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From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

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Subject: Council conclusions on a sustainable blue economy: health, knowledge, prosperity, social equity

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council conclusions on a sustainable blue economy: health, knowledge, prosperity, social equity, as approved by the Council at its meeting held on 26 May 2021.

**Council conclusions on a sustainable blue economy:
health, knowledge, prosperity, social equity**

The Council of the European Union,

RECALLING:

- the Council conclusions on the Integrated Maritime Policy of December 2008, 16 November 2009, 14 June 2010, 19 December 2011, 11 December 2012, 25 June 2013 and 24 June 2014¹;
- the Council conclusions on the Arctic of 20 June 2016²;
- the Council conclusions on ‘International ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans’ of 3 April 2017³;
- the Council conclusions on ‘A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ of 20 June 2017⁴;
- the Council conclusions on Blue Growth of 26 June 2017⁵;
- the Council conclusions on the revision of the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) Action Plan of 26 June 2018⁶;
- the Council conclusions on Oceans and Seas of 19 November 2019⁷;

1 16503/1/08 REV 1, 15175/1/09 REV 1, 10300/10, 18279/11, 16553/12 + COR 1, 10790/13 and 11204/14

2 10400/16

3 8029/17

4 10370/17

5 10662/17

6 10494/18

7 14249/19

- the Council conclusions on the updated Bioeconomy Strategy 'A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment' of 29 November 2019⁸;
- the Council conclusions on 'Building a sustainable Europe by 2030 – Progress thus far and next steps' of 10 December 2019⁹;
- the Council conclusions on 'EU Waterborne Transport Sector – Future outlook: Towards a carbon-neutral, zero accidents, automated and competitive EU Waterborne Transport Sector' of 5 June 2020¹⁰;
- the Council conclusions on the Farm to Fork Strategy of 19 October 2020¹¹;
- the Council conclusions on Biodiversity - the need for urgent action of 23 October 2020¹²;
- the Council conclusions on a recovery advancing the transition towards a more dynamic, resilient and competitive European industry of 16 November 2020¹³;
- the Council conclusions on the New European Research Area of 1 December 2020¹⁴;
- the Council conclusions on Offshore Energy - Fostering European Cooperation in Offshore and Other Renewable Energies of 11 December 2020¹⁵;
- the Council conclusions 'Towards a hydrogen market for Europe' of 11 December 2020¹⁶;
- the Council conclusions on Making the Recovery Circular and Green of 17 December 2020¹⁷;

8	14594/19
9	14835/19
10	8648/20
11	12099/20
12	12210/20
13	13004/20
14	13567/20
15	13893/20
16	13976/20
17	13852/20

1. ACKNOWLEDGES that climate change and environmental degradation, including loss of biodiversity, pose direct and existential threats to human life and well-being and endanger the foundations of our society and economy; for an ecologically and environmentally resilient future, the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the oceans and seas should be an integral part of the transformation; WELCOMES the European Green Deal as a strategy that will transform the European Union into a modern, resource-efficient, resilient, competitive and sustainable economy, where by 2050 biodiversity is conserved, restored and used sustainably, there are net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases, pollution is reduced to levels that are no longer harmful for humans and natural ecosystems, and economic growth is decoupled from unsustainable resource use;
2. HIGHLIGHTS that a sustainable blue economy as part of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy and a sustainable use of oceans and seas play an important role in the European Green Deal agenda; SUPPORTS sound governance based on knowledge, awareness and insight of oceans and seas, as well as fair and equitable socioeconomic conditions, in line with the EU's Strategic Agenda;
3. STRESSES that the COVID-19 pandemic poses a challenge of historic proportions to the European Union and the world; RECALLS that Next Generation EU and the new multiannual financial framework, including the Recovery and Resilience Facility, are instruments that need to be taken into account in the development of blue economy sectors to contribute to the European recovery, while reinforcing the commitment to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources;
4. RECOGNISES that oceans and seas play a vital role as a climate regulator, the planet's main carbon sink, and the main regulator of the planet's temperature; as such, oceans and seas should be regarded as an important nature-based solution to the challenges of climate change;

5. UNDERLINES the importance of all sea-basin strategies and initiative in promoting common objectives for a sustainable blue economy between the EU and neighbouring countries; WELCOMES the new Atlantic maritime strategy action plan¹⁸, the updated action plan for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the 2021 Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy;
6. IS CONCERNED about the job losses and setbacks in blue economy sectors due to the COVID-19 crisis; WELCOMES the joint efforts of the EU and its Member States to reverse the impacts of the crisis, including through public and private funding and investments, allowing the EU to emerge from this crisis stronger;
7. REAFFIRMS that, as expressed in the UN Resolution A/75/239 of 31 December 2020, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ‘sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out’;
8. RECALLS that, in order to ensure healthy and resilient oceans and seas, reverse the decline in their health, conserve their ecosystems and ensure sustainable use of marine resources, change is required in global management ambitions and specifically in our production and consumption patterns;
9. WELCOMES the Commission’s communication¹⁹ on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy, which calls for a strengthened cross-sectoral approach;
10. WELCOMES the Farm to Fork Strategy²⁰, which calls for an accelerated shift towards sustainable fish and seafood production and a circular blue bioeconomy; STRESSES that the transition towards fair, healthy and sustainable food systems and investment in new sustainable forms of food production and consumption are crucial to the sustainability of the food chain and to food safety and security;

¹⁸ 9922/20

¹⁹ 8810/21

²⁰ 8280/20

11. WELCOMES the new strategic guidelines for sustainable EU aquaculture and the fact that the Commission has started working on an initiative to support the production, safe consumption and innovative use of algae in the EU;
12. RECOGNISES the progress made so far within the framework of the common fisheries policy (CFP) on ensuring that fisheries are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and REAFFIRMS the need to continue to fully implement the CFP;
13. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of fisheries and aquaculture, especially on a small scale, as two of the main activities that constitute the economic and social base for local coastal communities, while ensuring their relevance and environmental sustainability in the long term, and REAFFIRMS the need for a special support for these communities;
14. RECALLS the findings of the EU Blue Economy Report 2020, in particular the need to recognise and acknowledge the value of oceans and seas, be it economic, social, environmental or cultural, which is even more urgent given the major crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The European blue economy can and should be a central and solid pillar which contributes to the green recovery of the European economy and the resilience of our society; ACKNOWLEDGES the Blue Economy Report 2021 and LOOKS FORWARD to other relevant studies and data that help to keep track of the blue economy on its path to a green recovery;
15. REAFFIRMS that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is the environmental pillar of the Integrated Maritime Policy and aims to achieve or maintain good environmental status for the EU Member States' marine waters through the application of the ecosystem-based approach and also to contribute to the sustainable use of marine goods and services by present and future generations;

16. STRESSES the need for effective policy coordination between the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) and sectoral policies that regulate maritime activities; HIGHLIGHTS that coordinated action is needed within EU regional and transnational cooperation to implement the MSPD as a means to deliver on the European Green Deal ambitions and to increase the outstanding potential of the coastal and maritime sectors in terms of sustainable growth and as a tool to enable multiple uses of sea space while preserving the coastal and marine ecosystems;
17. WELCOMES the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate; the United Nations Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects (the ‘Regular Process’) and its World Ocean Assessments; and the Global Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; EMPHASISES the need to increase global scientific knowledge of marine biological resources and populations; RECALLS that climate change and human activities have impacts on the environmental status of the ocean and seas and understanding the cumulative impact is an important pre-condition for the sustainable blue economy; WELCOMES the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, especially the recognition that nature-based solutions are essential for healthy seas and oceans, and of the need to close knowledge gaps on climate impacts and resilience, including on oceans;
18. EMPHASISES the close link to the 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 and all other SDGs related to the blue economy, well-being and sustainable production and consumption; HIGHLIGHTS that the EU’s international ocean governance agenda is an integral part of the European response to the UN’s 2030 Agenda;
19. REAFFIRMS the strong involvement of the EU and its Member States in the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and in the upcoming United Nations Ocean Conference;

20. ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of promoting marine conservation, sustainable development and blue economic activities, including in the outermost regions and overseas countries and territories, highlighting their specific vulnerability to climate change effects;

I. HEALTHY OCEANS AND SEAS TO SUPPORT LIFE

21. RECOGNISES the need to urgently address major threats to marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity by advancing action on their protection and conservation and, among other things, on adaptation to and mitigation of the adverse effects of climate change; CALLS for efforts to urgently address marine and land-based pollution, reduce the amount of plastic litter entering the oceans and seas, prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, end harmful subsidies, and stop the illegal exploitation of marine resources and the introduction of invasive alien species; STRESSES the importance of promoting the sustainable development of inland waterways, in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal and the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy;

22. ACKNOWLEDGES that marine litter is not only having a significant impact on marine ecosystems, but is also already generating additional costs and causing loss of revenues for the blue economy, especially in fishing, aquaculture, tourism and maritime transport activities; WELCOMES the efforts of the Commission and individual Member States at international level to reach a legally binding global agreement on marine litter and plastic pollution that would reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics in the oceans and seas;

23. REAFFIRMS the importance of including coherent and representative networks of effectively managed marine protected areas to achieve or maintain good environmental status and promote the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources and nature-based solutions in order to increase the resilience of the oceans and seas and halt biodiversity loss in the face of climate change; WELCOMES the targets set by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, including the objective of protecting a minimum of 30 % of the sea in Europe, one third of which should be strictly protected, while acknowledging the principles of freedom of the high seas and freedom of navigation;

24. CALLS on Member States to use maritime spatial planning to strengthen the delivery of ecosystem goods and services and achieve ecological, economic and social objectives, as well as to minimise conflicts between different activities at sea; ACKNOWLEDGES the concept of blue corridors in maritime spatial planning as a measure to improve the functional connectivity of ecological networks and to ensure sustainable fisheries and navigation in marine ecoregions;
25. CALLS on the Member States to ensure that a sustainable blue economy agenda is set out in close cooperation with the relevant international organisations and regional seas conventions and in line with the sea basin regional strategies; ENCOURAGES cooperation, synergy and exchange of know-how and best practices between different sea basins when implementing blue economy priorities;
26. REAFFIRMS its commitment to conclude the negotiation of an ambitious legally binding international implementing agreement, consistent with the UNCLOS, on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) as soon as possible;

II. KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS FOR BETTER MANAGEMENT OF OCEANS AND SEAS

27. RECALLS the importance of supporting research, innovation and open data in order to better understand, protect and restore the oceans and seas, their state and dynamics and ecosystems; ACKNOWLEDGES the pivotal role of Horizon Europe and WELCOMES the Horizon Europe candidate ‘Mission Ocean, Seas and Waters’; WELCOMES the establishment of a European Partnership for a climate-neutral, sustainable and productive blue economy; OUTLINES the importance of developing satellite-based ocean monitoring and surveillance tools; STRESSES the need to support the development of the European component of the Global Ocean Observation System;

28. ACKNOWLEDGES the progress made by the European Earth Observation Programme (Copernicus), especially through its Marine Service, and the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) in making marine data available based on FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) principles, and emphasises the need to further develop and build on these systems;
29. STRESSES that raising the level of knowledge of the oceans and seas and recognising the importance of healthy oceans for our planet, society and economy are critical in raising the awareness of and educating the public, and therefore RECOMMENDS a consistent effort to promote ocean literacy through formal education, awareness activities and projects and throughout all levels of society at large;
30. STRESSES the key role of regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) as key fora to move forward on actions which contribute to the implementation of SDG 14 and, in particular, the targets related to the management of fisheries and the conservation of marine biological resources; REAFFIRMS the right of fisheries and fleets to pursue their activities in a sustainable way;
31. RECOGNISES the relevance of the four Regional Seas Conventions (OSPAR, HELCOM, UNEPMAP and BSC) as a key tool with long tradition and experience in international cooperation for the protection of the marine environment within the different marine regions of the EU Member States and ENCOURAGES the continued use of these international conventions to cooperate with third countries on key issues and challenges that we are facing in our marine waters: land-sea pollution, marine pollution including marine litter, biodiversity conservation and protection, and the sustainability of human activities;
32. INVITES Member States and the European Commission, guided by the objectives of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, to further enhance the coordination of their marine and maritime research and innovation agendas and financing instruments, building on existing multilateral partnerships such as the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance and the strategic research and innovation agendas that were developed for the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and North Sea and their implementation plans;

III. A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY TO SUPPORT EUROPE'S RECOVERY AND PROSPERITY

33. STRESSES the general need to bring the environmental impact of the various sectors of the blue economy to sustainable levels by actively pursuing the objectives and environmental targets set under the MSFD for all relevant sectoral policies and through a combination of investments, innovation, regulation and cooperation with all stakeholders, including the private sector;
34. SUPPORTS the transition to a circular economy and welcomes the Circular Economy Action Plan, as one of the main building blocks of the European Green Deal, and LOOKS FORWARD to the action plan 'Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil – building a Healthier Planet for Healthier People'; RECOGNISES the need to strengthen circularity in blue economy sectors;
35. STRESSES the importance of sourcing food from the ocean and seas in a sustainable manner as one of the main challenges in the years to come, on the basis of the common fisheries policy and in close connection with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the updated Bioeconomy Strategy and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund; STRESSES in particular the need to support the development of the blue bioeconomy, as well as sustainable and innovative aquaculture systems;
36. WELCOMES the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy; EMPHASISES the importance of sustainable technologies, automation and digitalisation in the marine and maritime sector, which are essential for healthy, resilient oceans and a sustainable blue economy;
37. STRESSES the importance of decarbonising the shipping and maritime transport industries and moving towards the use of low-emission and renewable energy sources, to meet the objectives of the European Green Deal;

38. HIGHLIGHTS the need to ensure adequate funding and the framework conditions to promote research and development for efficient and innovative technologies to further prepare ships, ports, shipping activities, shipbuilding and energy production industries to support climate-neutral and low-environmental-impact maritime transport activities;
39. SUPPORTS the efforts that Member States undertake establishing Emission Control Areas (ECA) and Sulphur Oxide Emission Control Areas (SOx ECA) in the different European sea basins; SUPPORTS the decision by the contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention, in December 2019, to adopt the roadmap towards the designation of the Mediterranean Sea as a whole as an SOx ECA, with a view to submitting a designation proposal to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), as per roadmap, and ENCOURAGES its timely preparation so that the Med SOx ECA can enter into force as soon as possible;
40. WELCOMES the EU strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate-neutral future; SUPPORTS the uptake of marine renewable and low-emission energy sources, and also of platforms for innovation, industrialisation and multipurpose offshore platforms while ENCOURAGING further research on the latter; RECOGNISES that islands and ocean-dependent communities have a special role to play in spearheading decarbonisation by facilitating pilot projects for various offshore renewable energy technologies, in order to increase diversification of renewable sources and technologies while contributing to the security of supply in less-connected, peripheral or isolated energy systems;
41. RECALLS the need to intensify work on the role of hydrogen, particularly from renewable sources, and its contribution to decarbonisation, recovery and competitiveness;
42. ENCOURAGES European cooperation in offshore wind energy production and other marine renewable energy projects and RECALLS the need for easy access to financing, testing, deployment and connection to the European energy grid;

43. STRESSES the importance of sustainable financing instruments in promoting and driving the transition towards an effective and sustainable blue economy and welcomes the sustainable blue economy finance initiative and principles developed by the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and associated partners in this regard; ENCOURAGES measures to reduce risk for investors in sustainability through guarantees from the InvestEU programme; ACKNOWLEDGES that increased public and private investment is essential for achieving an innovative and sustainable blue economy in the EU and globally;
44. ENCOURAGES the Commission and the Member States to continue its partnership with the European Investment Bank Group to help small and medium-sized enterprises to introduce innovative new products and services into the blue economy through the BlueInvest initiative;
45. RECOGNISES the importance of sustainable maritime and coastal tourism for the development of the blue economy and the prosperity of coastal communities;
46. UNDERLINES the importance of strong collaboration with all parties that contribute to the development of the sustainable blue economy and its emerging businesses, and WELCOMES the instruments for participation and cooperation in research and technological development;

IV. A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY THAT IS SOCIALLY FAIR, EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE

47. EMPHASISES the importance of promoting a sustainable blue economy which facilitates a proper distribution of ocean wealth and ensures fair and decent working conditions, as well as equal opportunities for all; RECOGNISES the right of all men and women working in blue economy sectors to pursue their activities and earn a decent living, as well as the need to make maritime professions more attractive; OUTLINES the need to help all activities to engage in the transition to a sustainable pathway; RECALLS the 2020 ILO Resolution concerning maritime labour issues and the COVID-19 pandemic, urging member states to, among other things, designate seafarers as ‘key workers’;

48. URGES Member States to facilitate the process of upskilling and reskilling their workforce to meet the demands of new jobs and technologies, and INVITES them to ensure the promotion of maritime professions and increase the mobility of apprentices and students in maritime sectors by developing exchange programmes within the EU;
49. RECOGNISES that seaports are fundamental to the blue economy; they are essential nodes in the development and operations of various blue economy sectors, from maritime transport to coastal and maritime tourism, from offshore energy, fishing and aquaculture, and shipbuilding, repair and recycling facilities to the maritime circular economy; STRESSES the significant challenges, including difficulties in crew change and repatriation, being faced by EU and third countries seafarers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and ENCOURAGES Member States and relevant stakeholders to implement the relevant IMO protocols to ensure safe crew changes and travel during the pandemic;
50. RECOGNISES that the EU and its Member States will continue to uphold, promote and protect gender equality and women's empowerment in maritime activities; ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of enhancing the voice and participation of young generations;
51. CALLS for multilateral actions and structured cooperation to address global problems, including the livelihood of islands, ocean-dependent communities and the EU outermost regions and overseas countries and territories;
52. RECALLS that maritime security and maritime surveillance are a pre-condition for a prosperous blue economy in the EU; WELCOMES the latest report by the Commission and the European External Action Service on the implementation of the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) action plan and COMMITS to continue the joint actions at EU and Member States level in accordance with the action plan; ENCOURAGES the Commission to continue its efforts to set up a fully operational Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) for the maritime domain in cooperation with Member States and the relevant EU agencies;

53. UNDERLINES the importance of safety and health at work when carrying out activities in the marine and maritime sectors, in order to prevent accidents and to protect workers and the environment against possible related consequences.
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