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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Environmental aspects of the European Ocean Pact: Preserving marine biodiversity - Exchange of views

1. On 5 June 2025, the Commission presented a Communication on the European Ocean Pact¹. The Pact is a comprehensive strategy to better protect the ocean, promote a thriving blue economy and support the well-being of people living in coastal areas. One of the six priorities of the Pact is to protect and restore ocean health.
2. In order to guide the exchange of views on the European Ocean Pact at the forthcoming meeting of the Council (Environment) on 21 October 2025, the Presidency has prepared a background paper and two questions, as set out in the Annex to this note.
3. The Committee of the Permanent Representatives is invited to take note of the Presidency's background paper and to forward it to the Council for the abovementioned exchange of views.

¹ Doc. 9876/25 – COM(2025) 281 final.

Environmental aspects of the European Ocean Pact: Preserving marine biodiversity
- Exchange of views -

Presidency background paper with questions for Ministers

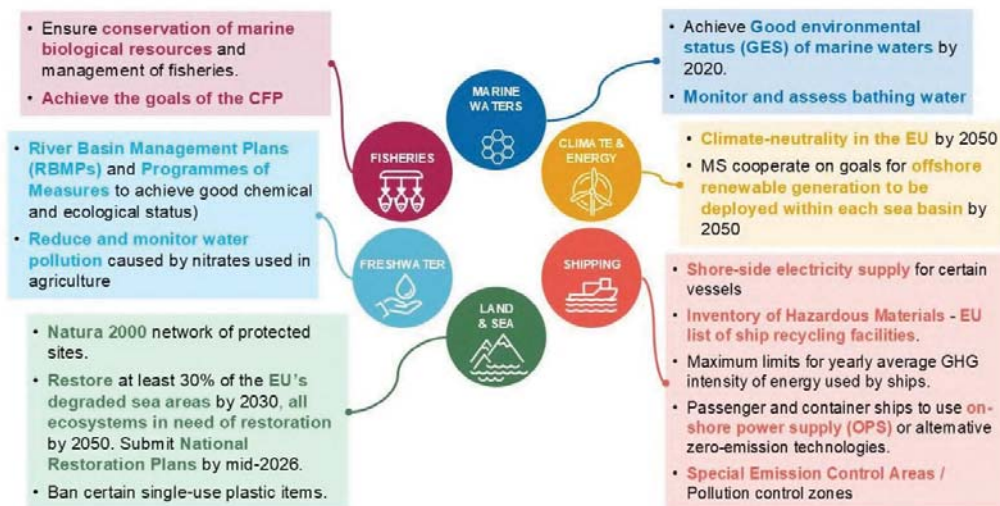
The ocean and seas are essential for life on Earth and for prosperity, competitiveness, security and a sustainable future. Yet the marine environment is deteriorating due to the cumulative effects of climate change, pollution, and the overexploitation of marine resources. These pressures are further compounded by other activities and growing threats.

To address these challenges, the Commission presented on 5 July 2025 its communication for a European Ocean Pact. The Pact introduces a new vision for an Oceans Union, underpinned by a stronger governance framework to ensure alignment of actions related to our oceans and to ensure better implementation of EU legislation as well as both binding and aspirational targets on ocean preservation and sustainable management. Alongside the Pact, the Commission also presented the Water Resilience Strategy.

For the first time, a holistic approach across all policy areas and sectors is provided. The Pact sets out six priorities: 1) protecting and restoring ocean health, 2) boosting sustainable competitiveness of the blue economy, 3) supporting coastal, island communities and outermost regions, 4) advancing ocean research, knowledge, skills and innovation, 5) enhancing maritime security and defence as a prerequisite, and 6) strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international rules-based governance.

The complex interrelationship between ocean related targets in different policy areas and sectors is illustrated below (see page 2 of the Pact):

OCEAN-RELATED TARGETS IN EU LEGISLATION AND POLICY – a selection



Chapter 2 of the Pact focuses specifically on an integrated approach for ocean health and sustainability, which not only addresses protecting and restoring marine life and essential ecosystem services of the ocean but also includes the role of the ocean as an ally in the fight against climate change. Promoting sustainable management of marine activities and tackling marine and freshwater pollution through a source-to-sea approach is emphasised.

The Pact also emphasizes the importance of an ecosystem-based approach in the management of marine activities, as outlined in the Marine Strategic Framework Directive (MSFD), and that further steps are needed in order to achieve good environmental status. The Commission is also planning a revision of MSFD in order to accelerate progress.

The Pact acknowledges that marine and coastal ecosystems face significant threats from pollution, including nutrients from activities on land and at sea. To address the land-based pollution sources, the Commission also intends to 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.

Marine habitats and cultural heritage — from seagrass meadows to mangroves — remain under pressure from human activities on land and at sea, which intensify the impacts of climate change. The Pact proposes action based on four guiding principles: (1) a source-to-sea approach to pollution; (2) the precautionary principle; (3) science-based policymaking; and (4) an ecosystems-based approach. It aims to achieve greater coherence across all relevant sectors.

The Pact also acknowledges the growing pressures from maritime activities such as offshore energy, fisheries and aquaculture, shipping, tourism, and recreation. Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity can simultaneously help mitigate climate change by enhancing the ocean's natural carbon capture capacity.

Despite improvements in some areas, good environmental status (GES) has not been achieved in all European marine waters. Further, despite the crucial role of well-connected and effectively managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as a means to protect and restore ecosystems and food webs, currently only 12.3 % of EU waters are considered protected. The target of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's of protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030 and the target of strictly protecting 10 % of EU seas by 2030 laid down in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 have not yet been reached. Consequently, improving and sustaining the health of the ocean will require innovation, collaboration, and commitment across all sectors — at local, European, and global levels.

In this context, the global Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) has the potential for a significant positive development in marine conservation with the possibility for nations to establish large-scale MPA's on the high seas - covering two thirds of our oceans. In September the BBNJ Agreement reached the required 60 ratifications, and will therefore enter into force in January 2026. Ratification by all EU Member States, as well as full and effective implementation, is now essential to ensure the marine ecosystems globally but also to uphold EUs' global leadership and ambition in ocean governance.

Questions to the ministers

Ministers are invited to exchange views on the following questions:

1. What do you see as the main challenges and obstacles to ensure good environmental status in our oceans? And what are the key instruments missing in that regard?
 2. Which elements of the Marine Strategic Framework Directive would you like to see adjusted – and how – to best help implementing the Ocean Pact’s vision?
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