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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

The European Ocean Pact

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The ocean and seas are crucial for life on Earth, prosperity, competitiveness, security and a sustainable future. The ocean is critical for energy, data, and strategic resources as well as regulating Earth's climate.

The European Union stewards the world's largest collective maritime area, with 25 million km² of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) across its Member States, outermost regions¹ and overseas territories. With about 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. The Union's maritime borders extend to the Caribbean, the Atlantic and the Indian ocean thanks to its outermost regions. Its blue economy directly supports close to 5 million jobs and contributes over €250 billion in gross value added annually to the EU economy². Maritime routes carry some 74% of the EU's external trade, and underwater communication cables carry 99% of inter-continental internet traffic.

At the same time, the health of our ocean is deteriorating due to the cumulative impacts of climate change, pollution, and overexploitation of marine resources. These environmental challenges are compounded by growing geopolitical tensions, which not only challenge cooperative governance but also pose a threat for our security. Freedom of navigation and freedom of action at sea are increasingly contested, and critical maritime infrastructures are threatened. Hybrid threats and cyber-attacks do not respect borders, nor does security at sea. Protecting European borders and infrastructure has become a priority.

To address all these challenges and strengthen Europe's leadership in Ocean policies, the European Ocean Pact builds on existing legislation and initiatives and will, for the first time, provide a holistic approach across all policy areas. It introduces a single reference framework aimed at streamlining coordination processes, simplifying reporting obligations and offering a strategy for implementing existing legislations and achieving policy goals more coherently across sectors. It lays the groundwork for an **Ocean Union**, including an Ocean Act building on the existing Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, and leverages the ocean's immense potential for Europe's resilience, food sovereignty, energy supply, security and competitiveness. It will also reinforce cooperation with international initiatives.

This Pact will support six priorities:

- protecting and restoring ocean health,
- boosting sustainable competitiveness of the blue economy,
- supporting coastal, island communities and outermost regions,
- advancing ocean research, knowledge, skills and innovation,
- enhancing maritime security and defence as a prerequisite,
- strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international rules-based governance.

¹ French Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Reunion Island and Saint-Martin (France), Azores and Madeira (Portugal), and the Canary Islands (Spain).

² European Commission (2025). The EU Blue Economy Report 2025.

The Pact aims at a holistic approach and collaboration across Member States, regions, and with relevant stakeholders including fishers, blue economy professionals, innovators, investors, scientists, and civil society. The Ocean Pact will be updated as needs evolve.

1. A Strengthened Governance Framework

A **strong governance framework** is needed to align 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 (MSFD), or the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), EU legislation and policy set a broad range of both binding and aspirational targets on ocean preservation and sustainable management. Strengthened governance should facilitate implementation of such targets and ensure enforcement of existing legislation in a coherent manner.

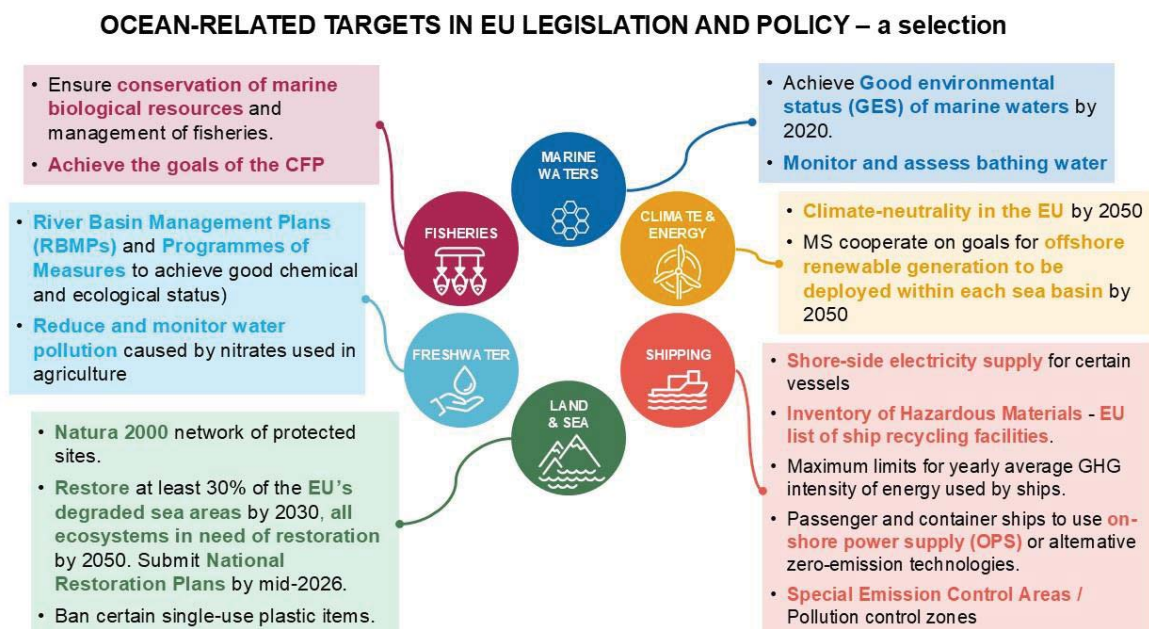


Figure: a selection of binding ocean related targets in EU legislation

Based on a consultation of the relevant stakeholders, **the Commission will propose by 2027 an “Ocean Act” that will build on a revision of the MSP Directive.** It will aim at strengthening and modernising maritime spatial planning as a strategic tool that will serve the priorities of the Ocean Pact and their implementation, notably through increased cross-sectoral coordination at national level and through a better organised sea basin approach. **The Act will reference relevant targets, so that they are identifiable under one roof, and will facilitate their coherent and effective implementation.**

The Commission will also work towards simplifying and synchronising ocean-related reporting obligations for Member States in existing legislation, with the objective to increase legal clarity and policy coherence, while reducing administrative burden. It will also assess ways to support the implementation of ocean-related obligations.

To monitor and report progress on the Pact’s relevant indicators and targets, the Commission will create a public “EU Ocean Pact dashboard”, feeding a regular State of the Ocean Pact Report, capitalising on existing reports and assets, such as the EU Blue Economy Observatory, EU Space Programme including Copernicus, digital tools and taking into account the once-only principle.

Close work with relevant stakeholders on all ocean-related policies will be of crucial importance. Drawing inspiration from the European Board on Agriculture and Food, the Commission will set up a high-level **Ocean Board**, composed of representatives from relevant sectors linked to the Ocean. The Board will be instrumental in supporting the Commission in its task of monitoring and ensuring the effective implementation of the Ocean Pact.

1.2. Working together at regional level

The growing number of maritime activities—offshore energy, fisheries and aquaculture, shipping, recreation and coastal tourism, and more—is creating pressure on limited ocean space. While some activities require dedicated areas, part of the way forward lies in more coordinated planning that balances individual and shared use of the sea within its ecological boundaries and conservation, fostering the co-existence of various maritime activities, prioritising inclusion, fairness, and solidarity.

The EU has supported regional cooperation in fisheries, the wider blue economy and environmental protection through regional frameworks, such as the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and Regional Sea Conventions, which are central to implementing the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the MSFD. Four sea basin initiatives have also contributed to advancing the sustainable blue economy. Additionally, flexible cooperation frameworks such as the Union for the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership, and regional cooperation in the Black Sea basin, have strengthened these efforts.

The EU needs to take the various cooperations to the next level in a more synergetic way to optimise the use of its marine space. Multi-use practices and areas involving offshore wind, with other clean energy technologies, conservation and restoration practices, fishing or sustainable aquaculture are promising avenues for the future.

Through the upcoming proposal for an “Ocean Act”, Member States will be encouraged to move from a national approach to a sea basin level approach. In this respect, they will be encouraged to cooperate with neighbouring countries, across existing regional cooperation bodies, through EU macro-regional strategies, as well as to build on the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters” basin-scale lighthouses.

Further to the “Ocean Act”, specific attention will be provided to:

- The **Baltic Sea** as an urgent priority: the Commission will organise a **high-level “Our Baltic” event** in 2025 as the starting point to a renewed, holistic approach to tackle ecosystem challenges, pollution from land and sea, strengthen security, environmental and fisheries management, and support coastal communities, in cooperation with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and existing regional bodies.
- The new **strategic approach to the Black Sea**, that sets out a forward-looking policy framework designed to address regional challenges through mutually beneficial

partnerships. Adopted in May 2025³, it encompasses actions focused on: (1) enhancing security, stability, and resilience, (2) fostering sustainable growth and prosperity, including through blue economy promotion, (3) promoting environmental protection, climate change resilience and preparedness, civil protection – with a special emphasis on coastal areas.

- The new **Pact for the Mediterranean**, that will pave the way towards a common space of peace, prosperity and stability in the Mediterranean region, building on the foundations of the 2021 Agenda for the Mediterranean. The Commission, in collaboration with the Union for the Mediterranean, will support the development of a blue economy sea-basin strategy on the Eastern Mediterranean, which currently lacks a dedicated structure for cooperation, based on the format of the WestMed Initiative and in cooperation with existing regional bodies.
- The **Arctic**, in particular the Arctic ocean, that is essential for the global climate and marine biodiversity, security and connectivity: the EU's Arctic policy serves as a model for its ocean diplomacy, cooperation and multilateralism and sustainable blue economy development. The Commission will continue engaging with Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Norway, upholding EU standards and exchanging best practices globally.

The Commission will prioritise stable and predictable access to all neighbouring waters, ensuring the fair and equitable use of marine resources.

1.3. Unlocking Financial Support

Ocean Funding

The initiatives in the Ocean Pact need investments and funding from private and public sources. An integrated approach to funding and ocean-relevant policies will cover a broad range of elements: the conservation of marine biological resources as one of the five EU exclusive competences, the restoration of marine biodiversity, the management of and innovation in fisheries and sustainable aquaculture activities, the activities on implementing the CFP, ocean knowledge, maritime security, food security, developing and scaling-up a competitive and sustainable blue economy, including offshore and ocean energy, biotech and desalination, safeguarding underwater cultural heritage, supporting other blue economy sectors and industries to become climate neutral, deploy smart solutions, as well as support maritime spatial planning.

Member States are encouraged to use part of the revenues they are getting from the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) – which now covers emissions from maritime transport - to invest in decarbonising the maritime sector, including via the improvement of the energy efficiency of ships, ports, innovative technologies and infrastructure.

Investing in the blue economy and innovation

European **start-ups and scale ups** that drive blue economy innovations face significant challenges, such as limited access to risk capital and regulatory barriers. Estimates suggest that

³ Joint Communication “The European Union's strategic approach to the Black Sea region”, JOIN(2025) 135 final.

blue economy SMEs in the EU face a financing gap of EUR 60 to 70 billion⁴. EU resources alone would be insufficient to close the investment gap. Therefore, joining public and private sources is key.

The European Commission's **InvestEU Programme**, which provides a guarantee deployed by the EIB, national promotional banks and multilateral financing institutions, mobilises private investments supporting a wide array of blue economy investments at different stages. Indicatively, relevant investments range from technologies or environmental sustainability solutions to offshore renewable energy, greening of ports and shipping, aquaculture, coastal development, tourism, circular economy. It also includes investments in RDI for strategic ocean and satellite technologies, digitalisation, AI applications, advanced manufacturing, and underwater robotics. Until now, InvestEU has supported investments worth more than EUR 15 billion. Looking ahead, InvestEU will continue supporting investable blue economy projects with funding and advisory services for the remaining programming period.

The **BlueInvest platform** holds a central role in EU's efforts to support blue economy. It aims to mobilise over €1 billion in public and private investments by 2028. It supports, inter alia, venture capital funds focusing on blue economy projects via the European Investment Fund's InvestEU equity products. In parallel, BlueInvest, accelerates business growth for European SMEs and start-ups by providing them with capacity building, investment readiness and fundraising support.⁵ With the revamped focus of the Ocean Pact on the blue economy the funding and advisory support under BlueInvest will be intensified.

The **new EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy**⁶ that aims to position the EU as the best place in the world to start and scale up technology-driven companies will also cover blue tech. It will benefit blue economy notably through regulatory simplification, including via the '28 regime'⁷, support for innovation, talent acquisition and skills development, as well as integration with broader EU initiatives.

The **Smart Specialisation Thematic Platform for a sustainable blue economy** will be further developed as a tool to foster innovation ecosystems in Member States and regions and to attract investments in innovation to boost the competitiveness of the blue economy sectors.

The Commission will continue to **work with the European Investment Bank Group** and other InvestEU implementing partners to **leverage private investments** and to **de-risk private capital**, including:

- **Enhancing coastal communities' resilience** and delivering ecological, climate, economic and social benefits, through the EU financing from structural and cohesion funds, as well as Horizon, including Mission Ocean programmes and EIB loans.

⁴ [Study to support investment for the sustainable development of the blue economy - Publications Office of the EU](#), 2018.

⁵ https://maritime-forum.ec.europa.eu/theme/investments/blueinvest_en.

⁶ "The EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy. Choose Europe to start and scale", COM(2025) 270 final.

⁷ The 28th regime will provide a single set of rules, potentially in a progressive and modular way. It would include an EU corporate legal framework, based on digital by default solutions, and will help companies overcome barriers when setting up and operating across the Single Market. To do so, it will simplify applicable rules and reduce the cost of failure by addressing specific aspects within relevant areas of law, including insolvency, labour and tax law.

- Unlocking further investment in ocean innovation, by launching an **investment mapping initiative** that will identify financial solutions accelerating the deployment of new technologies in the blue economy.
- **Enhancing advisory support** under the Blue Champions initiative to improve investment readiness and to seek financial solutions for ocean-related innovators and for accelerating the deployment of new technologies and results of science.

Flagship actions – governance:

- Ocean Act
- EU Ocean Pact Dashboard
- Ocean Board

Funding

- Enhancing coastal communities' resilience through EU financing and EIB loans
- Intensifying financial and advisory support under BlueInvest

2. Integrated approach for ocean health and sustainability

Significant EU objectives have been set and EU initiatives have led to progress in Ocean's health. But the marine environment continues to degrade, and the ocean and the diversity of life it supports remain vulnerable. 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 and marine cultural heritage, from seagrass meadows to mangroves, continue to face pressures from marine and inland human activities contributing to climate change. Improving and sustaining the ocean's health requires commitment, innovation, and collaboration across all levels, including globally⁸.

This Communication proposes actions based on four key principles: a source-to-sea approach on tackling pollution; a precautionary principle; a science-based approach to policy decisions; and an ecosystems-based approach.

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 anthropogenic carbon emissions. It plays a vital role in regulating the climate, sequestering carbon and mitigating climate change. This capacity is endangered by rising temperatures, biodiversity loss, acidification, and deoxygenation.

In turn, restoring marine ecosystems and rebuilding biodiversity can contribute to slowing down global warming, by increasing the ocean's carbon capture function. Ocean warming and acidification is mainly caused by carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels. Therefore, delivering on our climate objectives and engaging in climate diplomacy to bring other major emitters to reduce their greenhouse gases emissions is essential to counter ocean warming and acidification. In addition, producing renewable energy offshore helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, that would otherwise cause ocean warming and jeopardise ocean health and

⁸ Cf. Section 7.

prosperity, and reduces Europe's dependence on fossil fuels, including extracted from the seabed, in view of the risks on the marine ecosystems including the seabed, and thereby strengthens EU energy security and sovereignty in line with EU climate neutrality objective.

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

The Commission will support coastal communities to build new business models that benefit both nature and people including European blue carbon reserves, taking into account UNFCCC⁹ guidelines.

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

Pressures on the ocean harm marine ecosystems and biodiversity, affect coastal communities, fisheries and other sea-based activities.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

A network of well-connected and effectively managed MPAs plays a crucial role in protecting and restoring ecosystems and food webs, supporting coastal communities and fishers by helping rebuild marine life. The EU has expanded its MPA network to 12.3% of its waters but Member States are encouraged to accelerate efforts to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 target of legally protecting 30%, and strictly protecting 10% of its seas. This implies proposing management plans for each MPA, based on science and with the involvement of all local stakeholders including fishers, that aim to address the specific characteristics of the MPAs concerned in ecologically significant areas. This should include identifying, on a case-by-case basis, which fishing techniques are compatible with the conservation of the targeted species and habitats in the MPAs concerned.

The Commission will therefore work on the effective implementation and enforcement of existing EU legislation, notably the Birds and Habitats Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Nature Restoration Regulation, including the use of new technologies, aimed at facilitating surveillance and monitoring.

Sustainable management of marine activities

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 as outlined in the MSFD in order to achieve clean, healthy and productive seas, and ultimately a 'good environmental status'¹⁰ (GES) for all EU marine waters.

Despite progress, a recent evaluation of the MSFD¹¹ 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. **The Commission will revise the MSFD to accelerate progress towards achievement of the environmental objectives, simplify**

⁹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

¹⁰ [MSFD Article 3\(5\)](#) and further specified in [Commission Decision \(EU\)2017/848 laying down the criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters](#).

¹¹ [Report on the Commission's assessment of the Member States' programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive \(2008/56/EC\)](#).

implementation, and reduce administrative burden associated with reporting and data management.

Tackling marine and freshwater pollution

Marine and coastal ecosystems face significant threats from pollution, including nutrients from activities on land and at sea: agricultural runoff, chemical contaminants, plastics and microplastics. This is why measures need to address the entire water cycle on land and at sea. To address land-based pollution sources, the Commission will strengthen a source-to-sea approach, through the **Water Resilience Strategy**, and support coastal communities in the fight against land-based pollution, recognising their role 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 sets ambitious targets, such as reducing plastic litter in the ocean by 50% and nutrient losses by 50% by 2030, strongly supported with funding from Horizon Europe, including the Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters”. The Commission recalls the possibility for Member States to support active or passive marine litter collection schemes under the EMFAF national programmes.

An effective nutrient management, and a significant reduction of pollution including microplastics, PFAS and other chemicals are essential to reinforce Ocean’s health. The Commission will also continue financing research and innovation on nutrient management, microplastics. Moreover, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will continue to incentivise sustainable agriculture, including to help reduce excess nutrients.

Regarding marine pollution, maritime transport remains one of the major sources, contributing to emissions, discharge, waste, and underwater noise. Transformative change in maritime transport towards climate neutrality and zero pollution can limit impact on marine life and help retain and grow the EU’s competitiveness¹². While existing laws have reduced pollution from ships, further action is needed to curb air and water discharges, and prevent plastic pellet spills¹³.

The Commission will therefore:

- Enhance CleanSeaNet¹⁴ so that it can alert the Member States on more types of pollutants from ships e.g. sewage, garbage, lost containers. Member States should further develop verification processes and data accessibility. Building on the work that the EU has triggered under the MSFD on underwater noise, support the High-Ambition Coalition for a Quiet Ocean promoting ambitious and practical solutions that will restore a quieter ocean.
- Work with partners to ensure full implementation of decisions under IMO to reduce pollution from maritime transport.

¹² [EEA-EMSA Joint Report 15/2024: European Maritime Transport Environmental Report 2025.](#)

¹³ On 8 April 2025 the co-legislators provisionally agreed on the proposed draft Regulation to prevent microplastic pollution from the unintentional release of plastic pellets (COM(2023)645).

¹⁴ [Satellite based Services - CleanSeaNet service - EMSA - European Maritime Safety Agency.](#)

Flagship actions¹⁵:

- Revision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive
- European blue carbon reserves and new business models for coastal communities
- Encourage Member States in MPAs designation and management

3. Boosting the Sustainable Blue Economy towards greater competitiveness

The EU's blue economy is a powerhouse of economic and transformational potential. It is integral to Europe's broader industrial and security strategy, and spans wide with (i) traditional sectors in fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, and coastal tourism; (ii) new and emerging sectors in renewable energy, blue biotechnology, underwater robotics, and ocean observation, and (iii) global ocean technology champions, driven by research and innovations in AI, cleantech, and deep tech. A regenerative blue economy that restores the ocean while fostering development, social inclusion and equity involves revitalising marine resources and the ocean's natural systems.

In line with the Competitiveness Compass and the Clean Industrial Deal, the EU must enhance its competitiveness and accelerate the strategic transitions across traditional and emerging blue economy sectors, focussing in particular on decarbonisation and scaling up innovation. This means supporting our fisheries and aquaculture sectors, including better valorisation of aquatic biomass waste, 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 clean growth. Achieving this requires a smart mix of public funding, private investment, enabling regulation, skills development, knowledge sharing, research and innovation, 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 vital for food supply and food security. Yet, 70% of aquatic food consumed in the EU today is imported¹⁶. Complementing the Vision for Agriculture and Food, the comprehensive **evaluation and possible revision of the CFP, covering also the Common Market Organisation (CMO)**, and the **Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture** will mark a significant milestone. It will make sure that fisheries and aquaculture, including the processing sector, improve their competitiveness and resilience and ensure a stable supply for the EU market, while maintaining an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. It will entail working with Member States to make fishing activities future-proof and more sustainable by improving gear selectivity, including through innovation, and reducing negative impacts on the marine ecosystem, minimising and, where possible, eliminating incidental catches of sensitive marine species. The promotion at global level of EU sustainability principles is important to strengthen the sustainability of imports and ensure a level playing field, as further detailed in chapter 7.

¹⁵ Ocean health-related flagship actions under Section 7 also contribute to this priority.

¹⁶ The European Commission (2024): [The EU Fish Market Report 2024](#)

The Commission will propose:

- Measures aimed at the decarbonisation and modernisation of the fisheries fleet, supported by the Energy Transition Partnership for the fisheries and aquaculture sector¹⁷.
- Support for small scale fisheries as a priority. Relevant actions include the issuance of a vademecum presenting best practices the Member States could use in the allocation of fishing opportunities in order to improve transparency, and promote sustainable fishing, and a dedicated implementation dialogue. The Commission will also consider the establishment of a dedicated Advisory Council.
- The establishment of an EU initiative on Sustainable Aquaculture, involving Member States' authorities, representatives of the sector, other interest groups, research and innovation institutions, business accelerators, and financial institutions. It will enhance cooperation through setting targets and defining actions, including the development of projects aimed at multi-use of maritime space.
- To scale up European algae production, including through the new Bioeconomy Strategy to be adopted by the end of 2025, the launch of a Blue Bioeconomy Innovation initiative by 2027 and setting voluntary targets for the growth of algae production in the EU.
- A dedicated policy initiative on addressing the issue of **Non-Indigenous Species (NIS)** threatening fisheries and aquaculture, including opportunities for making use of these species in cases where those species are too spread already.
- A guidance document on managing predators, in the frame of the implementation of the Strategic Aquaculture Guidelines.
- The evaluation of the CMO Regulation to assess the effectiveness of the current labelling rules, including the scope of the products covered, their origin, and the channels through which they are sold, such as supermarkets, fishmongers and restaurants.
- An EU-wide campaign in 2027 on the benefits and the value added of EU-produced and sustainable "Aquatic food".
- Measures ensuring the sustainability of fisheries management and a level playing field for European fishers globally (see section 7).
- The evaluation and possible revision of the CFP Regulation
- Support the social dimension of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (see section 3).

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

Europe's *maritime manufacturing base* 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 and to develop technology for offshore renewables. **To maintain this competitive edge and lead the global transition to clean tech, the Commission will develop an Industrial Maritime Strategy.**

EU ports are strategic assets for competitiveness and security, acting as gateways for global trade, the internal market, especially as hubs for the European Maritime Space¹⁸, and military

¹⁷ [Partnership set up following the Commission Communication On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector.](#)

¹⁸ [TEN-T Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1679](#)

and civilian mobility. Many are evolving into hubs for decarbonisation, circularity and innovation in value chains, supporting industrial clusters. **To reinforce this function, the Commission will adopt a new EU Ports Strategy.**

Accelerating the decarbonisation of the EU *maritime transport* sector to meet our climate targets requires the robust implementation of the recent ETS extension to maritime, our greenhouse gases pricing mechanism. It also requires implementing FuelEU Maritime, a key measure to reduce the GHG intensity of fuels, to stimulate investments, develop alternative fuel infrastructure in ports, and trigger coordination efforts across the supply chain to achieve economies of scale. The EU is pushing for ambitious global measures at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to ensure a level playing field at global level. The recently agreed IMO Net-zero Framework is an important step to decarbonise the entire industry sector. Supporting the digitalisation of maritime operations, investing in green technologies, and fostering green skills development will play an equally essential role in ensuring the long-term sustainability and adaptability of the maritime industry.

Significant investments in alternative fuel production, energy infrastructure, shore-side electricity and uptake and onboard integration of new clean tech 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 and providing affordable energy that underpins industrial competitiveness across industry sectors and Member States. Accelerating the 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 such as fishing and aquaculture.

To continue benefitting from its global leadership in offshore renewables and with the ambition to confirm leadership in ocean energy technologies, the EU should maintain competitive supply chains, access to raw materials and skilled labour. Member States' commitments and regional cooperation¹⁹ will be key to achieve this.

The ocean can be an important source of genetic resources for bioeconomy and raw materials. Sea brines can be a source of magnesium, lithium, boron and vanadium, and could contribute to the security of supply of these and other metals through cost effective technologies to recover these metals. With the increasing need of efficient desalinisation plants to meet the needs for human consumption of freshwater and green hydrogen production, the feasibility of the recovery of metals from sea brines will be explored through dedicated activities under the Horizon Europe programme.

Coastal and maritime tourism is the largest sector of the blue economy and a major source of income for many coastal areas, diversifying livelihoods especially in rural coastal and island communities. Building on the progress within the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the European Agenda for Tourism 2030 and on the stakeholders' consultation launched in May 2025, the Commission will present an EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy in Spring 2026. The

¹⁹ Baltic energy market interconnection plan (BEMIP), Central and South-Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity (CESEC), North Sea Energy Cooperation (NSEC), Interconnections for South-West Europe.

new strategy will promote practices that benefit both coastal and island communities as well as outermost regions.

3.4. Strengthening the social dimension of the blue economy

Generational renewal, female participation, upskilling and appropriate working conditions are essential ingredients for a prosperous and attractive blue economy.

A new Blue Generational Renewal Strategy planned 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 STEM²⁰ education, which should also 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.

To boost digital and entrepreneurial skills, the blue generational renewal strategy will align with the new **Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) in the field of water, marine and maritime sectors and ecosystems** 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**.

In fisheries, the focus of the Commission will be on generational renewal and making the profession more attractive, including through fleet modernisation, digitalization and improved safety on board. It will also include support for upskilling and reskilling of fishers.

Flagship actions:

- Evaluation and possible revision of the CFP
- Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture
- Industrial Maritime Strategy and EU Ports Strategy
- Blue Generational Renewal Strategy

4. Protecting and empowering coastal communities and islands

A healthy ocean provides livelihoods, protection, and a sense of identity to coastal populations. Coastal communities are the driving human force behind a sustainable and competitive blue economy on the road to regenerative practices and play a crucial role in providing Europeans with healthy and sustainable food, clean and affordable marine renewable energy and in connecting Europe to the rest of the world. Their role of stewardship, as key stakeholders and actors in marine governance should be better acknowledged.

Coastal areas are varied and have unique geographical and natural assets, offering both significant economic opportunities and unique challenges. Unlocking the full potential of the

²⁰ Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

EU's coastal regions requires both strengthening leading coastal communities and closing the gap for those struggling to seize opportunities.

Coastal areas are also at the highest risk of climate change, facing rising sea levels, extreme weather events, coastal erosion, flooding, salt intrusion and the depletion of biodiversity, including fish stocks. Coastal communities and outermost regions are expected to step up adaptation and crisis preparedness. The Commission will step up support for coastal communities to implement adaptation strategies and planning, notably through the upcoming EU climate adaptation plan.

To boost its support for coastal communities and in line with the Preparedness Union Strategy, the Commission will propose a new EU **Coastal Communities Development and Resilience Strategy in 2026**. The strategy will capture the opportunities and set out the framework for fostering local economic development and stepping up resilience in coastal communities. The strategy will promote early warning capacities and climate adaptation plans supported by advanced observation and forecasting services.

It will aim to lever the huge potential of coastal communities in developing and deploying new sustainable business models, which contribute to the sustainable development and competitiveness of the EU as a whole. It will support income diversification opportunities and incentivise the inclusion of regenerative and restoration activities, science and technology innovation on observing predictions and services development, building on the successes of the Community-Led Local Development²¹ projects, New European Bauhaus (NEB) approach²² as well as the Mission Ocean lighthouses.

Considering the specific challenges that islands and outermost regions face, calling for tailored policies and better synergies, the Commission decided to launch a **consultation on a new strategy for islands** and an **updated strategy for outermost regions**.

Specific attention and measures tailored to the characteristics of the outermost regions are needed to break down their insularity and meet their needs: strengthening their resilience and connectivity, developing their economic, energy and food autonomy, as well as protecting their natural heritage. In particular, the small-scale fishery sector faces additional challenges in its operations due to remoteness of these regions and exposure to extreme weather events. To address those, the Commission will propose a review of the guidelines for fleet balance for fishing vessels of less than 12 metres in length in the outermost regions on the basis of the best available science in summer 2025.

New Flagship actions²³:

- EU Coastal Communities Development and Resilience Strategy
- Consultation on a new Strategy for EU Islands
- Updated strategy on outermost regions

²¹ [Inforegio - Community-led Local Development](#)

²² The New European Bauhaus' (NEB) transdisciplinary and participatory approach, innovative projects such as the [Lighthouse Demonstrator Bauhaus of the Seas Sails](#) provide blueprints for place-based actions that involves communities to identify and address the challenges of coastal territories. In the next years, the [NEB Facility](#) will support further projects, including in coastal communities.

²³ Actions under Section 3 also contribute to this priority.

- Review of the guidelines for fleet balance for fishing vessels of less than 12 metres in length in the outermost regions

5. The essential role of ocean research, knowledge, literacy and skills for blue innovation

5.1. Europe as a global leader in ocean science: launching the ocean observation initiative

Ocean observation is the foundation of all marine knowledge. It provides critical data for weather forecasting, climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, extreme events monitoring, civil security - sea condition, floods -, maritime shipping, offshore energy, fisheries and aquaculture, and increasingly defence and security. And yet the ocean remains largely unexplored, data is critically missing or unavailable, and the current observation networks are under growing pressure.

Currently, the EU relies substantively on cooperation with international partners for ocean observation. But as geopolitics shift, some international partners are disengaging from ocean science, disrupting key data and observation programmes and creating unpredictability for availability of historical and future critical data. Some datasets will no longer be available, others will not be maintained or completed. There is significant risk of decrease of the global coverage by observing infrastructures, resulting in less reliable and accurate information to decision-makers, citizens and investors.

In a risky geopolitical world, Europe must become independent and autonomous in all critical ocean infrastructures, data and information services, while preserving and enhancing international scientific collaboration whenever possible.

The Ocean Pact proposes to step up European efforts by launching an ambitious **ocean observation initiative**, including for the coastal and deep sea, covering the entire knowledge value chain, and taking a leading international role, to deliver critical information to all marine actors and sectors.

The EU Ocean Observation Initiative, covering observation campaigns, data processing, infrastructures and the provision of key services, will be the next chapter in the discovery of our planet's inner space and will connect, scale, govern and secure ocean observing capacities.

The initiative will also drive international scientific cooperation with like-minded partners, in particular for the completion of a global ocean observing system that is fit for purpose²⁴:

- **Securing historical data** from ocean observation that are currently at risk in EU-based databases, through a Horizon Europe action in 2025.
- Delivering a **blueprint mapping the knowledge gaps**, by June 2026.
- Developing an integrated, high-tech, cost effective, reliable and secure **observation system**.

²⁴ It will also support the proposed International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), cf. Section 7.

- Creating a **coherent and standardised approach to planning and conducting ocean observation campaigns** by 2027

The initiative builds on the EU existing contribution to operational marine knowledge. As part of it the Commission will further develop and integrate the two EU flagship data services EMODnet and the Copernicus Marine Service²⁵.

It will feed the **European Digital Twin of the Ocean (DTO)**, an ambitious and centralised near real-time virtual representation of the ocean accessible to all citizens, scientists and innovators, which will provide possible and future scenarios, tipping points and change drivers supporting evidence-based policy making by businesses. The DTO, which was announced by the Commission President at the One Ocean Summit in 2022, and which will be interoperable with the Digital Twin of the Earth system developed under the Destination Earth initiative, should be operational as an EU programme by 2030.

The Ocean Observation initiative will help Europe's partners to "Choose Europe" as a reliable science-based, high-tech, secure and open ally. It will also contribute to enhancing ocean literacy and facilitate public awareness for ocean related issues.

5.2. Ocean research and innovation for global leadership

The **Ocean R&I Strategy** will build on the Research and Innovation Framework Programme and, among others, the European Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030'. It will ensure a source-to-sea approach²⁶, and aim at improving the current governance by overcoming the fragmentation of EU R&I initiatives, including their research infrastructures. This will fill the gap between research and innovation through financing for development and deployment of new knowledge and solutions.

The Commission will facilitate the establishment of a **European network of ocean technology testing sites** to accelerate innovation and deployment of key ocean technologies.

Through transdisciplinary approaches that incorporate participatory research and citizen engagement, solutions can be devised for ocean and water conservation, ultimately supporting the well-being of coastal communities.

Established European collaboration mechanisms, such as JPI Oceans and the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, mobilise national investments and will play an important role in identifying and responding to ocean R&I challenges.

5.3. Strengthening ocean literacy and citizen engagement

Ocean literacy and citizen engagement foster an understanding of the ocean's influence on us and our impact on the ocean, empowering citizens to make informed choices. Member States are encouraged to promote intergenerational dialogue, based on participatory and/or deliberative practices. The notion of ocean literacy will be linked to a wider concept of promoting water literacy and understanding of the linkages between water management and the sea. Only by working together and valuing the diversity of all stakeholders, can we unlock the full potential of our ocean and create a more sustainable future for all.

²⁵ EMODnet aggregates in-situ ocean observation data whilst the Copernicus Marine Service is a world-leading digital information service, comprising satellite data, state-of-the-art monitoring, and forecasting.

²⁶ Ensuring appropriate links and coherence with the Water Resilience R&I Strategy.

The Commission will **scale up the European Coalition for Ocean Literacy (EU4Ocean)**, which engages thousands of organisations, businesses, youth and school children. Through education, awareness-raising and established tools such as the European Atlas of the Seas, EU4Ocean will continue working to increase knowledge on the importance of the ocean, including by working with the Bauhaus of the Seas Sails consortium²⁷.

Building on the Youth4Ocean Forum, the Commission will establish an **EU Ocean Youth Ambassador and Intergenerational Network** to engage young ocean professionals and advocates in ocean sustainability across the EU and globally. Career development of early career ocean professionals will be supported through the new **Blue Intergenerational Programme** of the All Atlantic Ocean R&I Alliance. The Commission will host **annual Youth Policy Dialogues**, ensuring that the voices of young people are effectively integrated into policymaking.

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. A special focus will be placed on empowering women, as well as other underrepresented groups, to take an active and meaningful role in ocean activities.

Flagship actions:

- EU Ocean Observation Initiative and Operationalisation of the European DTO by 2030 as contribution to the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainability
- European Ocean R&I Strategy
- Establish an EU Ocean Youth and Intergenerational Ambassador Network

6. Maritime security and defence as an underlying condition

The growing complexity of threats - including attacks on submarine infrastructure, cyber threats, risks posed by sub-standard vessels and the shadow fleet, and strategic contestation over maritime spaces - demands a coordinated, technology-driven and future-proof response covering the external and internal dimensions, as well as the military and civil dimensions. The Baltic Sea is specifically where the shadow fleet presents acute risks to the environment with oil spills, maritime safety and security threats, international trade and maritime law infringements.

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 reinforce the international rules-based order, ensuring full compliance with international instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

²⁷ <https://bauhaus-seas.eu/>

Along those priorities, and in line with the Joint Communication on Cable Security, the Communication on ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy²⁸, and the White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030, the EU and its Member States should focus on strengthening naval and coast guard cooperation, including through Multipurpose Maritime Operations (MMOs) enhancing maritime domain awareness, investing in cutting-edge maritime technology, strengthening critical infrastructure protection and military mobility, expanding naval defence capabilities, and reinforcing European presence and partnerships in the world.

6.1. Strengthening EU coast guard and naval cooperation and maritime border security

The Commission will further 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 airborne drone fleet (UxV)**, integrating AI and advanced sensors for real-time maritime monitoring, supported by Frontex, EMSA and EFCA. This enhances detection and response, complements NATO initiatives, and protects critical submarine infrastructure. Investment in capacity building and trainings will reinforce EU-wide coast guard and inter-agency collaboration.

6.2. Advancing technology for security and defence

The EU will leverage instruments like the EDF, PESCO, EDA and the proposed²⁹ SAFE and EDIP in order to modernise naval forces and related infrastructures, including in communication and networking capabilities, sensors, R&D for technologies, and common procurement of assets for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance as well as the establishment of regional information fusion centres as of 2025. The EIB is committed to help boost industry, including by supporting maritime technologies, mobilising private capital for security-focused innovation.

A new European Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) initiative (including the pilot European unmanned fleet proposed above) 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. Recent incidents affecting critical maritime infrastructure underline the need for seamless cooperation, following a regional approach per sea basin.

The Commission actively encourages all relevant national and EU maritime authorities and agencies to connect to the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE), taking a sea-basin approach to boost regional integration. Recognising the evolving nature of maritime threats, the Commission is committed to enabling the exchange of classified information within the CISE framework and encouraging its interconnectivity with the framework for information exchange operated by Frontex, notably EUROSUR as well as its interoperability with the Maritime Surveillance network (MARSUR), which facilitates secure communication among Member States naval forces. This will reinforce the civil-military interface, improve shared situational awareness, and enable faster, coordinated responses to threats across the maritime domain. The Commission will support efforts related to MDA to progress towards a near real time recognised maritime picture from space to the seabed, that could be shared with NATO.

²⁸ [Communication on ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy](#).

²⁹ At the time of adoption of this Communication adoption of the proposals was pending

6.3. 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, especially in the Baltic Sea region where the safety of critical infrastructure is even more at risk.

A central component of this is the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Cable Security³⁰ in synergy with the upcoming Industrial Maritime Strategy, which will enhance surveillance, deterrence, and response mechanisms. The security of marine and submarine infrastructure would benefit from stronger threats detection capacities and a more unified real time situational picture per sea basin. The Commission is supporting the establishment of voluntary Regional Cable Hubs per sea basin forming the Integrated Surveillance Mechanism, where Member States would agree to cooperate on enhanced detection at regional level. In that perspective the Baltic/Nordic MoU concerning the protection of critical undersea infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, is a promising avenue for stronger regional cooperation on the security of critical infrastructures in the Baltic sea.

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) in EU waters threatens ecosystems and infrastructure. **A coordinated UXO removal strategy, starting in the Baltic and North Seas and expanding to the Black Sea, will utilise advanced detection and disposal technologies.** Partnerships with HELCOM and other regional bodies will enhance implementation.

6.4. Reinforcing EU Naval Operations and Global Partnerships

The EU will bolster its naval operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy focussing on maritime situational awareness and the protection of critical infrastructure. Continuous naval presence in EU waters will be critical to deter illegal activities.

The Arctic is increasingly exposed to geopolitical competition and is vital in environmental, economic and security terms for the EU. Climate change is opening new sea routes and heightening the risk of resource competition, environmental degradation, and hybrid threats to EU security. 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. Building resilience in the Arctic aligns with EU priorities on climate, security and multilateral cooperation.

The EU will further aim at strengthening operational cooperation with Nordic Member States and like-minded Arctic States, particularly on maritime surveillance, search and rescue, and protection of critical maritime infrastructure.

Flagship actions:

- A comprehensive UXO strategy to integrate cutting-edge detection and disposal technologies
- Develop deeper cooperation between the EU, its Arctic Member states and like-minded Arctic States

³⁰ [EU Action Plan on Cable Security](#)

- A pilot for a European (UxV) unmanned drone fleet, equipped (surface, underwater and space) with state-of-the-art systems and technologies
- Strengthen cooperation in the framework of the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships with partner countries in North-Africa and the Middle East

7. International ocean governance and reinforced ocean diplomacy

Firmly embedded in EU Green diplomacy efforts and supporting the implementation of global commitments notably in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, 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**³¹.

7.1. Strengthening international ocean governance

The EU 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 by organising effective international governance. The EU will use its diplomatic clout based on its cumulative EEZ, large seafood market and commitment to sustainability.

Recognising the need for global cooperation, the EU will seek to position ocean governance at the forefront of international agendas, aligning international legal frameworks and fostering partnerships.

The Commission will prioritise and amplify the following key actions:

- **swift ratification of the BBNJ³² Agreement**, advancing its rapid entry into force, supporting its implementation, and ensuring the High Seas are governed sustainably.
- an **ambitious Global Plastics Treaty** to curb ocean pollution and will be a reliable partner and leader engaging with other parties and concluding the negotiations on the treaty as soon as possible.

The EU should also use all of its diplomatic leverage and outreach capacities to help broker an agreement on the designation of three vast **marine protected areas in the Southern Ocean** as the best way to conserve Antarctica's unique and pristine marine ecosystems and biodiversity. 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 ³³ to ensure compliance with the agreement.

³¹ For these and other references to the EU in this chapter, cf. Council conclusions on International Ocean Governance, 15973/22 of 13 December 2022.

³² [Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction](#)

³³ Cf. Proposal for a Directive on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, COM(2025) 173 final of 24.4.2025.

The Commission continues to support 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 and calls on the Council to confirm this approach. The Commission will advocate for a rules-based approach at the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

The Commission is committed to the precautionary principle and the need to ensure an adequate scientific basis on which to justify such activities and an appropriate consideration of associated risk and impacts before advancing with emerging technologies that intervene in marine environments for climate change mitigation, such as **marine** geoengineering and carbon dioxide removal technologies ³⁴.

The EU advocates for an **International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS)**, designed to enhance the science-policy interface³⁵. 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)**.

In addition, the Commission will undertake the following actions:

- The **Commission** is currently exploring how to improve the **sustainability of imported fisheries and aquaculture products** under the Autonomous Tariff Quota (ATQ) regime.
- **To reduce the accidental catch of sea turtles** in 2026, the Commission intends to adopt specifications concerning the turtle excluder device (TED) to be used by the EU fleet in tropical shrimp fisheries of West Atlantic and Indian Ocean. The Commission will assess the effectiveness of those new specifications before further steps internally or at international level are considered.
- 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, the Commission will intensify efforts to **address challenges with "flags of convenience"**, ensuring transparency in fishing vessel ownership structures to hold accountable those responsible for illegal practices in maritime industries, including fisheries, and environmental management. This will build on the results of an on-going study.
- The EU actively leads and advocates within **Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) to uphold high standards** of sustainability in fisheries management, especially for fighting against IUU fishing activities.
- The Commission will propose a **new generation of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs)** aligning with the EU's wider regional strategies and

³⁴ Joint Communication on the EU's International Ocean Governance, [JOIN\(2022\) 28 final](#).

³⁵ See footnote 31

priorities, most notably for Africa and the Indo-Pacific, to contribute to a coherent EU approach for sustainable fisheries and ocean governance.

- The European Parliament and the Council have reached a provisional political agreement on the Commission proposed amendment to Regulation 1026/2012 which aims to tackle **non-sustainable fishing practices**. It reflects the EU's commitment to foster cooperation in the management of shared stocks with third countries, while leveraging its market power to promote sustainable fisheries.

The EU will continue to lead by example through its **zero-tolerance approach to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing**³⁶ based on dialogues with third countries and the IUU carding system. In particular, it will leverage the EU catch certification scheme (CATCH) which aims to safeguard the EU market from IUU fishery products.

The **digitalisation of CATCH (IT CATCH)** is an EU flagship in the global fight against IUU fishing, which will become mandatory from January 2026. As a result, EU Member States will reinforce and harmonise their import controls and actions to ensure the legality of fishery products put on the European market. Particular attention should be paid to outermost regions, which are exposed to unfair competition and illegal fishing from neighbouring third countries.

The EU will continue to engage for ratification and implementation of the Port States Measures Agreement and to promote the implementation of its **updated fisheries control rules** on the global stage³⁷.

The Commission will prepare in 2026 a **Communication on a new strategic approach to EU fisheries external action** in which it will outline **these EU efforts**. 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. Ensuring the sustainable governance of ocean resources, particularly fisheries, will require enhanced cooperation between the EU, third countries and global actors. 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. Engaging in climate diplomacy at global level is essential for restoring the ocean's health. The SIDS (small island developing states) in particular are close allies in the negotiations in the frame of the COP process, as they are also directly impacted by the effects of climate change.

The Commission will put forward the following priority actions:

- **The Commission will adopt a seascape approach** for ensuring effective impact and synergy in advancing sustainable ocean governance, conservation, and sustainable economic development in partner countries. It will identify key areas to be conserved, mapping stakeholders and taking full account of activities affecting them, and address system-wide interactions.

³⁶ See footnote 31

³⁷ See footnote 31

- The Commission's objective will also be to confirm its commitment to the **EU-Africa partnership** by reaffirming our cooperation on the sustainable blue economy, which gives a vital contribution to the economy, food security and nutrition, and the sustainable development of both continents.

The EU will use its diplomatic channels to push ocean issues through the international political agendas including the G7 and G20. The EU reiterates its strong engagement towards the annual ocean and climate dialogue mandated by the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC to advance ocean and climate issues both within UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, including in view of the new generation of NDCs and the next Global Stocktake.

European ocean diplomacy will promote adherence to **international governance standards** related to fisheries management while assisting developing countries in ratifying and implementing key international agreements, biodiversity protection, fishing vessel registration and meeting the SDGs, in particular SDG 14. The EU will continue to support the sustainable socio-economic growth of partner countries through strategies such as the Global Gateway, ensuring that fisheries, aquaculture and other ocean-related activities contribute to sustainable development and capacity building worldwide. To support the EU objectives under the Ocean Pact, and supported by the EIB Group, Global Gateway is being leveraged to promote targeted investments in partner countries aimed at addressing ocean governance, sustainable blue economy and climate action. These include flagships such as the support for Green Shipping Corridors, to promote decarbonisation of maritime transport, and the initiative to transform the sargassum seaweed influx into an opportunity for circular innovation and sustainable growth in coastal communities.

In addition to being the biggest donor globally, the EU and its Member States are the biggest global donor for the High Seas. The EU welcomes the progress under the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on mobilising the funds needed to protect biodiversity, to achieve the action targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), and to close the global biodiversity funding gap, including in the ocean.

Flagship actions:

- Communication on a strategic approach to EU fisheries external action, including a new generation of SFPAs
- Adoption and entry into force of the amendment to Regulation 1026/2012 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 and support implementation in developing countries through the EUR40 million contribution to the Global Ocean Programme
- Entry into force and implementation of phase 1 of WTO agreement on banning harmful fisheries subsidies and conclusion of negotiations of phase 2 on outstanding additional rules to regulate subsidies that incentivise overfishing and overcapacity
- Mandatory use of the digitalised EU catch certification scheme IT CATCH from January 2026, to complement the EU carding system for a more effective fight against IUU fishing
- Piloting of an International Platform for Ocean Sustainability

8. Next Steps

In the face of the triple planetary crisis of accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, as well as geopolitical tensions, the EU must act with resolve to safeguard our ocean and its maritime future. By mobilising the full range of tools and partnerships at its disposal, the EU can lead by example to create a more resilient, sustainably used, and secure ocean space.

The Ocean Pact outlines a strategic and coordinated response. It brings together governance reforms, innovation, investment, and international diplomacy under a unified vision for ocean health, sustainability and prosperity.

This Pact is not only a roadmap—it is a call to action and responsibility. Together, we will secure the ocean’s role as Earth’s climate regulator and ally in the fight against climate change, its biodiversity and habitats as the wealth of our planet, an economic engine, and a shared heritage for generations to come.

The Commission will work hand in hand with the other EU institutions, the Member States, stakeholders, and international partners to deliver concrete results.

Annex: Ocean-related targets in EU legislation and policy³⁸

Objective	Binding/ aspirational	Source
Good environmental status (GES) of marine waters by 2020. MS must adopt national marine strategies to achieve or maintain GES. Introduce the ecosystem-based approach as a binding principle for managing the EU's marine environment.	Binding	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
Ensure the conservation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries targeting them. Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for all fish stocks by 2020.	Binding	Common Fisheries Policy Regulation
30% of EU sea protected by 2030, of which 10% should be strictly protected.	Aspirational	Biodiversity Strategy
Support the biodiversity strategy by aiming to contribute to getting and keeping fish stocks to sustainable levels, reduce the impact of fishing on the seabed and minimise fisheries impacts on sensitive species by phasing out bottom fishing in MPAs by 2030, improving selectivity, protecting sensitive species, supporting the fishing sector, and strengthening research, implementation, governance, and stakeholder involvement.	Aspirational	EU Marine Action Plan: Protecting and Restoring Marine Ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries
At least 20% of the EU's sea areas must be restored by 2030 & all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. MS shall submit National Restoration Plans by mid-2026.	Binding	Nature Restoration Regulation
Installing ~111 GW of offshore renewable energy generation capacity by 2030 and ~317 GW by 2050, of which 100 MW of ocean energy capacity by 2027 and 1 GW by the early 2030's.	Aspirational	Communication "Delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions"
MS shall conclude a non-binding agreement to cooperate on goals for offshore renewable generation to be deployed within each sea basin by 2050	Binding	TEN-E Regulation
88 GW of offshore renewable generation capacity by 2030 and 360 GW by 2050	Aspirational	
Overall renewable energy target of at least 42,5% by 2030 (non-binding aim 45%). MS shall publish information of planned tenders and which volumes of offshore renewable energy they plan to achieve.	Binding	RED III
Measures to support achieving climate neutrality by 2050 – integrating energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture, reducing GHG emissions, enhancing sustainability and energy efficiency, aligning with biodiversity and pollution goals, developing skills and	Aspirational	Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector

³⁸ List may be complemented.

careers, investing in research and innovation, and promoting international collaboration.		
Climate-neutrality in the EU by 2050, intermediate target of reducing GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.	Binding	European Climate Law
Targets for the deployment of shore-side electricity supply for larger seagoing container and passenger ships in maritime ports and for inland waterway vessels.	Binding	AFIR
Maximum limits for yearly average GHG intensity of the energy used by ships above 5,000 gross tonnage calling at European ports, regardless of flag – 2% decrease by 2025 and 80% reduction by 2050. Passenger and container ships to use on-shore power supply (OPS) or alternative zero-emission technologies from 1 January 2030 onwards in ports covered under AFIR art 9, and from 1 January 2035 in all EU ports that develop OPS capacity.	Binding	Fuel EU Maritime Regulation
Recycling facilities shall ensure that ship recycling prevents discharge of hazardous substances into the sea and properly manages waste. Requires an Inventory of Hazardous Materials to manage substances that could harm marine environments and the establishment of a European list of ship recycling facilities	Binding	Ship recycling Regulation
Ban certain single-use plastic items, e.g. straws & cutlery. Collect 77% of plastic bottles by 2025 & 90% by 2029.	Binding	Single use plastics Directive
Quantitative reduction in the consumption of some single-use plastics products by MS by 2026 compared to 2022.	Aspirational	
By 2030 the EU should reduce plastic litter at sea by 50% and microplastics by 30% and reduce nutrient losses, the use and risk of chemical pesticides, the use of the more hazardous ones, and the sale of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture by 50%.	Aspirational	Zero Pollution Action Plan
MS shall establish the Natura 2000 network of protected sites to ensure that the most valuable natural habitat types and species' habitats across the EU are maintained or, where appropriate, restored at a favourable conservation.	Binding	Birds directive
		Habitats directive
MS shall use their River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and Programmes of Measures to protect and, where necessary, restore water bodies to reach good status, and to prevent deterioration (good chemical and ecological status)	Binding	Water Framework Directive
MS shall reduce water pollution caused by nitrates used in agriculture by designating nitrate vulnerable zones, monitoring nitrate concentrations of water bodies & establish codes of good agricultural practises	Binding	Nitrates Directive
MS are required to ensure that marine fuels are not used in their territorial seas, EEZ and pollution control zones	Binding	Sulphur Directive

outside of the Baltic and North Sea ECA's if the sulphur content of those fuels by mass exceeds 0.50 %, and within the ECA if the sulphur content of those fuels by mass exceeds 0.10 %		
MS are required to monitor and assess bathing water.	Binding	Bathing water Directive
Achieving the goals of CFP, by contribute to an efficient and transparent market, by regulating professional organisations, marketing standards, consumer information, competition rules and market intelligence	Binding	CMO
MS are required to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse impact on biodiversity of the introduction and spread within the Union, both intentional and unintentional, of invasive alien species.	Binding	Invasive Alien Species Regulation
With a 2030 target, the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters" aims to protect and restore the health of our ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments. The Mission's new approach will address the ocean and waters as one and play a key role in achieving climate neutrality and restoring nature.	Aspirational	EU Mission - Restore our Ocean and Waters