, rural areas and food systems[9], the Union of Skills[10], the Consumer Agenda 2030[11] and the Competitiveness Compass[12]. Implementation of this Vision should promote equal opportunities, in line with the Union of Equality[13], ensuring that no one is left behind.

[3] SWD(2026)751, SWD(2026)752, SWD(2026)753.
[4] The European Ocean Pact – Oceans and fisheries – European Commission.
[5] COM(2026) 111 final.
[6] 2040 climate target – Climate Action – European Commission.
[7] Vision for Agriculture and Food – Agriculture and rural development.
[8] Bioeconomy Strategy – Environment – European Commission.
[9] The Commission launches a public survey for shaping Food 2040, the upcoming Food Systems Research and Innovation agenda | EU Agri-food Platform.
[10] Union of skills – European Commission.
[11] 2030 Consumer Agenda – European Commission.
[12] Competitiveness compass – European Commission.
[13] Building a union of equality - European Commission

2. Recognising the megatrends shaping fisheries and aquaculture

Climate change

Climate-driven ecosystem shifts will intensify by 2040, affecting stock productivity and distribution (migration of species from traditional spawning grounds), as well as aquaculture production conditions. Changes such as warming waters, with global sea surface temperatures exceeding 21°C in both 2023 and 2024 for the first time on record[14], and ocean acidification decrease the availability of traditional species, favour alien invasive species, and require more adaptive management approaches, especially in areas highly vulnerable to climate change, such as islands and the outermost regions.

Climate change can also lead to significant losses for aquaculture producers due, inter alia, to the increase of harmful algal blooms and jellyfish blooms and parasites.

The **EU Blue Economy Report 2025** underlines measurable impacts tied to climate change, noting that **coastal damage from flooding could rise from EUR 1.2 billion annually today to between EUR 137 billion and EUR 814 billion annually by 2100**, depending on greenhouse gas emission scenarios[15]. An EU study has found that climate change can delay the recovery of commercially important stocks such as North Sea herring and cod, requiring more flexible and adaptive fisheries management to maintain resilient fisheries[16]. These changes have implications for the resilience of coastal communities, as set out in the Commission Communication on the EU Strategy on resilient, prosperous and liveable coastal communities[17].

Demographic and societal change

Demographic trends will also influence the future of fisheries and aquaculture[18]. Member States are experiencing structural challenges relating to an **ageing workforce and weak inflow of young people**.

Broader societal changes, including evolving **expectations regarding working conditions** (such as fair pay, gender equality and work-life balance) and shifting employment preferences will further affect the sectors' attractiveness. The long-term attractiveness of the sectors will also depend on ensuring equal opportunities and non-discrimination for all. This includes removing barriers to career progression, while fostering inclusive and respectful workplaces.

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[14] SP - Global ocean change in the era of the triple planetary crisis

[15] EU Blue Economy Report 2025 - EU Blue Economy Observatory

[16] European Commission: European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, Bastardie, F., Feary, D., Kell, L., Brunel, T. et al., Climate change and the common fisheries policy – Adaptation and building resilience to the effects of climate change on fisheries and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases from fishing – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2926/155626. See also the SWD(2026)751.

[17] COM(2026) 530 final.

[18] The Foresight study on fishers of the futures provides a forward-looking analysis of how demographic trends may shape the sector in the future.

Consumption patterns are evolving in response to increasing trade-offs between prices, health considerations, convenience and sustainability. Demand for affordable, healthy and sustainable aquatic food will be a significant factor for the future of the sectors. Globally, demographic growth presupposes rising food demand, including for protein, which in turn risks increasing the pressure on wild stocks.

Technological transformation and digitalisation

Technological progress is accelerating. **Digital tools, artificial intelligence, remote sensing, advanced monitoring and control, selective gears, clean propulsion systems, precision feeding and new production systems** can improve efficiency, competitiveness, traceability, environmental performance and safety. This is broadening the range of functions that operators can perform, including public-interest tasks (e.g. data collection and ocean observation for marine stewardship). By 2040, skills development and adaptive governance will be essential to ensure that innovation supports CFP objectives and remains accessible to all operators.

Geopolitical developments and globalised value chains[19]

Over 60% of the EU's aquatic food consumption is imported[20], Securing access to key resources and maintaining open trade while strengthening sustainable EU production and fair global competition will remain a central challenge until 2040.

Diversification of supply chains is becoming essential to make fisheries and aquaculture more resilient. The sectors' integration into global value chains improves cost-efficiency, access to inputs and market reach. However, it also increases exposure to geopolitical uncertainty through shifting power dynamics, trade relations and disruptions. This can increase price volatility and dependencies, especially in remote regions.

3. The European Commission's long-term vision for resilient, competitive and sustainable EU fisheries and aquaculture

By 2040, the EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors thrive, and contribute to healthy stocks and ecosystems providing the vital basis for their long-term competitiveness and resilience. EU fisheries and aquaculture adapt better to the major changes shaping their future, including climate change, demographic shifts, technological and geopolitical developments, increasing competition for space and evolving consumer habits.

A strong environmental foundation, supported by robust scientific advice, effective control, a culture of compliance and viable and competitive business models, together with innovation and

[19] SWD(2026)751

[20] Self-sufficiency rate based on European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products (EUMOFA) data for 2025 (EU Fish Market).

diversified income opportunities and maximised valorisation of aquatic resources, will encourage investment, improve incomes and working conditions, and enable generational renewal.

Together, fisheries and aquaculture strengthen Europe's food and nutritional security by providing affordable, healthy and sustainable aquatic food – a unique source of protein and essential micronutrients, while supporting a fair transition towards more low-impact, climate-neutral activities through innovation, cleaner energy alternatives, efficiency and skills development.

By 2040, the EU will also have a more efficient external fleet operating in line with the principles of the CFP, as well as a sufficient supply of sustainably produced aquatic food achieved through more sustainable management of global fisheries and aquaculture, effective international ocean governance and partnerships, thereby ensuring a level playing field for the EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

4. Aquatic food supply: creating the conditions for a strong business model

4.1 The EU fishing fleet by 2040

By 2040, the EU's fleet will be operating in balance with the available fishing opportunities and adapting to changing ecosystems, in full alignment with the objectives of the CFP. It will be made up of newer, modern and energy-efficient vessels that have a lower environmental impact and greenhouse gas emissions and are more profitable, thereby supporting attractive working conditions.

Healthy fish stocks provide the foundation for socio-economically sustainable fisheries. Ensuring sustainable management of fish stocks will remain an uncompromised policy objective achieved through robust science, effective control and a strong compliance culture. Fleet capacity management is a major pillar of a viable business model, which should be aligned with available fishing opportunities. Together with other management approaches, like total allowable catches (TAC) based systems, the overall system needs to account also for the increasing impacts of climate change on species distribution and the role of other external factors impacting economic and social performance.

Available fishing opportunities are not always fully used due to a combination of biological, economic and operational constraints, including constraints in mixed fisheries.

The diversity of the EU's fleet remains a strategic asset. **Small-scale coastal fisheries** can contribute particularly to coastal communities' livelihoods, often in locations with few other economic opportunities, such as in the EU outermost regions, in Island Member States, and to territorial cohesion through diversified activities and shorter value chains. **Large-scale fleets**, including the EU external fleet, can contribute particularly to food supply, employment, competitiveness and innovation through improved productivity, cleaner energy solutions and

technological development. The EU's fleet operates in both **internal and external waters**. It requires stable access to fishing grounds and a level playing field in terms of fisheries management rules to remain sustainable and competitive.

funding and targeted support will facilitate the **diversification and complementarity of activities and income**, investments in vessels, skills development and resilience (particularly for small-scale fishers) and maximised valorisation of resources with a view to increasing value and profit bases;

To support this vision:

- the Commission and the Member States will continue to work for **healthy fish stocks** by implementing the ecosystem-based approach to **fisheries management and rebuilding strategies** and **combatting illegal fishing practices**;
- the Commission will continue work with the EU's scientific community to strengthen long-term sustainability and higher stability, via multiannual TAC, while a balanced approach on the socioeconomic dimension will be promoted when setting fishing opportunities;
- the Commission and Member States will continue supporting the functioning and creation of producer organisations (POs), particularly through promoting the integration of small-scale fishers into new or existing POs. This can be achieved through continued financial support and programming, continued awareness-raising at Member State level as well as operational support;
- the Commission will support Member States in rolling out an incentive-based approach for more selective fishing and in continuing to promote pilot projects on gear selectivity;
- the Commission will launch in 2027 the process for assessing the possibility to develop complementary indicators and assess technological developments which could further improve the assessment of vessels' effective harvesting capacity, taking account of the characteristics of different fisheries. This assessment will also consider safety, working conditions and the energy transition, in complementarity to Member States' efforts in fleet capacity management;
- ~~Commission and~~ Member States, with the support from the Commission as appropriate, should improve **fleet-capacity management to create better conditions for profitability**, taking measures to use available fishing opportunities while also supporting adaptation to new realities, linked to changing stock distributions;
- Member States are encouraged to allocate **fishing opportunities fairly and transparently** with attention to access for small scale coastal fishers and young entrants in line with Article 17 of the CFP Regulation and using the guidance in the Commission Communication for enhanced transparency and good governance in the allocation of

fishing opportunities by Member States[21]. Member States are also invited to use methods for allocating fishing opportunities that allow the reallocation of unused quotas;

- Member States and regional authorities are invited to translate Vision 2040 into local realities and to develop **fleet-tailored strategies for the transition** in a bottom-up approach, if appropriate, through national and regional partnership plans **(NRPPs), for example** through **community-led local development (CLLD)**; they are encouraged to ensure appropriate funding for small-scale coastal fisheries;
- operators, especially the large-scale fleet, are encouraged to **invest in technological innovation and skills development** to strengthen self-sustained profitability and resilience.

4.2 EU aquaculture by 2040

By 2040, EU aquaculture will be a strategic and fully integrated pillar of the EU's sustainable food system. It will play an increasing role in the supply of high-quality aquatic food by expanding EU production capacity while ensuring lower environmental impact and reducing the EU's trade deficit in aquatic products.

The sustainable growth of EU aquaculture requires: (a) a simplified governance framework; (b) synergies with other sectors, including the maritime sector (through Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), agriculture, bioeconomy (to valorise side streams and underexploited resources), and with nature protection and restoration (to benefit from ecosystem services offered by nature-positive aquaculture); (c) reduced dependency on fossil fuels and imported inputs; (d) high environmental performance and animal welfare standards; (e) climate adaptation; (f) consumer trust; (g) economic profitability and fair income; (h) a level playing field for EU aquaculture producers and (i) innovation. The sector relies on diverse and complementary production models, with small-scale aquaculture supporting coastal and rural development and larger enterprises driving efficiency, innovation and production capacity. Through circular, nature-positive and restorative approaches, it will contribute to the implementation of EU policies to protect and restore ecosystems.

By 2040, sustainable aquaculture needs to be fully integrated into MSP, enabling its sustainable growth and building synergies with other maritime economic activities, also looking at economies of scale. Inland aquaculture should be supported through integrated spatial and water resource planning. For freshwater and transitional waters, this should also be coherent with River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive[22] and, where relevant, Flood Risk Management Plans and Natura 2000 objectives. In this context, new multiuse and coexistence models will be mainstreamed. One example is the combination of offshore renewable energy

[21] C/2025/6227, Communication from the Commission for enhanced transparency and good governance in the allocation of fishing opportunities by Member States: A vade mecum on the application of Articles 16 and 17 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy.

[22] Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/60/2026-05-10

installations with low-trophic aquaculture (e.g. molluscs and seaweed) to create synergies that can also benefit small-scale fisheries.

To support this vision:

- the Commission will **put forward a proposal by the end of 2027** with the view to addressing obstacles to unlock the full potential of EU aquaculture and ensuring a **clear, simplified and coherent regulatory and administrative framework** across the EU that provides certainty for investment and new entrants. This should enable flexible and adaptive licensing approaches [23] (such as phased development, adaptive capacity adjustments, and simplified procedures for low-impact systems), without lowering environmental standards;
- as envisaged in the European Ocean Pact, the Commission will set up in 2027 an **EU Initiative on Sustainable Aquaculture**[24]**,** a platform that will bring together key actors to enable coordination and exchanges as regards sustainable growth of EU aquaculture production.
- the Commission will **further develop the EU framework** for the welfare of farmed aquatic animals across all stages of production, building on existing good husbandry practices, guidance and scientific knowledge.
- taking into consideration the outcome of the evaluation of the CFP Regulation and the guidance provided under the Commission strategic guidelines on EU aquaculture[25], **the Commission will work with and encourage Member States to work towards:**
    - promoting **synergies between fisheries and aquaculture**, thereby supporting innovation, diversified income sources and greater value creation, particularly through shared infrastructure, services, processing and markets;
    - strengthening **the synergies between aquaculture and agriculture and related territorial development** to support a more circular EU food system, promote cross-sectoral diversification, and enhance the resilience of rural areas, islands and outermost regions;
    - integrating **aquaculture-specific measures in national climate adaptation plans**, including include adaptive spatial planning and licensing, environmental monitoring and the promotion of resilient and climate-adapted species and strains;
    - enhancing **environmental and climate performance, as well as resource efficiency**, including by **nature-positive and restorative aquaculture practices** into their implementation of EU and national environmental and climate policies. The Commission will publish a staff working document in 2027 on how to promote ecosystem and climate services of nature-positive aquaculture, including marine

[23] Regulatory and administrative framework for aquaculture | EU Aquaculture.
[24] As per the European Ocean Pact – COM/2025/281 final.
[25] Climate change adaptation | EU Aquaculture.

aquaculture. The Commission will continue exploring reward mechanisms such as nature credit schemes;

- increasing the strategic autonomy and resilience of aquaculture by supporting production of alternative feed ingredients as well as hatchery capacity;
- strengthening **producer organisations and improving value chain integration**, particularly for small-scale aquaculture producers.

Member States and regional authorities are invited to translate this Vision into local realities and to include strategies for the transition in a bottom-up approach, into their NRPPs and, when relevant, through CLLD.

4.3 Energy transition of fisheries and aquaculture: realistic, affordable, and socially just

By 2040, the fisheries and aquaculture sectors will have made substantial progress on the energy transition with the goal of strengthening their resilience, competitiveness, sustainability and reducing their carbon footprint.

The energy transition is an integral part of the wider transition to resilient, competitive and modern EU fisheries and aquaculture. As evident during the energy price shocks in 2022 and 2026, substantial parts of the EU fishing fleet are highly vulnerable to fossil energy price increases, with also parts of the aquaculture sector being impacted. By progressing on the energy transition, the sectors can both strengthen their resilience and ensure their fair contribution to achieving the EU climate target for 2040[26]. The Vision is therefore accompanied by the Roadmap[27] for the energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture (see Annex 2 and accompanying staff working document), developed in close collaboration with stakeholders, including under the Energy Transition Partnership for fisheries and aquaculture[28].

Adopting energy efficiency measures are amongst the most feasible solutions for reducing operational costs, strengthening resilience and improving the sectors' emission performance in the short run. In parallel, stepping up investment in the development and testing of clean technologies and fuels is needed to adopt energy-efficient and low-carbon solutions in newly built vessels and through retrofits, where possible. The modernisation of fishing vessels should ensure the safety of fishing crews and address the sector's needs for the energy transition. Importantly, the energy transition should proceed in tandem with progress in balancing fishing capacity with the available fishing opportunities.

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[26] COM(2024) 63 final, Securing our future. Europe's 2040 climate target and path to climate neutrality by 2050 building a sustainable, just and prosperous society.

[27] The Roadmap is based on the consultation of a wide range of stakeholders under the Energy Transition Partnership for EU fisheries and aquaculture, as well as on the progress made in the sector by Member States and research institutes. The reasoning and evidence underpinning the Roadmap is set out in the accompanying SWD(2026)752 and SWD(2026)753.

[28] The Energy Transition Partnership for fisheries and aquaculture.

The energy transition will require enhanced investment capacity, underpinned by the development of a stronger business model, capable of mobilising the substantial private capital necessary to support fleet modernisation. Besides, the transition requires investment in fuelling infrastructure, alternative fuels, modernising ports and industrial capacity, and strengthening workforce skills. These conditions should be created in synergy with the EU's decarbonisation initiatives for the maritime sector (including for ports and maritime industry) and the development of affordable and available clean energy and infrastructure[29]. In aquaculture, the transition will advance through increased use of renewable energy, efficiency and lower-carbon feed, alongside increased production of low-trophic species.

Interdependence with other policies and coordinated action across governance levels is needed to effectively create the conditions for making the transition. Setting out strategic actions on funding, regulation governance and innovation, the Roadmap therefore provides a common pathway for the transition at EU level, following two phases: first, supporting the adoption of energy efficiency measures and research and innovation, while preparing for the long-term transition of the sectors; then scaling up the development and adoption of sustainable fuels and technologies, while preparing for the long-term transition of the sectors.

5. Aquatic food consumption: diversification, added value and supporting informed choices

By 2040, aquatic food in the EU market will meet high sustainability and quality standards, thus ensuring that a highly diverse and affordable aquatic food mix contributes to healthy diets.

In 2023, EU-produced fisheries and aquaculture products met 38% of EU consumption[30]. Dependency concentrated on five species (tuna, salmon, cod, Alaska pollock and shrimp), which accounted for 42% of EU consumption but in which the EU had only 12% self-sufficiency.

Diversifying consumption patterns strengthens resilience, reduces supply-chain dependencies and creates opportunities for the EU industry while boosting local employment. By 2040, EU fisheries and aquaculture need to provide a range of sustainably sourced products and help diversify value chains. The **EU's market power** provides important leverage for promoting higher sustainability standards globally.

Achieving diversification and more sustainable imports will require responding to consumers' demand for **transparent information** so that they can make informed choices. **Communication activities** can raise awareness of the value of aquatic products on the EU market, making sustainability an integral part of purchasing decisions.

[29] These initiatives include the EU Port Strategy, the EU Maritime Industrial Strategy, Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation and the European Grids Package.
[30] EUMOFA – EU fish market 2025.

The EU rules on traceability and labelling ensure that retailers and consumers are provided with relevant product information to make informed choices. This also supports **product differentiation** in the market, which can both provide incentives to reward more sustainable options and maintain an offer of affordable options.

Creating added value around aquatic food products is key to developing more sustainable and competitive fishing and aquaculture sectors, thus strengthening their economic performance. Fully maximising the economic use of fishery and aquaculture resources is crucial in this regard.

A **consistent approach that combines consumer information, trade policies and ocean diplomacy, as well as promoting sustainable EU production** will therefore be essential to align consumption patterns with the EU's long-term nutrition and food security objectives.

To support this vision:

- the Commission will ensure that, by applying **digital traceability to all products along the supply chain by 2029**, including processed products, the same transparency standards as well as a fuller set of information will apply to EU products and imports;
- the Commission will consider extending mandatory consumer information, in particular as regards prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products;
- the Commission will launch a **campaign in 2027** on the benefits and value added of EU-produced and sustainable aquatic food[31];
- the Commission will promote the consumption of a **wider range of species** (including underused stocks, invasive wild-caught species (where possible) and low-trophic and native farmed species), particularly through communication campaigns and collaboration with retailers.

6. Enabling Vision 2040

6.1 Workforce of the future

By 2040, a sufficient number of young professionals will be attracted to the fisheries, aquaculture and processing sectors due to their increased profitability and better working conditions.

As highlighted in the 'Fishers of the Future' study and the Youth Policy Dialogue[32], the future generation of fishers will combine traditional knowledge with digital skills, innovation and marine stewardship (collecting data, observation, etc.). Young people will be attracted to meaningful careers within quality job frameworks, while expecting safe and attractive working conditions, a stable income, and suitable development opportunities. The sectors should be accessible and

[31] As per the European Ocean Pact – COM/2025/281 final.
[32] Feedback on youth perspectives on the future of fisheries and aquaculture was collected by the Youth Policy Dialogue that took place in Cyprus on 18-20 March 2026.

attractive to people of all ages and backgrounds, promoting equal opportunities in education, training, recruitment and career development. The sectors need to offer attractive career prospects, provide opportunities for diversification and adaptation, and be based on profitable business models that guarantee a decent livelihood while also contributing to sustainable practices. Modern, connected and 'smart' vessels and aquaculture farms will make these professions more appealing for new operators. Traditional and artisanal fishing vessels remain an important part of active fishing activities and Europe's maritime heritage.

Continuous improvement of working conditions throughout the value chain is essential to ensure that labour is valued and protected. **The EU and its Member States must lead by example in improving working conditions**. Directive 2017/159[33] incorporates major parts of International Labour Organisation (ILO) C188 into EU law, but the latter has not been ratified by all Member States. There are no harmonised standards on training and certification of fishers in the context of the 1995 IMO Convention on Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F).

Equal opportunities for all, including gender equality, needs to be reinforced, with particular attention being paid to strengthening women's entrepreneurship and improving working conditions and training. Women's access to management positions also needs to be encouraged. Women's work, including in family businesses, should be recognised and formalised, with access to social protection and finance.

Third-country nationals working on EU vessels are becoming an increasingly important part of the workforce. Ensuring that they have decent working conditions that are on a par with those of EU nationals needs to become standard practice.

Skills development is a key transition-enabler. The sectors need to benefit from strengthened education and training that combine traditional knowledge with new skills[34], building links with maritime and connected sectors, including major delivery systems, such as water and energy security. The Commission will continue to support investments in vessels to improve the safety and working conditions on board. In fisheries, this includes safety training in line with Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) practices, marine knowledge, business skills and digital literacy. In aquaculture, more specialised and continuous training will be needed, covering areas such as aquatic biology, aquatic animal health and welfare, and innovative farming practices.

[33] Council Directive (EU) 2017/159 of 19 December 2016 implementing the Agreement concerning the implementation of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 of the International Labour Organisation, concluded on 21 May 2012 between the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the European Union (Cogeca), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and the Association of National Organisations of Fishing Enterprises in the European Union (Europêche). ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2017/159/oj

[34] Study to Support and Design Skills Development in the Blue Economy – European Commission.

Diversification and complementarity of activities is a key pathway for continuous adaptation to structural changes affecting the sectors and for their resilience[35] creating new and complementary sources of income, new products and innovative uses of aquatic resources and strengthening overall resilience.

To support this vision:

- the Commission will promote the **development of harmonised training and certification standards for fisheries** by tabling a proposal to integrate STCW-F[36] into EU law by spring 2028;
- the Commission will in 2027 launch the **Blue Generational Renewal Strategy**[37], supporting reskilling and upskilling across the broader blue economy and promoting education, ocean literacy, and intergenerational knowledge transfer; it will consider paid apprenticeships, mentoring, recognised qualifications and possible forms of support for access to a first vessel or aquaculture business;
- through the **Blue Bioeconomy Innovation Initiative**[38] to be launched in 2027 the Commission will support the valorisation of side streams from fisheries, aquaculture and processing,
- the Commission calls on the Member States to implement and **enforce Directive 2017/159** as well as applicable Union legislation around health and safety at work;
- the Commission will encourage Member States and stakeholders to address barriers to participation, combat discrimination and improve the accessibility of workplaces, training and career development for all;
- stakeholders are invited to consider **income diversification and complementarity**, including through aquaculture; innovative business models such as pescatourism[39]; and local value chains, processing cooperatives, territorial branding and contributing to data collection initiatives such as OceanEye[40];
- stakeholders are invited to join existing up and reskilling actions in place under the Union of Skills, in particular the EU Pact for Skills[41];
- **fisheries local action groups (FLAGs)** are invited to support locally tailored projects and the development of blue skills, thus promoting diversification and complementarity.

6.2 Access to finance

By 2040, fisheries and aquaculture will thrive on viable and resilient business models. Profitability and sustainability will be the foundation for attracting investment in the sector accelerating the

[35] Vertical diversification occurs within the same value chain. Horizontal diversification occurs between different value chains.
[36] International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel.
[37] As per the European Ocean Pact – COM/2025/281 final.
[38] As per the European Ocean Pact – COM/2025/281 final.
[39] Pescatourism: non-commercial fishing activities that use marine aquatic resources for recreation, tourism or sport.
[40] OceanEye: An EU ocean observation initiative – COM(2026) 268 final.
[41] Homepage of Pact for skills.

energy transition, driving innovation and modernisation and supporting both fleet and generational renewal.

Meeting the investment needs of fisheries and aquaculture requires a combination of private capital, national budgets and EU funding. At present, **private investment remains constrained in parts of the sectors due to limited profitability, relatively low return on investment**[42] **and lack of predictability**. As the sectors become more economically viable, **private financing will play a growing role in supporting their transition.** Unlocking the sectors' full potential requires a stable and predictable regulatory framework and stronger cooperation between different actors from both the public and the private domain.

Public funding remains an important component of the financial framework. Given its scarcity, it will need to increasingly focus on **addressing market failures and investment gaps, derisking and catalysing investment** that would not otherwise take place, including investments in vessels modernisation and high-end innovation. A more strategic use of public resources, combined with wider use of financial instruments and accompanying technical assistance, can help mobilise private investment and support further public-private partnerships. This could be particularly relevant for outermost regions, where limited access to private finance makes public support essential to unlocking capital. Accessible grants and technical assistance remain necessary for safety, skills and a fair transition, particularly for small-scale operators, young entrants and SMEs.

Without prejudice to the outcome of the MFF negotiations, the Commission has proposed a minimum reserved allocation of EUR 2 billion under the NRPPs for core CFP functions, which Member States may complement in line with their priorities, including the indispensable need for financing of fisheries control and data collection. The purpose of the proposed approach is to allow Member States to build more integrated responses and stronger synergies across policy areas, notably in the areas of CLLD, generational renewal and aquaculture. Moreover, the proposal provides funding possibilities through the European Competitiveness Fund.

To support this transition:

- the Commission and Member States will need to prioritise public funding to support investments that would not otherwise take place, including investments in vessels modernisation and high-end innovation. In doing so, the use of **de-risking mechanisms and innovative financial instruments**, particularly for pilot initiatives and for innovative or higher risk projects, can help optimise the use of public money;
- the Commission will encourage collaboration between Member States, and financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank and national promotional banks, to

[42] Return on Investment (ROI) for the EU aquaculture sector as a whole was 5.1% in 2022 (latest data available) and ROI for the EU fisheries sector as a whole was 4.6% in 2023 (latest data available). ROI can vary significantly by unit of analysis (e.g. enterprise, vessel, fleet segment etc.). Source: own elaboration based on data retrieved from STECF 24-14 and STECF 25-07.

mobilise tailored financing solutions, which could include **venture capital, equity and guarantee instruments**;

- the Commission will strengthen **technical assistance under the NRPPs** to Member States and operators to support the **broader uptake of financial instruments**;
- the Commission will undertake a study by the end of 2027 to analyse how **fishing rights can be leveraged to improve access to finance** (for example, through their use as collateral or financial guarantees or through the creation of a secondary market across the EU), while respecting Member States' competence for the design and implementation of fishing rights schemes.

6.3 Smart and simple rules for competitive, resilient and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture

By 2040, the EU has a system of fully documented fisheries and aquaculture activities, and rules that are effectively enforced. These will contribute to the long-term sustainability of the resources. Fishers and aquaculture producers will have a strengthened environmental stewardship role.

The fleet's **monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems** and their proper implementation are the backbone of sustainable fisheries management. The **revised Control Regulation** [43] will deliver tangible improvements in this direction and in the traceability of fisheries and aquaculture products with digital and automated reporting tools that enable more efficient compliance and reduce administrative burden.

Advanced tools can enhance data processing and risk-based control. Emerging technologies (e.g. environmental DNA analysis) offer new opportunities for monitoring ecosystems and support more informed management decisions. **Increased use of technologies** makes management measures more effective by enabling **cost-efficient monitoring** of fishing and aquaculture activities, including through electronic monitoring, space observation and data analytics. They can support efforts to reduce unwanted catches, prevent by-catch of protected species and to detect illegal fishing. In aquaculture, they can enhance real-time oversight of production, animal health and welfare, and environmental performance

Trust in and ownership of the rules remain essential for their implementation. Communication, participatory decision-making and strengthening analytical capacities will be key to ensuring effective implementation and broad acceptance.

To support this vision and drawing from the CFP evaluation:

The Commission will on the one hand improve implementation of the existing legal framework, and at the same time put forward targeted initiatives to address priority challenges, while ensuring

[43] Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 November 2023 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, and amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006 and (EC) No 1005/2008 and Regulations (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2017/2403 and (EU) 2019/473 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control. ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/2842/oj

sustainability, stability and predictability for fishers and the wider fisheries sector. In particular, the Commission will take steps to address:

  - **the challenge of unwanted catches**, including the by-catch of protected species, taking into consideration that the landing obligation has not delivered the expected results, notably in its practical application. In that respect, the potential of technological developments and fully documented fisheries as well as improvements on selectivity, will be taken into account, following a dedicated stakeholder dialogue later this year.
  - **the need for fleet investments**, in order to take into account the needs for fleet modernisation, energy transition and improving working conditions on board, including through better defining effective harvesting capacity next to capacity for social or environmental purposes, as well as through updating the 2014 Guidelines for assessing the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities
  - **the need to support small scale fishers**, including through the future Ocean Act;
  - **upholding a level playing field** and protecting the European fisheries chain from unfair global competition, notably on seafood products. This could include extending mandatory consumer information, in particular to prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products;
  - **developing a legislative instrument for aquaculture** as referred to in Section 4.2.

- the Commission will consider simplification actions, notably with regard to the EMFAF Regulation and the four EU multiannual plans (MAPs). The recently proposed EMFAF amendment, in particular, will provide more flexibility to Member States to implement their national programmes for the remainder of the programming period;
- the Commission will, encourage Member States to use EU funding to **strengthen investments** in advanced tools and technologies that enhance data-processing, fleet and ecosystem monitoring and risk-based controls;
- the Commission and Member States will promote predictable and **regular exchanges with stakeholders (particularly advisory councils) and social partners**. Implementation dialogues held twice a year will foster a shared understanding of practical challenges and will inform simplification initiatives;
- Member States are called to strengthen the **implementation and enforcement** of the applicable rules and to fight against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The Commission will continue to ensure compliance with the EU *acquis* through audits and verification and, where necessary, enforcement measures;
- within **multilateral agreements / regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs)**, the EU will promote simplification of reporting and notifications through digitalisation as well as consistency of MCS across the different forums.

6.4 Access to space

By 2040, the use of maritime space will be guided by multiuse by design and synergetic approaches, fairness, transparency, predictability and an ecosystem-based approach. Food production is one of the strategic priority uses, contributing to the EU's food security – particularly as land-based food production faces increasing constraints.

Maritime space is becoming increasingly crowded, with growing needs for conservation, food, energy, transport and other uses. MSP is essential to strategically develop sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, avoid or manage potential conflicts and operationalise the ecosystem-based approach, through stakeholder engagement, co-design and co-management, and via transparent processes. MSP promotes coexistence and, where appropriate, multiuse of maritime space, supported by appropriate safeguards and balanced interactions between sectors. **Local action groups** are encouraged to contribute to co-design processes that translate EU objectives into concrete local realities.

An ecosystem-based approach to MSP should ensure that space allocation decisions are supported by robust environmental assessments, considering the suitability of specific areas for each activity, cumulative impacts and climate adaptation. In this context, the Ocean Eye, the European Ocean Observation initiative, and the marine knowledge services in particular, Copernicus, through the Copernicus Marine Service (CMEMS), the European Marine Observation and Data network (EMODnet) and the European Digital Twin Ocean (EDITO) can support the identification of optimal sites for offshore or coastal aquaculture by providing operational marine data relevant to water quality, temperature, water circulation and more, thereby helping operational planning, risk reduction and resilience, including through tools that support the monitoring and forecasting of ecological and climate hazards.

The expansion and effective management of **marine protected areas (MPAs) and restoration areas should be fully embedded in MSP processes**. In addition, a **source-to-sea approach** should be adopted to take into account interactions with land-based activities.

Low-impact and nature-positive aquaculture may be integrated with MPAs, where appropriate, if compatible with the conservation objectives of the sites. In particular, careful planning, and sustainable farming of bivalve molluscs and algae in those areas may enhance the protection of marine ecosystems.

The Commission will, as already announced in the European Ocean Pact, support this transition by proposing an **Ocean Act** in early 2027 building on the revision of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive. It will align with the parallel revision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to create a cohesive legal framework for sustainable ocean management, avoiding duplication and maximising coherence.

6.5 Research and innovation (R&I)

By 2040, ***innovation will be a central priority****. The gap between R&I and market uptake will have been overcome. Sustainable solutions developed through research will be affordable and aligned with the needs of operators, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.*

Science is essential for evidence-based decisions in fisheries management. It is a key factor in the transition, helping the sectors understand the ecosystems on which they depend adapt to climate change and improve knowledge of their economic base. In fisheries, improved gear selectivity and real-time monitoring reduce bycatch, while AI may enable more targeted fishing, reducing the need for corrective measures, provided that it pursues sustainability objectives. In aquaculture, innovation strengthens environmental performance, competitiveness and resilience. Looking ahead, stronger coordination of fisheries science at EU level could contribute to a more efficient use of resources and greater synergies across scientific activities. This could include exploring whether existing EU bodies, such as the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), could play an enhanced role, where appropriate and within their respective mandates.

Data and knowledge are essential for understanding the ocean and for the development of ocean science and innovation. Progress towards the **'collect once, use many times' principle and the generation of recommendations should accelerate**, ensuring efficiency, reducing burdens and maximising its value for control, science and management.

Making full use of scientific data and products from these services, including space-based observations, is essential to strengthen ocean monitoring, support ecosystem-based fisheries management, improve climate adaptation, and underpin effective policy implementation.

Recreational fisheries are becoming increasingly important in some sea basins, yet information on their scale, catches and impacts remains incomplete, creating challenges for effective fisheries management.

The EU not only funds research and innovation under Horizon Europe, a framework programme open to (almost) all operators, but it also promotes data collection, scientific cooperation and knowledge-sharing as the basis for decision-making at international level. However, growing demand for scientific advice means that the EU must adapt its institutional framework to match its international ambitions. Strengthening the science-policy interface will support sustainable management, improve future stock assessment, support ecosystem-based decision-making and underpin adaptation to climate change.

To support this vision:

- the Commission will work with Member States to reinforce the **EU fisheries scientific community** and specifically explore options for a more effective participation of EU scientists in international fisheries management;
- the **OceanEye** will provide information on the state of aquatic environments, supporting early detection of changes and more informed decision-making, including at the international level by promoting a strengthened UNESCO **Global Ocean Observation System (GOOS)** through an International Alliance for global ocean observation. The EU will also work on improving science-policy interface on ocean issues through the **International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS**);
- the forthcoming **EU Ocean and Water Research and Innovation Strategy**, to be adopted early 2027, will provide strategic guidance on key R&I priorities to support the objectives of the Ocean Pact, based on a source-to-sea approach;
- through initiatives such as the Energy Transition Partnership, the EU Sustainable Aquaculture initiative or the Blue Bioeconomy Innovation initiative, the Commission will facilitate **cooperation between researchers, industry and public authorities**, also providing a forum to identify research priorities;
- the Commission will accelerate RDI uptake through speeding up the practical application of research results and innovations by facilitating experimentation, the adoption of new solutions and their scaling up;
- the Commission and Member States will continue to develop RecFishing as a common digital framework for recreational fisheries reporting, improving the availability, quality and comparability of data on recreational catches;
- the Commission and Member States, building on the recently published Annual Social Report [44],will work on **enhancing the socio-economic angle of the scientific advice** used for policymaking.

7. Acting beyond our borders: an EU strategy for fisheries external action[45]

By 2040, the EU will be further engaged in pursuing the full implementation of fisheries multilateral agreements and will continue the efforts against IUU fishing, including through constructive dialogue and through implementing available tools. It will be a key driving force in making RFMOs increasingly effective and efficient and in achieving the ratification and enforcement of all fisheries-relevant ILO conventions on safety at sea and decent working conditions. The EU has a diversified external supply of aquatic food and strong sustainability requirements for EU imports. The EU's ocean diplomacy is committed to enhancing sustainable

[44] Scientific Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Social Data in EU Fisheries: methodology, dissemination, analysis and evaluation (STECF 25-02 & 25-13), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2026, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/6411168, JRC145884.
[45] The evidence underpinning the Strategy is set out in the accompanying staff working document SWD(2026)751.

fisheries management worldwide, as well as governance systems and capacities in partner countries.

A stronger and more coherent external action is an integral part of the Vision for 2040. It aims to **foster sustainable fisheries and ocean governance at the international level** in the context of an evolving architecture of international agreements. It also aims to **contribute to the EU's aquatic food supply** by strengthening multilateral, regional and bilateral frameworks through effective and fair fisheries management rules for all fleets and countries, thereby ensuring a level-playing field.

Given the size of its market, the EU has the leverage to require a high environmental and social sustainability of its supply chain for aquatic food and globally, and should make full use of this leverage, thereby also fostering a level playing field for EU operators. It will continue efforts to build up the resilience of the EU market by diversifying our sustainable supply of aquatic food, in terms of both species and origin.

The EU will work towards the introduction of sustainability requirements in the Autonomous Tariff Quota (ATQ) regime for fisheries products, building on the ongoing back-to-back evaluation and impact assessment.

The EU strategy for fisheries external action will be guided by the following **goals**:

- **strengthening multilateral cooperation**, **grounded in science, rules-based order and partnerships**;
- **achieving strong monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS)** at international level as a prerequisite for effective management, maintaining healthy fish stocks and safeguarding the competitiveness of the EU's external fleet;
- **enhancing the transparency of vessels and ownership for all countries and fleets,** across multilateral, regional and bilateral forums;
- **fostering the implementation of core labour rights** by engaging within the ILO and in fisheries management frameworks.

The EU's approach will vary between marine regions, as well as according to the issues at stake and its broader relations. This requires tailored approaches for the EU's neighbourhood and the parts of the ocean where EU fleets are most present.

In times of challenges to rules-based international relations, **ocean diplomacy is vital** to advance the EU's policy goals. Ensuring the sustainable management of fisheries resources to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 14 on life below water) requires **strengthened international cooperation and the effective implementation of the legal framework established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** and related agreements. Ocean diplomacy for sustainable fisheries will support science-based decision-making and the precautionary approach. It will also support cooperation both within regional and

multilateral frameworks and with developing countries to strengthen their capacity to implement international frameworks.

To achieve these goals, the Vision is accompanied by the EU strategy for fisheries external action (see Annex 1 and accompanying staff working document). Its **priorities** will be to:

- **promote the sustainable management of global fisheries and uphold the rules-based multilateral maritime order**;
- **tackle global overcapacity and unfair competition**;
- **strengthen social responsibility in fisheries management frameworks**, including labour provisions and their monitoring and enforcement;
- **engage at the regional level** to ensure stable access to fishing grounds for the EU fleet in international waters, in the Northeast Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Black Seas, as well as in West Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific regions through a **new generation of sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs)**;
- build more sustainable supply chains through **effective trade rules**;
- **use ocean diplomacy for sustainable fisheries worldwide**;
- strengthening the cost-efficiency, transparency and sustainability of **rules applying to the EU fleet operating in non-EU waters**.

8. Conclusion

The Vision 2040 sets a clear direction for a coordinated transition that is built on viable business models and on investments in vessels and aquaculture farms. This transition promotes full and innovative uses of sustainably exploited marine resources; a skilled workforce; support for low-impact small-scale fishers and aquaculture producers in particular; diversification and complementarity; smart and simple rules; the fight against IUU fishing; and a level playing field and fair market conditions. It will ensure that environmental sustainability underpins the sectors' social and economic long-term prosperity. This approach will make the fisheries and aquaculture sectors more attractive and enable generational renewal and inter-generational fairness for a viable and resilient future.

Delivering on this vision in a 2040 perspective will require collective action by the EU, Member States and stakeholders, supported by coherent and effective policies, governance and strategic investment. These efforts will together enable a step-change in the sectors' contribution to food security, climate neutrality and a thriving blue economy in the EU.