

The European Oceans Pact

Response to the Call for Evidence

The European Environment Agency's recent briefing¹ leaves no room for doubt: overfishing, bycatch, and habitat degradation are destroying marine biodiversity. While a healthy ocean is indispensable in regulating climate, the 2024 State of the Climate report² warns that we are on the *brink of an irreversible climate disaster*. At the same time, the **World Economic Forum** declares biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse – including the marine ecosystem – as one of the **most severe risks facing humanity in the next decade**³. We must act now: the costs of not addressing the greatest threats for our very fundamentals of life, health and economy are high – and anticipated to increase even more.⁴

Europe's seas are at a breaking point – but solutions are already available. ClientEarth, BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, Oceana, Seas At Risk, Surfrider Foundation Europe and the WWF European Policy Office have outlined in their **Blue Manifesto**⁵ a step-by-step roadmap that has been endorsed by more than 140 organisations from civil society to businesses. It is a pragmatic, science-based plan to guide the EU in achieving a healthy Ocean in 2030, while also guaranteeing a just and socially fair transition.

The European Oceans Pact (EOP) is now the unique opportunity to put Ocean at the heart of decision making, enabling coherence across all ocean-related policies and therefore strengthen the foundation for the EU's competitiveness and its sustainable blue economy. This could be achieved by having the EOP

¹ European Environment Agency, August 2024, [Healthy seas, thriving fisheries: transitioning to an environmentally sustainable sector](#)

² Bioscience, December 2024, [The 2024 state of the climate report: perilous times on planet Earth](#)

³ World Economic Forum, January 2025, [Global Risks Report 2025](#)

⁴ European Commission, May 2020, [The Business case for biodiversity factsheet](#) “The world already lost an estimated €3.5-18.5 trillion per year in ecosystem services from 1997 to 2011, and an estimated €5.5-10.5 trillion per year from land degradation. Biodiversity underpins EU and global food security. Biodiversity loss risks puts our food systems and nutrition at risk. Biodiversity loss is intrinsically linked to and exacerbates climate change. Biodiversity loss results in reduced crop yields and fish catches, increased economic losses from flooding and other disasters, and the loss of potential new sources of medicine.”

⁵ Joint NGOs, October 2024, [Blue Manifesto: the roadmap to a healthy ocean in 2030](#)

outline how to protect the Ocean, decarbonise EU fisheries and ensure the long-term health of Europe's fish stocks and marine environments.

ClientEarth welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Commission's call for evidence and would like to highlight three priorities to truly deliver an effective EOP:

- (1) strengthen the **implementation and enforcement** of existing legislation and policies;
- (2) ensure **policy coherence** and include **clear, timebound, and tangible targets**; and
- (3) secure a **socially fair transition** especially for small scale and low impact fisheries, notably by establishing an **EU Ocean Fund and phasing out harmful fossil fuel subsidies**.

I. Strengthening Implementation and Enforcement

Measures under the new EOP must make use of the existing tools already available and ensure that they are properly implemented and enforced.

A. Enforcement and implementation of Ocean-related laws and regulations

i. General

First and foremost, the EOP must ensure the use of all the available tools to achieve a healthy Ocean by 2030 the latest. The European Environment Agency outlines in its' 2024 Report on Healthy Seas, thriving fisheries⁶, that **existing measures within the EU and Member States could address the biodiversity, pollution and climate crises**. These include "ensuring all harvested stocks are exploited at sustainable levels, promoting low-impact activities, and establishing a large-scale, well-designed and effectively managed network of marine protected areas". It further outlines that transitioning to sustainable fisheries **"requires the full implementation and enforcement of existing management tools**, especially those targeted at reducing the negative impacts of these pressures on marine resources".

Despite these findings, when it comes to environmental legislation, the Commission opened fewer than 560 legal proceedings⁷ against EU Member States during its last mandate – the lowest number in two decades. This is also highly counterproductive from an economic point of view: fully implementing EU environmental laws could save the EU economy around EUR 55 billion every year in health costs and direct costs to the environment, according to the latest Commission's environmental implementation review (2022⁸) (this does not even include the costs for poor implementation of the CFP).

This review also highlights the key reasons for implementation shortages, including "insufficient *integration of the environmental objectives* in the framing and execution of public policies with a significant environmental footprint, *ineffectiveness of environmental governance*, including by those responsible for ensuring compliance on the ground, and *lack of transparency on environmental information*, which would enable those concerned, be they authorities or ordinary members of the public, to mobilise and act. The country reports also point to shortcomings in implementing the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention: access to information, public participation and access to justice, which affects implementation and enforcement at national level". It stresses that the "*political will* is the crucial ingredient for governments

⁶ European Environment Agency, Briefing no. 10/2024, *Healthy seas, thriving fisheries: transitioning to an environmentally sustainable sector*

⁷ Politico, 27th August 2024, *Ursula von der Leyen has taken green enforcement behind doors*

⁸ European Commission, 2022, *Environmental Implementation Review*

and decision-makers to drive the timely, correct and efficient implementation of EU environmental policies and regulations, achieve their objectives and reap their benefits". The European Commission, as the 'Guardian of the Treaties', has a special responsibility for ensuring the implementation of EU law at national level. Where appropriate, this should be achieved through enforcement actions.

By way of example, evidence of the lack of committed enforcement action by the Commission can be found in the closure of infringement proceedings against 5 Member States⁹ (France, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland) for non-compliance with the Landing Obligation under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) despite the lack of clarity on whether those Member States have effectively addressed compliance and control concerns. The Landing Obligation is an important tool to end overfishing: it seeks to ensure that all catches (except those subject to exemptions) are landed to avoid discards of unwanted fish and to encourage fishers to fish more selectively. The obligation fully entered into force in 2019 – and still, it is widely recognised that Member States are not enforcing the landing obligation within their jurisdictions.

The lack of proper implementation of the CFP and the Habitats Directive has resulted in destructive fishing practices that are seriously harming marine ecosystems. For example, between 2015-2023, more than 4.4 million hours of bottom trawling¹⁰ have been recorded in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), completely undermining conservation efforts. Even though the Commission has published a Marine Action Plan¹¹, calling for mobile bottom fishing to be phased out of MPAs, not enough progress has been made¹² – though Member States were due to submit their roadmaps by the end of March 2024, few have in fact done so. To restore and conserve marine ecosystems, the Marine Action Plan needs to be fully implemented and strict enforcement of the Habitats Directive – which prohibits destructive activities in EU MPAs – is essential to stop destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling, in all MPAs. 'Protected' should really mean protected¹³ and protecting the ocean and fish stocks are not only good from an environmental point of view but also lead to economic benefits: conserving marine stocks could increase annual profits of the seafood industry by more than €49 billion¹⁴.

The mission letters published in September 2024, including the letter for the Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, outline that the Commissioners should make **"full use of all instruments for implementation and enforcement, including infringement proceedings"**. To ensure this mission becomes a reality, a more systemic approach to enforcement and implementation should be adopted by the Commission. The EOP should provide for an **Implementation and Enforcement action plan** for all ocean-related legislation and policies, including an increase of strategic infringement procedures when environmental objectives and targets are not being met. The action plan should include provisions for

⁹ ClientEarth, Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, Sciaena, Seas at Risk and WWF, June 2020, [Letter to the Commission on the full implementation of the landing obligation](#)

¹⁰ Seas At Risk, Marine Conservation Society, Oceana Report, 16th April 2024, [A quantification of bottom towed fishing activity in the marine Natura 2000 sites](#)

¹¹ Commission, February 2023, Action Plan: [Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries](#)

¹² So far, only Greece and Sweden have announced to ban or strongly restrict bottom trawling in their MPAs, the Scottish government has proposed bottom trawling bans in 20 MPAs; see Euronews, February 2025, [NGOs launch legal case against French government over bottom trawling protected areas](#) | [Euronews](#); The National, August 2024, [Scottish Government proposes trawling ban in Marine Protected Areas](#) | [The National](#)

¹³ See also recent legal actions against France, Spain and the Netherlands by ClientEarth and partners: ClientEarth, September 2024, [NGOs take France to court over trawling in Mediterranean 'protected' marine areas](#) | [ClientEarth](#); October 2024, [NGOs continue fight against bottom trawling in marine protected areas with lawsuit in Spain](#) | [ClientEarth](#); January 2025, [Netherlands faces court as pressure to end bottom trawling in marine protected areas mounts](#) | [ClientEarth](#)

¹⁴ Commission, October 2022, [Biodiversity: European Business and Nature Summit to push for global deal for nature at COP15](#)

increased resources for compliance and enforcement units to investigate and address non-compliance and enhance the capacity of units dealing with international negotiations on the ocean. This action plan should further pledge that more funding will be included in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for Member State enforcement and implementation of ocean policies.

ii. Sectoral enforcement and implementation

Proper implementation and enforcement is already possible and could lead to **immediate positive effects for relevant stakeholders**. A number of examples are listed below.

To reduce the risk of **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fish** entering the EU market, the EOP should encourage the swift implementation of the mandatory IT CATCH system, taking action against Member States that fail to implement the new requirements. Addressing IUU through proper implementation would enable fairer competition between catch imported into the EU and EU fishers.

The EOP should also focus on **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**: according to a 2020 report by the European Court of Auditors¹⁵ on the marine environment protection, spending in this area should be increased. Well-managed MPAs and fish stock recovery areas (as provided for in the CFP) are essential tools for rebuilding fish stocks and protecting marine biodiversity. Research also shows that well-managed protected areas does not only benefit marine health, it also has significant positive socio-economic impacts. As mentioned above, properly managed MPAs would enable conservation of marine stocks, which could in turn increase annual profits of the seafood industry by more than €49 billion¹⁶.

On the topic of **bycatch of sensitive species and mobile bottom fishing in MPAs**, the EOP should fully implement the Marine Action Plan, taking emergency measures if Member States miss deadlines to adopt national measures or submit joint recommendations, and initiating enforcement actions if environmental obligations are not met.

The EOP should provide for the implementation of the **National Restoration Plans** by Member States, evaluating effectiveness and using its enforcement powers to ensure the goals of the Nature Restoration Law will be achieved in time. The Advocacy Toolkit for Nature¹⁷ outlines how healthy eco-systems can help protect, adapt and mitigate against climate change “**often at a very low cost**”. The toolkit outlines that protecting coastal wetlands could save the insurance industry €50 billion annually through reducing flood damages.

The European Commission must assess whether designation of suitable acceleration areas for **offshore renewable energy** and permitting regimes fully comply with REDIII requirements, the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and other nature protection laws, and ensures that such projects are not developed within Natura 2000 sites or other MPAs and takes corrective actions when needed.

Finally, to make the EOP a **truly holistic framework**, full implementation and enforcement should also focus on **human rights and the environment** when it comes to laws regulating the negative impacts of businesses activities in the ocean. This includes recognising the potential of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which

¹⁵ European Court of Auditors Special Report 26/2020, *Marine Environment: EU protection is wide but not deep*

¹⁶ DG Environment, 18th October 2022, *Biodiversity: European Business and Nature Summit to push for global deal for nature at COP15*

¹⁷ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *An advocacy toolkit for nature – Biodiversity loss, nature protection, and the EU strategy for nature – October 2022*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

fully cover ocean-related activities. For example, the CSDDD requires companies in all sectors to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence across their value chains, in line with internationally recognised standards, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. To this effect, companies will be required to identify, address, mitigate, and bring to an end both potential and actual adverse impacts on human rights and the environment. This will improve the level playing field between imports and EU produced fisheries products. By effectively implementing and enforcing these laws, the EOP can better protect our ocean and human rights while promoting responsible and competitive business practices.

B. Implementation and enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation (CFP)

The CFP is one of the key examples where there is no need – nor time to wait – for a revision of the law, but an urgent need to make **full use of the tools and** measures that are already provided in the law to enable sustainable fisheries. Most importantly, the CFP requires an end to overfishing by 2020 – but fish stocks are still overexploited. Not making use of the CFP provisions in practice is putting the fisheries and people depending on them at risk: A healthy marine ecosystem with is a prerequisite for healthy fish stocks and thriving fishing and coastal communities. Put simply, without fish there is no more fishing industry.

It is the political commitment to implement and enforce the law that needs to be strengthened. As noted in the Marine Action Plan: “There is a need to renew the EU's collective commitment to marine conservation and secure a clear political commitment of all stakeholders and institutions to implement the environmental legislation effectively, use the current CFP policy tools and make them work”. Faster CFP implementation will help restore a healthy marine environment, ensure **food security** and make the **sector become more resilient**, as stressed by the Commission in the Fisheries and Oceans package¹⁸.

The EOP should ensure that the CFP rules and its related policies – from the recently adopted Fisheries Control Regulation to environmental laws – are finally applied and, where necessary, enforcement actions are taken. The briefing “Common Fisheries Policy: Mission not yet accomplished”¹⁹ by Birdlife, ClientEarth, the Fisheries Secretariat, Oceana, Our Fish, Seas At Risk and WWF outlines solutions for several implementation, control and enforcement shortcomings that are already possible – and required – today.

A number of examples are listed below, while more details can also be found in ClientEarth’s Response to the call for evidence for the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy²⁰:

- *Ending overfishing (Art. 2 and 3 CFP)*: The cornerstone for sustainable fisheries management – restoring all harvested fish populations above biomass levels capable of producing the “**maximum sustainable yield**” – has not been fully achieved, as many fishing limits continue to be set above the best available scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES),²¹ and/or not fully in line with the precautionary approach and the, ecosystem-approach to fisheries management.²² By way of example, the Council of the EU is facing court action initiated by ClientEarth for setting unsustainable limits in the North-East Atlantic for EU-only and EU-UK

¹⁸ Commission, February 2023, *Communication: The Common fisheries policy today and tomorrow: A Fisheries and Oceans Pact towards sustainable science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management*

¹⁹ ClientEarth, June 2021, *Common Fisheries Policy: Mission not yet accomplished*

²⁰ ClientEarth, September 2024, *Common Fisheries Policy evaluation – Response to the call for evidence*

²¹ ClientEarth’s annual Report, November 2024, *Taking stock 2024 – are TACs set to achieve MSY?*

²² Joint Recommendations co-signed by 22 NGOs, September 2024, *Joint NGO recommendations on fishing opportunities for 2025*.

shared stocks for 2022²³; and by the CCB network because of quotas in the Baltic for 2024²⁴. In addition, requirements under other EU policies, such as the **MSFD, are not coherently applied and so far are not properly integrated into decisions on fishing limits**. Key steps towards addressing this fundamental shortcoming could be taken immediately, among others, by requesting scientific advice from ICES on fishing opportunities that are geared towards achieving Good Environmental Status, as required under the MSFD²⁵. As outlined in the recent joint NGO recommendations on fishing opportunities for the Baltic Sea²⁶ and for the Northeast Atlantic,²⁷ while the current ICES advisory framework indeed reflects the CFP's requirement to fish stocks at or below the MSY exploitation rate, *"it for example does not yet explicitly incorporate key requirements under the MSFD regarding population health and food web integrity. This means that the current ICES headline advice is neither geared towards ensuring that stocks exhibit 'a population age and size distribution that is indicative of a healthy stock' (MSFD Descriptor 3), nor that 'all elements of the marine food webs, to the extent that they are known, occur at normal abundance and diversity and levels capable of ensuring the long-term abundance of the species and the retention of their full reproductive capacity' (MSFD Descriptor 4). It is for the ICES advice clients, such as the EU, to explicitly request ICES to fully reflect such important policy objectives in its advice on fishing opportunities, and, where such incorporation is not yet possible in the short-term, to provide sufficiently precautionary alternative catch options geared towards minimising the risk fishing poses to stock and ecosystem health"*.

- **Policy coherence (Art. 11 and 18 CFP):** The most obvious instrument for policy coherence, i.e. the Joint Recommendation procedure, enables Member States to propose conservation measures affecting fisheries. However, the European Court of Auditors highlights in "Marine environment: EU protection is wide but not deep"²⁸ that "Article 11 procedure often had the consequence that **commercial fisheries interests were favoured over nature conservation requirements**". While the report "Was Article 11 of the CFP doomed to fail?" (produced by Ocean Future Collective for Oceana²⁹) makes specific suggestions for better implementation, the European Commission has also the power to accelerate the Joint Recommendation procedure and adopt measures (Art. 11(3), (4)). By way of example, the Dogger Bank marine protected area demonstrates what it means to be protected on paper, but not in practice: despite a legal complaint filed by several NGOs, the Commission has not yet initiated infringement action or adopted emergency conservation measures in that important sandbank ecosystem in the North Sea. While the UK has successfully prohibited bottom contacting gear in the entire UK Dogger Bank marine protected area, there is no equivalent ban implemented by the Netherlands, Germany or Denmark. Hence, that "protected area" is simply a "paper park"³⁰.

²³ ClientEarth, October 2022, [EU Council is facing court to avoid repeat of Baltic fish stock collapse](#)

²⁴ Coalition Clean Baltic, August 2024, [Environmental organizations appeal to EU court to invalidate fishing quotas due to Baltic herring stocks collapse](#)

²⁵ Joint NGO feedback to the European Commission, August 2024, [Sustainable fishing in the EU: State of play and orientations for 2025" consultation](#)

²⁶ FishSec, June 2024, [Joint NGO recommendations on Baltic Sea fishing opportunities for 2025](#)

²⁷ ClientEarth, September 2024, [Joint NGO recommendations to the EU on fishing opportunities for 2025](#)

²⁸ European Court of Auditors Special Report 26/2020, November 2020, [Marine Environment: EU protection is wide but not deep](#)

²⁹ Oceana, October 2021, [Was Article 11 of the CFP doomed to fail?](#)

³⁰ For more, see the reports by Blue Marine Foundation, ClientEarth and Marine Conservation Society, September 2020, [Report to inform appropriate assessment of fishing operations on the Dogger Bank SACs](#); and the June 2019 [Complaint to the Commission concerning alleged breach of Union legislation](#) by ClientEarth and WWF, supported by other organisations.

- *Supporting small scale and low-impact fishers (Art. 17 CFP)*: Member States are required to use transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature, when allocating fishing quotas to vessels. However, the obligation to ensure transparency and to consider those criteria is neither implemented nor enforced across the EU. As a result, Member States are left with the broadest margin of discretion and arbitrariness, undermining both the effectiveness of this provision and the competitiveness of small-scale fishers. The Oceana Policy Briefing “Enhancing transparency in fisheries”, reveals that no Member State (0%) provides an explanation of how social, economic, and environmental factors are weighted in the allocation of fishing opportunities for all commercial species³¹. **This lack of transparency represents a missed opportunity** to guide the transition toward low-impact fisheries: the “Study on Article 17 of the common fisheries policy. Methodological considerations of an allocation of fishing quotas based on social and environmental criteria” (VertigoLab)³² stresses the **positive impact that quotas allocated in favour of environmental and social criteria can have on GDP and employment**. Complementary, the Seas at Risk report “Allocating fishing opportunities with environmental, social, and economic criteria in mind”³³ presents ten positive case examples. Despite this evidence, Member States are still sticking primarily to historical catch records, at the expense of small-scale fishers. Simply making use of Art. 17 CFP would help small scale and low impact fishers right away, without any delay.

C. Increased transparency and access to justice

The lack of transparency, notably in the process of setting total allowable catches (TACs), impedes public scrutiny and makes it impossible to hold decision-makers accountable, and it ultimately creates a culture of mistrust. In 2019 the European Ombudsman made a finding of maladministration in this context, following ClientEarth’s complaint about systemic failures on transparency in the Council decision-making process for TACs in the Northeast Atlantic³⁴ and noncompliance with the Aarhus Convention. ClientEarth welcomes recent improvements in transparency, notably with the revision of Article 113 of the Fisheries Control Regulation on access to fisheries data. We encourage the Commission to make sure that those improvements are implemented and enforced.

The EOP, to enable better transparency, should outline the **establishment of an EU Ocean and Seas Agency**, or of a cooperation mechanism between Agencies and ocean-related monitoring systems that streamlines ocean data and knowledge collection, ensures open access, and issues regular reports on the environmental and climate status of the ocean. The next MFF and EMFAF should dedicate some funding for supporting these measures.

The Commission should ensure full public transparency on the allocation of fisheries opportunities either by publishing annual EU-level reports or by creating a new database with precise catch and effort data in a usable form in respect of each Member State.

³¹ Oceana, November 2024, *Enhancing transparency in fisheries*

³² VertigoLab, January 2022, *Study on Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy*

³³ Seas at Risk, February 2024, *Allocating fishing opportunities with environmental, social and economic criteria in mind*

³⁴ ClientEarth, September 2021, *ClientEarth’s complaint to the European Ombudsman regarding the lack of transparency of the December Council TAC-setting process*

D. International Governance

The EOP must not only ensure proper implementation and enforcement of EU laws and policies – it also must **implement international frameworks and targets**, including the biodiversity targets in the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Paris Agreement, given the strong ocean-climate nexus³⁵.

With the incoming UN Ocean Conference, the Commission must position itself as an ambitious ocean actor, capable of setting ambitious standards to be followed. The EOP should confirm its strong engagement for **international ocean governance**, including by presenting a plan for the rapid implementation of the BBNJ Treaty and a long-term vision for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14. The EOP should confirm its strong engagement for **international ocean governance**, including by presenting a plan for the rapid implementation of the BBNJ Treaty and a long-term vision for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 - hence, it should stand up for (or engage for) a strategy for a healthy ocean to 2030 and the following decades charting a path for the implementation of the new SDGs.

II. Enabling policy coherence and legally binding targets

The ocean is an ecosystem that we all depend on – we cannot have policies that do not approach it as such.

A. Adopt a holistic approach in policy and decision-making processes

Ocean governance must follow a holistic approach: The EOP should establish a **roadmap with a clear timeline, clarifying the link between existing targets, policies and legislations, to ensure that all instruments are contributing together to the long-term resilience of a sustainable, low-impact blue economy**. Inconsistencies between environmental, fisheries, and other ocean-related policies – including the regulation of various sectors like fisheries, energy, tourism, and shipping – need to be addressed to preserve ecosystems and safeguard the very fundamentals of our life and economy for the benefit of all.

The EOP must account for the international and European frameworks. Among others, the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) entails 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030 – incl. the 30x30 targets (restoration and protection, Target 2 and 3), the target to mainstream (terrestrial and marine) biodiversity in all decision-making (Target 14 et seq), and a phase out of harmful subsidies (Target 18). In addition, the EOP should lay out a clear strategy for implementing the EU's targets of halting and reversing biodiversity loss, climate neutrality, zero pollution and circular economy into the European Oceans Pact.

Ocean policy risks being approached in a siloed manner – different DGs work on fisheries and environment matters with little apparent coordination. For instance, no group was set up for the EOP when the project groups were released by Von Der Leyen in January. The aim of the project groups is to enable decision making in cross-cutting initiative. For policy coherence to become a reality in policy- and decision-making, **breaking down the silos between the different actors is key**. At EU level, this means that the different

³⁵ Commission Report COM/2025/3, February 2025, *Commission's assessment of the Member States' programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)*

DGs (ENV, MARE, CLIMA, ENER, TAXUD, etc) and parliamentary committees (PECH, ENVI, BUDG, etc) working on ocean-related topics should meet regularly on specific topics and files. In addition, an EU Ocean and Seas Agency or a cooperation mechanism between Agencies and ocean-related monitoring systems should be established. As mentioned above, the Agency should streamline ocean data and knowledge collection at national and regional level, ensure open access, and issue regular reports on the environmental and climate status of the ocean.

B. Strengthening policy coherence via the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and enabling simplification

Targets based on the EOP must become **tangible** – i.e. they must be **clear, timebound (including intermediate targets), measurable and enforceable**. A comparison can be made with criteria set out in the recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in light of climate change (Klimaseniorinnen).³⁶ This included the finding that in working towards achieving carbon neutrality States needed to set out clear, tangible intermediate targets, timelines and pathways. Importantly, the ECtHR also noted that such targets had to be updated with due diligence, and in line with the best available science.³⁷ Such an approach in the EOP will provide for greater – and simplified – coherence for all actors involved.

The MSFD is already the EU's **overarching tool** to protect its marine waters and coasts, and to ensure the sustainable use of its resources. As outlined in the latest MSFD Programme of Measures assessment, “The MSFD can also make a direct contribution to achieve the objectives of the forthcoming ‘Ocean pact’ (...) to ‘boost the blue economy and ensure the good governance and sustainability of our oceans in all of their dimensions’”.³⁸ Further, the final conclusions of an informal meeting of EU Marine and Water

³⁶ See ECtHR, 9 April 2024, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* (application no. 53600/20): “550. When assessing whether a State has remained within its margin of appreciation (see paragraph 543 above), the Court will examine whether the competent domestic authorities, be it at the legislative, executive or judicial level, have had due regard to the need to:

(a) **adopt general measures specifying a target timeline** for achieving carbon neutrality and the overall remaining carbon budget for the same time frame, or another equivalent method of quantification of future GHG emissions, in line with the overarching goal for national and/or global climate-change mitigation commitments;
(b) **set out intermediate GHG emissions reduction targets and pathways (by sector or other relevant methodologies)** that are deemed capable, in principle, of meeting the overall national GHG reduction goals within the relevant time frames undertaken in national policies;
(c) provide **evidence showing whether they have duly complied**, or are in the process of complying, with the relevant GHG reduction targets (see sub-paragraphs (a)-(b) above);
(d) keep the relevant GHG reduction targets **updated with due diligence**, and based on the best available evidence; and
(e) **act in good time and in an appropriate and consistent manner when devising and implementing the relevant legislation and measures**”

³⁷ Looking at the ocean climate nexus, further support for this approach can be found in the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on climate change. To begin with, the Tribunal clarified that anthropogenic GHG emissions qualified as ‘pollution’ under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. As States are required to prevent, reduce and control pollution to the marine environment, these efforts necessarily extend to preventing, reducing and controlling the reduction of anthropogenic GHG emissions into the atmosphere (para. 205 ITLOS AO). Thereby and similarly to the ECtHR, the ITLOS noted the relevance of the best available science in assessing whether States had met their legal obligations as regards climate change. Both international courts have therefore provided that States’ margin of appreciation as regards the means chosen to address climate change/climate harms is legally limited by considerations of the best available scientific evidence.

³⁸ European Commission Report, February 2025, Commission’s assessment of the Member States’ programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0003>

Directors stress that the “MSFD should grow into a ‘European law of the sea’”.³⁹ The MSFD set a target for Member States to achieve **good environmental status** (GES) of marine waters by 2020. And yet, Member States failed to achieve this objective, given the poor implementation and lack of ambition to deliver effective measures⁴⁰.

Therefore, the EOP must strengthen the MSFD as an umbrella framework by strengthening links with the Marine Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), establishing legally binding targets and thresholds, introducing criteria for a non-deterioration principle, reinforcing cross-border cooperation, enforcing nature restoration and marine protection measures as well as climate adaptation and resilience targets and measures, and ensuring strong enforcement provisions.

Long-term and intermediate targets should be binding and measurable (i.e. a *real pathway* to healthy marine waters), as well as affect all elements set out in the MSFD – **from marine biodiversity, to commercial fish, food webs, eutrophication, contaminants, marine litter, energy and others**. Each of the GES elements must be addressed in time, and the EU and Member States must be assessed periodically towards their **actual progress** of achieving their targets in the water.⁴¹ This must include a legally binding target to **protect 30%, and strictly protect 10% of EU marine and coastal waters by 2030** to ensure the European Union is in line with the targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework. It must also entail **a ban on destructive activities in all EU Marine Protected Areas** including, but not limited to, **bottom trawling**. This is already provided for in the Marine Action Plan⁴², but Member States have made little progress towards this target and many have failed to provide their roadmaps to the Commission.

Furthermore, to be fully aligned with the objectives to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, achieve climate neutrality and zero pollution, the EOP should propose a **ban on deep-sea mining in European seas** and advocate for the adoption of a moratorium within the International Seabed Authority and other international ocean governance bodies. It should further propose a **ban on all new offshore oil and gas exploration and extraction**, and a **strategy to phase out** offshore oil and gas drilling.

³⁹ See “Informal Meeting of EU Marine and Water Directors – Final conclusions 13 and 14 June 2024”, [Contact support \(europa.eu\)](#): “Marine Directors also looked into possible strategic objectives for the next Commission. During the discussions it became clear that there is an emerging call for further action. The MSFD should grow into a ‘European law of the sea’ envisaging sustainable use of the marine environment.”

⁴⁰ European Commission Report, February 2025, *Commission's assessment of the Member States' programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)* see in this regard the recommendations on page 25 et seq

⁴¹ European Commission Report, February 2025, *Commission's assessment of the Member States' programmes of measures as updated under Article 17 of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)*. The assessment report shows difficulties in assessing how effective proposed measures are. In fact, significant gaps remain in the Member States' programmes of measures to tackle pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change.

⁴² Communication from the Commission, COM/2023/102, *EU Action Plan: Protecting and Restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries*

III. Enabling a blue just transition by redirecting financial flows towards small-scale fisheries and low-impact blue economy activities

The transition towards small-scale fisheries and a low-impact blue economy requires structural changes. Reforming funding frameworks by establishing an EU Ocean Fund and removing harmful subsidies are keys to ensuring a just and sustainable transition in the fishery sector.

A. Establishing an EU Ocean Fund for a Just Transition

The EOP represents a key instrument to craft an ambitious **action plan for the just transition towards small-scale fisheries and a sustainable, low-impact blue economy**, and an opportunity to rethink the EU funding scheme to support the transition. To achieve this ambition, the EOP must embed a strong commitment to establishing a **new EU Ocean Fund, as called for in the Blue Manifesto**.

The EMFAF funding has shown its limitation in effectively supporting the objectives of the CFP: as stressed by WWF in its report on "*Can Your Money Do Better? Member States Spend Billions of EU Funds on Activities That Harm Nature*," today between 5% and 12% of EMFAF funding is channelled into biodiversity-harming subsidies – more than double the amount dedicated to restoring biodiversity⁴³. ClientEarth, in its response to the EMFAF 2021-2027 Mid-Term Evaluation, has already highlighted the need to change the EMFAF structure and increase funding for ocean conservation and restoration⁴⁴.

The boundary between subsidies and harmful subsidies is often very thin, with the risk that financial support leads to overcapacity and overfishing by the EU fleet, always concealed behind EMFAF financial measures. Following the methodology established by the WTO, the Commission's own guidance document on reporting non-energy-related environmentally harmful subsidies is already a valid instrument that should be fully recognized and applied by Member States⁴⁵. It confirms that subsidies contributing to IUU fishing, high seas fishing outside RFMO competence areas, and overfished stocks are considered harmful subsidies. The OECD has also highlighted that fuel and vessel-related subsidies pose a significant risk to fishery sustainability in the absence of effective management, while support for monitoring, control, and surveillance presents no such risk⁴⁶. **The EOP should, therefore, outline a roadmap to guide the Commission toward fully applying this identification methodology.**

The transformative change the EOP is expected to deliver, as well as the revision of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in 2027, represent the opportunity to finally enable this holistic approach, moving from the sectorial EMFAF towards a holistic EU Ocean Fund, while increasing the level of funding dedicated to the ocean overall⁴⁷. The EOP should establish the foundational framework of the new fund, capable of effectively driving the necessary transition in the wider blue economy. To achieve this, the EU Ocean Fund will require significantly greater financial resources, amounting to at least 1% of the new MFF. The EOP should already outline that the EU Ocean Fund should be based on two

⁴³ WWF, May 2024 Briefing on '*Can your money do better? Member States spend billions of EU funds on activities that harm nature*': see page 31.

⁴⁴ ClientEarth, September 2024, *EMFAF – Mid-Term Evaluation*, CFP evaluation: response to the call for evidence, page 4

⁴⁵ Agreement on fisheries subsidies, *Ministerial Decision of 17 June 2022, WT/MIN(22)/33, WT/L/1144*

⁴⁶ 35 OECD Review of Fisheries 2022 | OECD Review of Fisheries | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org)

⁴⁷ ClientEarth, November 2021, *Recommendations for spending the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)*, page 6.

pillars: one dedicated to the long-term restoration and conservation of the marine environment, and another one dedicated to the just transition to a low impact and clean blue economy. **The EU's maritime economy cannot be competitive unless it is confined to the current ecological limits of marine ecosystems.**

Establishing a single, coherent Ocean Fund could not only simplify access to financing but also strengthen the enforcement of environmental conditionality. The EOP should outline the overarching principles that should be included in the subsequent Ocean Fund Regulation, ensuring that it will only support activities that align with the EU's environmental goals. The European Commission, through the EOP, must therefore commit to enforce the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Principle when using taxpayers' money and subsequently include it in the next Ocean Fund Regulation as part of the transformative change the EOP will deliver⁴⁸.

Eventually, the action plan of the EOP should outline a trajectory for supporting the transition of the most vulnerable parts of the blue economy. To meet these objectives, the Ocean Fund should therefore **prioritize access and support for the transition of small-scale coastal fisheries**⁴⁹. The EMFAF does not currently prioritize funding for small-scale and low-impact fishers, nor does it provide preferential treatment for vessels under 12 metre in length. For example, in the previous EMFF, despite representing 75% of the total EU fleet, the small-scale coastal fishing sector received only about 20% of funding⁵⁰. Member States should be required by the new Ocean Fund Regulation to include a specific section on small-scale fisheries in their national operational programmes, with a portion of the fund under the shared management allocated exclusively to them⁵¹.

B. Phase out harmful subsidies

To drive this transition, the EOP should provide a **clear, coordinated and actionable plan to eliminate all kind of harmful subsidies from all maritime and fisheries sectors**. Target 18 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) already calls for the phase-out of harmful subsidies, setting a goal to identify them by 2025 and to eliminate, phase out, or reform incentives, including subsidies harmful to biodiversity, in a proportionate, just, fair, effective, and equitable manner.

The need to phase out harmful subsidies is particularly urgent when they incentivize the use of fossil fuels. As recently highlighted in the second edition of the European Maritime Transport Environmental Report (EMTER), published by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the European Environment Agency (EEA), activities such as cargo shipping, container transport, commercial fishing, tankers, cruise ships, and port operations remain major contributors to a wide range of environmental challenges⁵². The report states that the entire maritime sector accounts for 3-4% of the EU's overall carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions - a share that the report underscores must be reduced urgently.

Among ocean-based activities, the fisheries sector is particularly affected by fossil fuel-based harmful subsidies, making the energy transition even more challenging. The fisheries sector, rather than being guided towards the transition, continues to benefit from harmful indirect tax subsidies due to

⁴⁸ ClientEarth, September 2024, *EMFAF 2021-2027 – mid-term evaluation*, page 2.

⁴⁹ ClientEarth, November 2021, *Splash out (the right way): 15 Recommendations for spending the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)*.

⁵⁰ ClientEarth, April 2023 *Small-scale fishers revealed as least supported recipients of EU funds | ClientEarth*, page 3.

⁵¹ ClientEarth, April 2023, *Small-scale fishers revealed as least supported recipients of EU funds*, page 4.

⁵² EEA-EMSA Joint Report 15/2024, February 2025, *European Maritime Transport Environmental Report 2025*

the fossil fuel tax exemption set by the Energy Taxation Directive (ETD), a framework that fails to incentivize a shift to clean energy and hinders the transition of small-scale, low-impact fishers. The outdated tax breaks for fossil fuels under the ETD **distort fair competition in the EU fisheries sector**: Large-scale industrial fleets, despite their inefficiency and higher environmental impact, are particularly dependent on these subsidies for profitability while small-scale fisheries, with fewer resources and narrower profit margins, struggle to benefit from them. **Phasing out these subsidies is not only essential for environmental sustainability and climate neutrality but also for ensuring long-term competitiveness in the fisheries sector, enabling small-scale fisheries to thrive.** The EU fishing fleet today benefits from fuel tax breaks amounting to between €759 million and €1.5 billion annually⁵³. This lost revenue represents a potential investment opportunity to support the implementation of the future action plan for the transition outlined in the EOP.

At present, the revision of the ETD is stalled at the Council. As already outlined in our open letter, to strengthen the European Commission's position—and in light of the holistic approach the EOP is expected to deliver in addressing ocean-related challenges—stronger collaboration between Commissioner Hoekstra and Commissioner Kadis's cabinets is needed to oppose any outcome that falls short of the Commission's original ETD revision proposals⁵⁴.

About ClientEarth

ClientEarth is a non-profit organisation that uses the law to create systemic change that protects the Earth for – and with – its inhabitants. We are tackling climate change, protecting nature and stopping pollution, with partners and citizens around the globe. We hold industry and governments to account, and defend everyone's right to a healthy world. From our offices in Europe, Asia and the USA we shape, implement and enforce the law, to build a future for our planet in which people and nature can thrive together.

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⁵³ ClientEarth, *Capacity ceilings in EU fisheries: obstacle or opportunity for the decarbonisation process?*, page 6.

⁵⁴ ClientEarth, December 2024, *Open Letter: Strengthening ocean resilience and fisheries sustainability and eliminating fossil fuel subsidies*, page 2.

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BLUE MANIFESTO

THE ROADMAP TO A HEALTHY OCEAN IN 2030

We need a healthy ocean and abundant marine life to build a climate-proof future

Photo OceanImageBank/Liam McGuire



Time to add the “blue” to the EU’s green transition

The ocean, where life began some 4 billion years ago, is vital to the survival of all life on Earth. It provides half the oxygen on Earth, stabilises our climate, and supports all of the life on our planet. It contributes to food security, delivers renewable energy, connects countries and continents, supports a wide array of blue businesses, and is a source of well-being and happiness.

The EU boasts the world’s largest maritime territory with almost half its population living within 50 kilometres of a coastline. In past decades, the EU has adopted a succession of strategies and action plans to protect its seas and ensure the well-being of coastal communities. Yet, while well intended, a lack of policy coherence, poor implementation and fragmented governance have hampered progress. The European Green Deal’s goal to secure a climate-neutral EU by 2050 is commendable, as well as its commitment to leave no one behind, do no harm, and reduce pollution to zero. However, these ambitious yet achievable objectives are only partially addressed in the EU’s existing blue policies.

Imagine a world where the ocean teems with life, marine ecosystems flourish, and where coastal communities thrive in harmony with nature. This vision is not just a dream; it’s an achievable reality, and the Blue Manifesto is our urgent call to action to make it happen. Civil society organisations across Europe have united to provide EU decision- and policy-makers with a clear roadmap to a healthy and resilient ocean by 2030, and to a more sustainable and equitable future for generations to come.



Europe's seas are at tipping point

Against this backdrop, the relentless pursuit of “blue growth” is pushing European seas to the brink. Member States missed 2020 targets to achieve a good environmental status for Europe's seas, especially in terms of contaminants, eutrophication, invasive alien species, commercial fishing, and marine litter, paving the way for ocean health to deteriorate further. Over 90% of Europe's marine area is over-exploited as a result of intensive fishing, shipping, oil and gas drilling, tourism and other coastal activities, while emerging activities like the large-scale rollout of offshore wind energy add to these multiple pressures.¹ Destructive practices such as bottom trawling continue in 90% of EU offshore marine “protected” areas, and more than 14 million tonnes of plastic still enter the ocean each year.

Climate change is also hitting the ocean hard and fast. Sudden and steep rises in ocean temperature observed in recent years are accelerating de-oxygenation and acidification, which in turn devastate marine biodiversity.

We need to reverse the decline of ocean health to protect marine life, public health, and livelihoods for generations to come.²



Photo OCEANA/Carlos Minguell

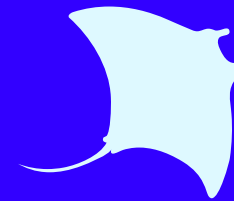
THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF **BLUE GROWTH** IS PUSHING EUROPEAN SEAS TO THE BRINK

A three-point plan to turn the tide by 2030

1 Adopt an overarching and ambitious EU Ocean Deal to make sure all policies and legislation that impact the ocean are working in harmony with one another. The Ocean Deal would create a framework to integrate existing and new legislation, guaranteeing that all ocean-related policies are fit for preserving and restoring the ocean and coastal communities. The Ocean Deal should improve compliance with and enforcement of environmental rules at national and international levels, promote transparency in ocean-related activities, and integrate strong reporting and access to justice provisions.

2 Turn ambition to action with an EU Ocean Fund dedicated to the long-term restoration and conservation of the marine environment, and to the just transition to a sustainable, low-impact blue economy for the benefit of all. Subsidies that are harmful to the marine environment should be eliminated as soon as possible and no later than 2027, both at the EU and Member State levels. Taxpayers' money should be invested in delivering the objectives of the Ocean Deal; the revision of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in 2027 will be an opportunity to do so, as well as a chance to increase the level of funding dedicated to the ocean overall.

3 Put the ocean at the heart of EU decision-making, ensuring coherence between different policies and initiatives that impact the ocean. European Parliament Committees responsible for policies impacting the Ocean Deal and Fund (e.g. Environment, Fisheries, Transport and Tourism, Industry and Energy, and Budget Committees) should hold regular joint sessions to ensure coherence among sectoral policies related to the ocean, including climate and marine protection. A crosscutting Ocean Commissioner should be appointed in the new European Commission, and joint Council meetings of Environment, Energy, Fisheries and Transport ministers should be held within each Council Presidency to make progress on the implementation of the Ocean Deal.



¹) *Multiple pressures and their combined effects in Europe's seas*, European Environment Agency, Briefing no. 18/2020.

²) *European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA)*, European Environment Agency, Briefing no. 1/2024.

The step-by-step roadmap to a healthy ocean

The Ocean Deal must serve as the overarching framework for the many policy initiatives that need to be rolled out in coming years, outlined in this Blue Manifesto. Under this umbrella, current ocean-related policies will need to be revised and new policies adopted to ensure robust protection and effective restoration of marine biodiversity by 2030.

We propose the following timeline for achieving these objectives.

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

The European Commission publishes an "**Ocean Deal**" communication, outlining a policy roadmap to achieve healthy, clean and resilient marine ecosystems by 2030. This plan ensures a coherent and balanced framework for reaching the EU's climate, zero pollution, and biodiversity goals, while also guaranteeing a just and socially fair transition.

- The **European Commission** establishes an **Ocean Commissioner**.
- Each Presidency of the **Council of the EU** holds a **joint ocean meeting** attended by Environment, Climate, Energy, Fisheries and Transport ministries, with stakeholder representation at all meetings.
- The **European Parliament** establishes a forum for **all matters related to maritime activities and marine ecosystems**, such as an inter-group or a gathering of MEPs from relevant Committees, including Fisheries, Environment, and Transport and Tourism.

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- From 2024 onwards, the Council of the EU establishes sustainable, **ecosystem-based and precautionary limits on fishing opportunities** in line with the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the best available scientific advice in an era of climate change.
- To tackle ocean pollution and finalise the work of the 2019-2024 mandate, the European Parliament and Council of the EU adopt the regulations on **preventing plastic pellets losses, Packaging and Packaging Waste, the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, and the revised list of surface and groundwater pollutants**.
- The European Commission advocates for an ambitious **Global Plastic Treaty** that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics, including single-use plastics, microplastics and fishing gear, as well as hazardous chemical additives and upstream measures focusing on plastic production and reduction.

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CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission establishes an **EU Ocean and Seas Agency** or a cooperation mechanism between Agencies and ocean-related monitoring systems that streamlines ocean data and knowledge collection, ensures open access, and issues regular reports on the environmental and climate status of the ocean.
- The European Commission presents an **action plan for a just transition to a well-being blue economy that respects ecological limits**, promotes sufficiency principles over pure economic growth, enables a transition towards low-impact and regenerative activities, supports sustainable livelihoods, fosters social justice, health and well-being, and supports workers and communities affected by the transition.
- From 2025 onwards, the European Commission **increases resources for compliance and enforcement units** to address potential marine-related legislation violations and enhances the **capacity of units dealing with international negotiations on the ocean**.
- The European Commission **strengthens the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)** by tightening the link with the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), establishing legally binding targets and thresholds, introducing criteria for a non-deterioration principle, reinforcing cross-border cooperation, enforcing nature restoration and marine protection measures as well as climate adaptation and resilience targets and measures, and ensuring strong enforcement provisions.
- At **UNOC 2025**, the European Commission pledges its commitment to the **Ocean Deal and Ocean Fund and confirms its strong engagement for international ocean governance**, including by presenting a plan for the rapid implementation of the BBNJ High Seas Treaty and a long-term vision for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.
- The European Commission proposes **new legislation on ocean resilience and coastal adaptation** emphasising nature-based solutions for better preparedness for climate-related challenges and including an EU-wide and evidence-based **monitoring system on carbon sequestration in marine ecosystems** ("blue carbon"). For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission **adopts a proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-2034** that transforms the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund into a much more substantial **Ocean Fund**, removes environmentally harmful subsidies, earmarks funding for the ocean in other related budget programmes, and ensures sufficient funding for related EU Agencies such as the Ocean Agency, European Environment Agency and European Fisheries Control Agency. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission proposes **new legislation to restrict the import and trade of aquatic food products** that cause harm to endangered species and bycatch of sensitive species. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission proposes **new legislation with binding 2030 targets for the effective management of at least 30% of EU seas**, including at least 10% under strict protection, with a clear definition of "effective" (e.g. banning harmful activities) and "strict protection". For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission proposes **new legislation to ban destructive activities in all EU Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** including, but not limited to, bottom trawling. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- In line with the **EU Deep Sea Access Regulation**, the European Commission adopts a delegated act to include seamounts in the list of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) and a revised Implementing Regulation to protect deep sea VMEs in EU waters between 400m and 800m depth.
- The European Commission proposes a **revised Energy Taxation Directive** to phase out fuel tax exemption in fisheries and redirect funds to finance a just and fair transition in the fisheries sector. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission adopts **delegated and implementing acts to strengthen the EU fisheries control system**, including digital traceability of all seafood products, engine power monitoring, and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) of vessels at high risk of violating EU fisheries rules.
- The European Commission **introduces a legislative framework for the traceability and labelling of all seafood products in the EU** to prevent sourcing from Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities and ensure environmentally and socially responsible practices. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

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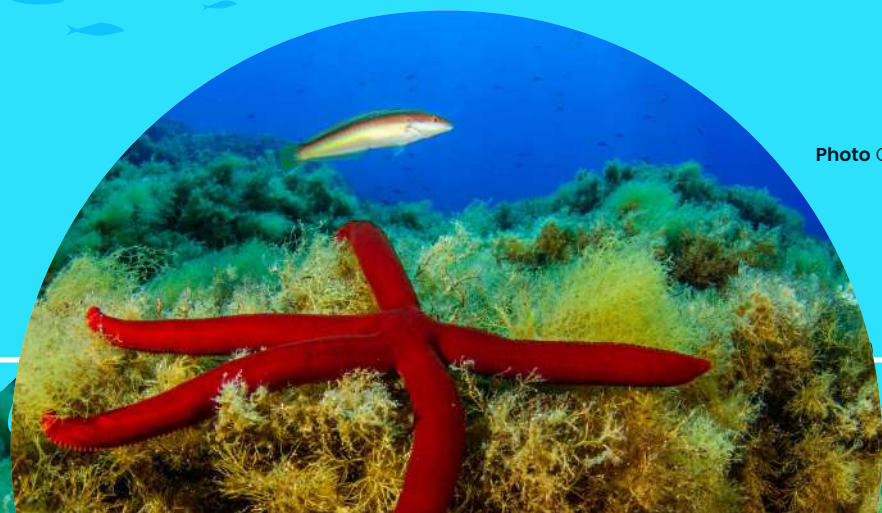
SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission proposes a **revised Bathing Water Directive** with high standards for safe access and high environmental and health criteria, including additional parameters for monitoring water quality and obligations to address identified pollution at its source. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- Taking an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, particularly in the context of climate change, the European Commission seeks scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) **for setting Total Allowable Catches (TACs) that guarantee food supply for thriving predator populations.**
- The European Commission ensures **full public transparency on the allocation of fisheries opportunities** either by publishing annual EU-level reports or by creating a new database with precise catch and effort data in a usable form per Member State.
- The European Commission proposes a **ban on deep-sea mining** in European seas and advocates for the adoption of a moratorium within the International Seabed Authority and other international ocean governance bodies.
- The European Commission assesses whether designation of **suitable and acceleration areas for offshore renewable energy and permitting regimes fully comply with REDIII requirements**, the Habitats and Birds Directives, the MSFD and other nature protection laws, and ensures that such projects are not developed within Natura 2000 sites or other MPAs and takes corrective actions when needed.
- The European Commission publishes an implementing act on auction design criteria for offshore renewable energy auctions under the **Net Zero Industry Act** requiring Member States **to introduce mandatory non-price criteria** on biodiversity, social aspects and circularity, and conduct annual assessments of those criteria.
- The European Commission proposes a **ban on all new offshore oil and gas exploration and extraction**, and a strategy to phase out offshore oil and gas drilling. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- To reduce chemical pollution in our seas, the European Commission proposes **revisions to the REACH Regulation and Cosmetic Products Regulation** that accelerate the ban on harmful substances. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- On the topic of bycatch of sensitive species and mobile bottom fishing in MPAs, the European Commission **oversees implementation of the Marine Action Plan**, taking emergency measures if Member States miss deadlines to adopt national measures or submit joint recommendations, **and initiating enforcement actions if environmental obligations are not met.**
- The European Commission sets guidelines for Member States to effectively implement threshold values for all descriptors of **Good Environmental Status under the MSFD** by 2030, including for example underwater noise pollution.
- **Instead of reopening the CFP Basic Regulation**, the European Commission revises the Multiannual Plans of Fisheries Management to include legally **binding measures for an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management**, strengthened provisions to safeguard fish populations, and clear and binding deadlines for the joint recommendation process.
- The European Commission **proposes legislation on unintentionally released microplastics in the environment**, notably from textiles, geotextiles, paints, tyres, detergents, construction materials and the shipping industry. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

Photo João Rodrigues



Photo OCEANA/Juan Cuetos



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SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- As requested by citizens in the **European Citizens Initiative**, the European Commission proposes legislation addressing the **international shark fin trade**.
- The European Commission enforces a **ban on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)** to prevent further ocean pollution under the REACH Regulation.
- The European Commission ensures marine geo-engineering technologies and practices are excluded from the Carbon Dioxide Removal Certification Framework and 2040 EU Climate Target, enforces **the moratorium on geo-engineering** under the Convention of Biological Diversity and supports efforts to regulate additional marine geo-engineering technologies under the London Convention and Protocol, **proposes a ban in European seas**, and refrains from funding research on marine geo-engineering.
- The European Commission **prohibits carbon storage in the water column and at the seabed**, halting Carbon Capture and Storage in sub-seabed geological formations until there is proof of no environmental harm.
- The European Commission adopts delegated acts establishing ecodesign requirements for textiles, furniture, tyres, and paints, including **a zero-emission target for microplastics**, in accordance with the **Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation**.
- To **reduce the risk of IUU fish entering the EU market**, the European Commission encourages swift implementation of the mandatory IT CATCH system, taking action against Member States that fail to implement the new requirements.
- The European Commission proposes a **revised Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Directive**, expanding the scope and introducing additional measures to reduce SUP production and consumption. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2028.
- To prevent profits from illegal fishing flowing back to the EU and allow more equitable access to marine resources, the European Commission **publicly discloses ownership of fishing vessels** by EU citizens, both within the EU and worldwide.
- The European Commission fully **monitors National Restoration Plan implementation** by Member States, evaluating effectiveness and **using its enforcement powers** to ensure the goals of the Nature Restoration Law will be achieved in time.
- As a continuation of its **Circular Economy Action Plan**, the European Commission proposes a **Sustainable Resource Management Directive** with binding science-based resource reduction targets for land- and sea-based sectors. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2028.

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

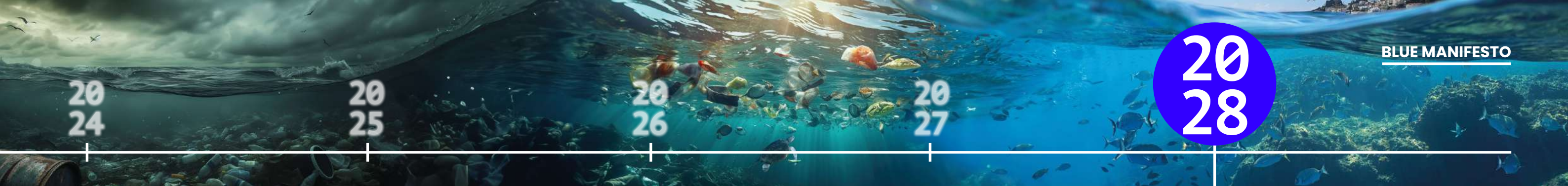
- The European Commission revises the **State aid rules for the fishery and aquaculture** sectors to align with the new Ocean Fund and to **remove all environmentally harmful subsidies**.
- The European Commission proposes a **revised MSPD that requires ecosystem-based planning** aligned with MSFD targets and thresholds, introduces nature-based climate adaptation and resilience measures, incorporates the EU's protection and restoration targets, ensures coherence with energy, climate, fisheries, sustainable finance and other relevant policies, promotes responsible multi-use, and strengthens the link with land-use planning and coastal management for effective adaptation to climate change. **For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2028.**



Photo João Rodrigues

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission includes sector-specific guidance on **seafood** under the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive**.
- The European Commission advocates for the inclusion of **underwater noise reduction** in an **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** Regulation.
- The European Commission proposes an ambitious **revision of the Fuel EU Maritime Regulation** to reduce ship CO2 emissions including via energy efficiency and wind propulsion measures, include black carbon emission factors, and require all ships listed under the EU MRV Maritime Regulation to use distillates or other cleaner fuels when operating in/near the Arctic. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2029.
- The European Commission adopts new **Strategic Guidelines for the aquaculture sector**, setting clear guidelines for Member States **to reduce the amount of wild-caught fish used as feed** by diversifying the feed supply chain and shifting production to non-fed and low-trophic aquaculture.



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CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission proposes an **EU Strategy for a healthy ocean extending to 2040** that focuses on the regeneration of European seas while charting a path for the EU's implementation of the new SDGs.

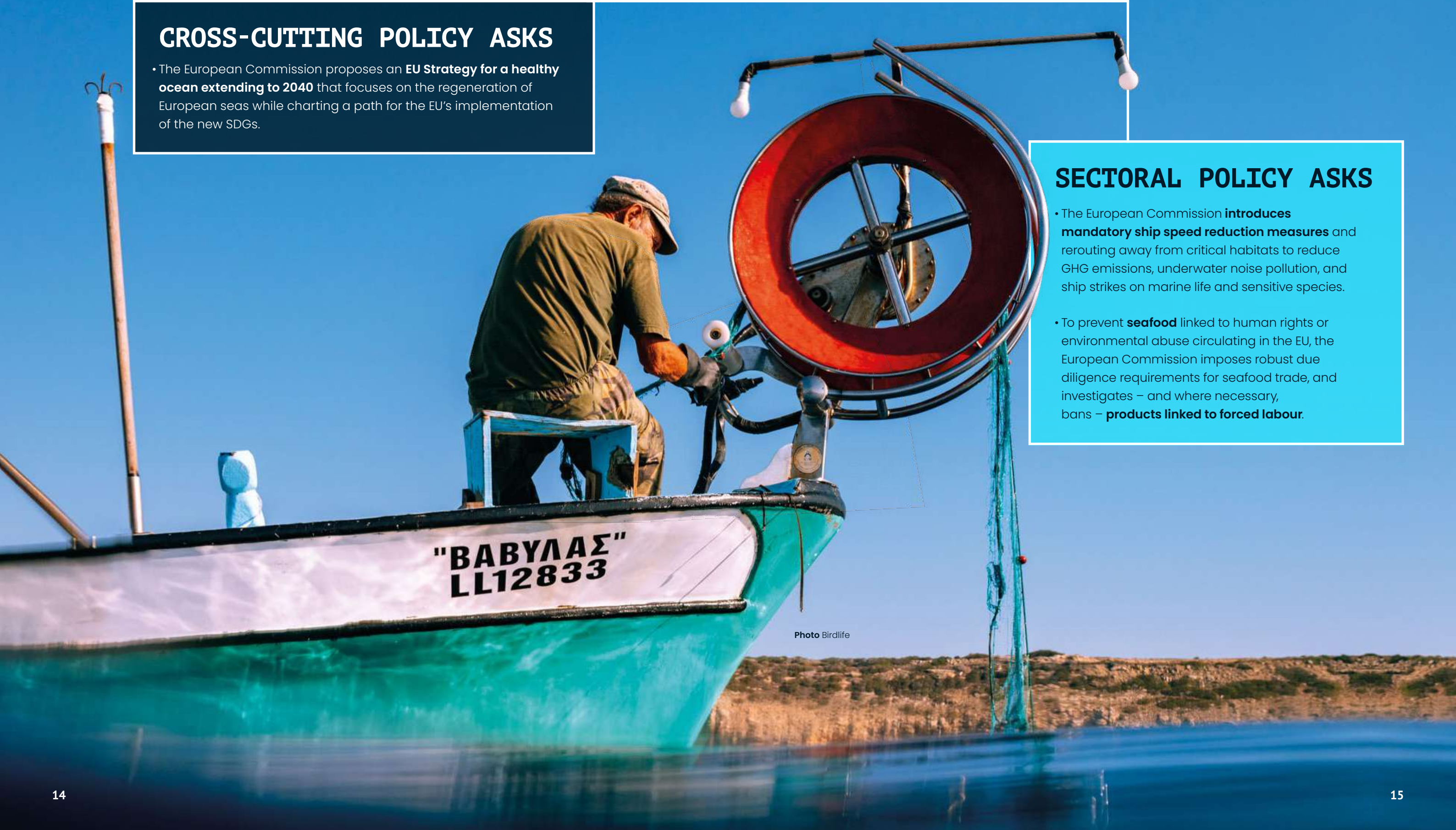


Photo Birdlife

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission **introduces mandatory ship speed reduction measures** and rerouting away from critical habitats to reduce GHG emissions, underwater noise pollution, and ship strikes on marine life and sensitive species.
- To prevent **seafood** linked to human rights or environmental abuse circulating in the EU, the European Commission imposes robust due diligence requirements for seafood trade, and investigates – and where necessary, bans – **products linked to forced labour**.

A healthy ocean is an achievable reality

This vision for 2030 is not just wishful thinking. Our step-by-step roadmap is a pragmatic, well-researched and science-based plan to guide the EU in restoring marine life by ending overexploitation, destructive practices, and pollution.

And we're not starting from zero; a wealth of ready-to-deploy solutions already exist. Across Europe, innovative initiatives by startups and local communities are making a difference, from wind-powered commercial vessels to nature-inclusive design for wind farms. Restoration initiatives are contributing to climate mitigation and flood protection. Regenerative cooperative farms for seaweed, mussels, and oysters are using farming methods that avoid fertilisers, pesticides and freshwater and help coastal communities thrive. Low-impact fishers are working with local NGOs, scientists, and administrations to co-manage fish resources, resulting in abundant fish populations, fairer prices and very short local supply chains. With EU support, examples like these can be rapidly upscaled.

Nature undeniably has intrinsic value in and of itself, and we are lucky that with the right policies in place, we can also benefit from a healthy ocean. By investing in a blue economy that is nature-positive and promotes social standards, the EU can restore marine life and biodiversity while creating quality employment that enables gender equality, social inclusion, and access to adequate wages.

THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

Europe has a unique opportunity to become an inspiring global leader by taking bold action to safeguard marine ecosystems.

The stakes are high, and with 2030 fast approaching, the coming years will be decisive if the EU institutions are to leave a positive legacy for generations to come.

The European Ocean Pact, as announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029, represents a promising first step in the right direction. It will be crucial to ensure that such a Pact aligns with the Ocean Deal vision and policy roadmap proposed in this Blue Manifesto.

Public support is undeniably strong: a recent Eurobarometer poll shows that an overwhelming majority of EU citizens see climate change as a serious threat, and agree that tackling climate change should be a priority to improve public health.³

It is therefore up to these leaders to take the urgent actions needed to nurse the ocean back to health and ensure the prosperity and longevity of the communities they represent. With unwavering political commitment and robust implementation, we can achieve the change that the ocean, and all of us, need.

3) *Citizen support for climate action*, European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 538, Climate Change, 2023 survey.

Supported by





BLUE MANIFESTO



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