

CALL FOR EVIDENCE FOR AN INITIATIVE (without an impact assessment)

This document aims to inform the public and stakeholders about the Commission's work, so they can provide feedback and participate effectively in consultation activities.

We ask these groups to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions, and to give us any relevant information they may have.

■ You should **finalise this document at the earliest stages of the preparatory process**, so that best use can be made of feedback from stakeholders.

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE	The European Oceans Pact
LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT	DG MARE – A3/A2
LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE	Commission Communication
INDICATIVE TIMING	Q2-2025
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	Policy area: Ocean and fisheries <u>Oceans and fisheries - European Commission (europa.eu)</u>

This document is for information purposes only. It does not prejudge the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content. All elements of the initiative described by this document, including its timing, are subject to change.

A. Political context, problem definition and subsidiarity check

Political context

Our seas, waters and ocean and their ecosystems sit at the heart of many of the world's global challenges: climate regulation, food security, provision of medicines, new sources of clean energy, job creation, resilience and competitiveness, inclusive growth and cohesion, security, and strategic autonomy.

The EU has the largest EEZ in the world and is the world's second largest market of fishery and aquaculture products. Next to the traditional fisheries sector, our blue economy has some of the most dynamic economic sectors – renewable energy, aquaculture, blue tech and ocean observation, blue biotechnology, shipping, coastal and maritime tourism, and ports and maritime transport.

We must mirror the importance of the Ocean on the EU political agenda to align with global trends and strengthen the EU's economic prospects. We must look at how we interact with the ocean - how we impact the ocean, how the ocean impacts us (resilience of the industry and of the coastal communities in the face of climate change), as well as at the opportunities we can harvest from the ocean, acknowledging its importance in terms of competitiveness, sustainability, and climate change mitigation/adaptation: all intrinsically linked to global welfare. This is crucial given the recent geopolitical and geoeconomic changes, the effects of pollution, climate change, the loss of biodiversity (triple planetary crisis) and the EU's role as a global champion of sustainability, not only achieving its sustainability objectives, but in setting an example and accompanying and supporting its partners in their efforts to achieve theirs. It is also key in making sure the EU can seize all opportunities offered by the ocean.

As announced in [Europe's Choice “Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029](#), a European Oceans Pact will focus on boosting the blue economy and ensuring the good governance and sustainability of our oceans in all of their dimensions.

Problem the initiative aims to tackle

Despite the impetus towards more coherence, our ocean-related policies still remain rather fragmented to help achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 14. On the one hand, we should assess the way we interact with the ocean, i.e. how we impact the ocean, how the ocean impacts us (resilience of the industry and of the coastal communities in the face of climate change). On the other, we need to seize the opportunities that we can harvest from the ocean to seize all the opportunities the ocean and the blue economy offer. The European Oceans Pact will build among others on the foundations laid by the Fisheries and Oceans Package¹ and the sustainable blue economy Communication² and look at a broader, integrated approach to ocean governance across all sectors.

A European Oceans Pact is essential to support coastal communities and rural communities that depend on the ocean. The Pact will be crucial to address urgent issues such as the triple planetary crisis, competition for marine space, economic competitiveness, fisheries and aquaculture management, all requiring coordinated action across Member States.

The international leg of the European Oceans Pact will aim to maintain and strengthen the EU's global leadership in protecting and restoring the marine environment, to ensure level-playing field, to uphold our social standards, and to continue promoting an international ocean governance system based on international law, with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and its implementing agreements, in particular the BBNJ Agreement³, at its core.

This Pact will foster a holistic approach, integrating environmental, economic, and social dimensions, ensuring that all stakeholders - including local communities, authorities, industries and NGOs - are engaged in ocean governance.

Basis for EU action (legal basis and subsidiarity check)

Legal basis

This initiative falls under a policy area (conservation of marine biological resources under the CFP) where the EU has exclusive competence under Article 3(1)(d) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and therefore, the subsidiarity principle does not apply.

The CFP Regulation, and by extension the Oceans Pact scope also includes areas of shared competences between the EU and its Member States, where the subsidiarity principle applies, such as for aquaculture and the market policy.

Since 2007, with its Integrated Maritime Policy and Blue Growth Policy, the EU has been developing a cross-sectorial approach to the blue economy, building notably on the EU policies for fisheries (TFUE art. 43), environment (art. 192), transport (art. 100) and research (art. 182).

The Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council established a framework for maritime spatial planning.

In 2021 the Commission adopted a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU.

¹ [Fisheries, aquaculture and marine ecosystems \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/).

² COM(2021) 240 final

³ [BBNJ Agreement | Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/oceans-and-climate/blue-growth/blue-growth.html).

In 2021 the Commission adopted Strategic guidelines for a sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021-2030⁴

In 2021, the Commission adopted the Joint Communication on a stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic.

In 2022 the Commission adopted the EU algae initiative⁵.

In 2022 the Commission adopted a joint Communication setting the course for a sustainable blue planet updating the international ocean governance agenda.

In 2023 the Commission presented a package of measures to improve the sustainability and resilience of the EU's fisheries and aquaculture sector.

In 2023 the Commission also adopted a joint Communication for a revision of the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its action plan.

In 2023, the Commission has adopted a new Control Regulation.

In 2023, the Commission adopted the Fisheries and Oceans package.

The package presented measures to improve the sustainability and resilience of the EU's fisheries and aquaculture sector. It includes four elements: A Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector; an Action Plan to protect and restore marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries; a Communication on the common fisheries policy today and tomorrow and a Report on the Common Market Organisation for fishery and aquaculture products.

The Commission has thus accrued experience, while respecting the principles of subsidiarity. Existing texts, however, are now superseded by a new context, new trends and new policy objectives.

Practical need for EU action

Overall, there is a growing recognition of the need for a single reference framework for all ocean-related policies – both within the Commission and vis-a-vis stakeholders.

A Commission Communication is the appropriate instrument to introduce a holistic approach to all EU ocean related policies, calling on all players, at all levels (EU, national, regional and local) and thematic and sectorial communities to adhere to that vision and put it into practice in their respective remits.

B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how

The European Oceans Pact will set a vision for a holistic approach to ocean-related policies. The purpose is to achieve a single reference framework for all ocean-related policy actions during the Commission's mandate. It will pursue three equally important objectives:

- 1) pursue a healthy and productive ocean by implementing relevant EU legislation and championing the EU's international ocean governance agenda,
- 2) boost a competitive, resilient, and sustainable EU blue economy, including fisheries
- 3) consolidate, simplify, and extend the EU's marine knowledge framework.

These three objectives are inter-related and must be pursued in parallel. The Oceans Pact will seek to address key challenges and opportunities of today.

⁴ [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0236 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/other/2021/236/oj)

⁵ [Communication from the Commission: Towards a strong and sustainable EU algae sector - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/2021_100)

We will need to ensure, together with the relevant DGs, coherence and alignment of this Communication with the *New Pact for the Mediterranean* for areas of shared interest in the blue economy. Strong synergies with other relevant policy and legal instruments, such as the *Maritime Strategy Framework Directive* (MSFD), the *Clean Industrial Strategy* (regarding waterborne), the *Maritime Industry Strategy*, the *Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act* (for ports, shipping, fisheries and aquaculture), the EU Port strategy, the Important Projects of Common Interest (IPCI) for strategic sectors, the *European Biotech Act* (for blue biotechnology and BBNJ provisions on marine genetic resources), the updated Bioeconomy strategy, the new European Internal Security (on cybersecurity and critical maritime infrastructure), A circular Economy Act, the European Water Resilience Strategy, clean energy investment strategy for Europe, European Innovation Act, EU start-up and scale-up strategy, Horizon Europe and EU Missions, the New European Bauhaus, the updated EU International Ocean Governance Agenda, the *Vision for Agriculture and Food*, the *Union of Skills*, the *Circular Economy Act*, *European Degree and European University Alliances* and synergies with the new Climate Adaptation Plan will be exploited.

The Communication will also be developed in synergy with the Clean Industry Deal, to the mutual benefits of both initiatives, and will support the policy objectives of the strategic agenda 2024-2029 for a prosperous and competitive Europe.

Likely impacts

The likely impact of the initiative is an increased coherence and complementarity of all policies and actions that target the ocean and the blue economy, as well as a stronger commitment, collaboration and coordination of all EU fisheries, aquaculture and blue economy stakeholders.

The initiative will contribute to improve protection and restoration of marine biodiversity, promoting transparency and reporting in ocean-related activities.

The initiative will contribute to a clean, healthy, and productive ocean and blue economy for the prosperity of the EU's coastal and rural regions and communities.

The Pact will contribute to a prosperous fishing and aquaculture sector continuously contributing to EU's food sovereignty and EU food strategic autonomy, including artisanal fishers who are part of Europe's cultural heritage and traditions.

The initiative is expected to boost the blue economy and thereby contribute to increasing its socio-economic resilience, competitiveness and sustainability in the medium to long-term.

The initiative is expected to attract investments, boost innovation and the technological potential of all blue economy sectors as well as their uptake.

Future monitoring

Monitoring of the implementation will be ensured through regular exchanges with Member States, in particular in the Council Working Party on Maritime Affairs.

Monitoring across the Commission will be ensured through the Inter-service Group.

Together with relevant Commission services, we will map out the stakeholders involved in sectors that relate to the ocean.

Besides the preparations, the Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues will also further support the implementation of the strategy by bringing together sector-specific stakeholders and the broader ocean community.

The Advisory Councils will also ensure monitoring of the implementation.

At the UN event in Nice, the Pact will be presented to stakeholders and implementation will be discussed.

The yearly Youth Policy Dialogue and the Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues will also serve as a monitoring and implementation tool.

C. Better regulation

Impact assessment

The initiative will take the form of a Communication on the EU Oceans Pact. It does not create a new policy and no legislative impacts are expected at this stage. Therefore, no impact assessment has been planned for the initiative itself.

Consultation strategy

Public consultation is not planned through a questionnaire in eu-survey. Broad targeted consultations will be held in 2024- 2025.

Extensive public consultations have already taken place for some elements of the Pact. For instance, in 2024 events on foresight have been organised, the pan-European multi-stakeholder Blue Forum produced two position papers on the future of the sea⁶. The foresight project *Fishers of the future* examines the future role of fishers in society up to 2050⁷. The announcement of the Fisheries and Oceans Pact in the CFP Communication, published in 2023⁸, has been followed by a year of in-depth consultation of the Advisory Councils and social partners on the Fisheries and Oceans Package⁹.

Furthermore, *the Maritime Spatial Planning week in Marseille will be held in October 2024*. Another edition of *Fishers of the future* will be held in January 2025. A high-level round table in January 2025 gathering Member States, MEPs and stakeholders will serve as a starting point for the consultation.

The European Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues that will be held at the European Ocean Days in Brussels in March 2025, including a Youth Policy Dialogue will serve as stock taking exercises to gather the views of stakeholders, including relevant counterparts of other Commission DGs in sectors that relate to ocean matters.

The Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues will help designing the Oceans Pact. This can be understood as a broad and in-depth consultation of relevant stakeholders notably the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, the Advisory Councils and the social partners.

In addition, the next edition of the European Maritime Day will be held in Cork, Ireland, in the third week of May 2025. This will be an important platform for sectoral stakeholders and the broader ocean community to meet and engage in setting up concrete plans and ways to implement the Oceans Pact.

Another important leg of the European Maritime Day is its local initiative, the European Maritime Day in my country. This is a local iteration of the European Maritime Day, led by coastal communities all across Europe and beyond, which will serve as a platform for stakeholders and civil society at large to take ownership of the Pact and its implementation.

⁶ [European Blue Forum Publications | The European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁷ [Fishers of the future - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁸ COM (2023) 103 final.

⁹ [Fisheries, aquaculture and marine ecosystems \(europa.eu\)](#).

Why we are consulting?

The objective of the consultation process is to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to help design the European Oceans Pact in a collaborative and inclusive way and to listen to the views of all stakeholders.

The scope of the consultation process will seek the views and perceptions of the coastal communities and rural communities reliant on the ocean in the EU, also including Member States administrations, regional and local authorities, citizens and sectors.

The main objectives of the consultation are:

- o Ensure transparency of the process; enhance accountability and transparency of the Commission activities;
- o Gather general public, sector and expert stakeholders' opinions and inputs.
- o Stimulate stakeholders to provide inputs and ideas in order to draft the Oceans Pact.
- o Promote ownership and prepare stakeholders for the implementation of the Oceans Pact.

Target audience

Stakeholders will be grouped as:

- o Relevant Directorates-General of the Commission, which are responsible for different policy areas related to the Ocean: through a high-level meeting and inter-service consultations (first meeting scheduled on 16 October 2024).
- o The Member States and relevant agencies: they will notably be consulted through the Member States Expert Group (MSEG) on Blue Economy during the assessment process in December 2024 and March 2025.
- o European Parliament, notably SEARICA group, Committee of the Regions, Economic and social committee
- o Coastal communities
- o Citizens/General Public: The public constitutes the largest stakeholder group.
- o Industry and Business related to the ocean: industry associations including fishers / aquaculture producers / processors
- o Experts and think tanks: the experts are researchers and specialists working on different topics of interest (biodiversity, data collection, ocean governance etc), research institutions
- o NGOs: non-governmental organisations in the field of ocean conservation and biodiversity;
- o Youth are young people, activists and youth organisations involved in actions and coalitions for ocean literacy and awareness raising, as well as young people interested in blue economy / fisheries careers.