

The EU oceans and fisheries policy – Latest developments and future challenges



This study presents an overview of the main EU policies addressing **Fisheries, Aquaculture, the Blue Economy and International Ocean Governance**. It makes policy recommendations to strengthen policy for these themes in response to current and future challenges.

The main policy associated with fisheries, aquaculture and the oceans is the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which from 1970 developed as a distinct policy, separate from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Reforms to the CFP have been made every 10 years or so, with the latest 2013 iteration due to be evaluated to inform potential future reform.

Other EU policies impacting fisheries and associated areas include the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), the EU's commitments to various international agreements and more recently the European Green Deal (EGD).

The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), with a total budget of EUR 6.2 billion over the



period 2021-2027, is the main support mechanism to implement policy. This is unlikely to be sufficient to support the green transition.

The shared competence in **aquaculture policy** with Member States works well, but challenges remain: adapting to climate change and increasing input costs, competition for marine space and a reducing social licence to operate.

Increasing competition for marine space is an issue across the whole of the **Blue Economy** and currently incentives to maximise marine space through co-location and co-existence are lacking.

There are also concerns that the higher environmental and social standards required of EU production could make EU operators less competitive than non-EU producers, a major challenge in the seafood sector that is so reliant on imports.

The EU plays a proactive role in **International Ocean Governance**, but EU support faces a lack of third country capacity; resistance of some nations to adhere to international standards and changing geo-politics.

The study

This study gives an overview of the CFP and other relevant EU policies in relation to current & future challenges facing Fisheries, Aquaculture, the Blue Economy and International Ocean Governance.

Main observations

A key challenge for the CFP has been establishing a balance between **environmental, social and economic objectives** to ensure sustainable fisheries within healthy marine ecosystems. It is also a challenge to ensure the CFP remains coherent with more recent over-arching EU policies, particularly as major

policies such as the European Green Deal have been introduced since the CFP was last reformed.

A key challenge is ensuring fisheries, aquaculture and other operators in traditional blue economy sectors can make the **green and digital transitions** sought in the EGD and other cross-cutting policies.



Policy recommendations

Fisheries:

1. Increase **direct support**, address constraints and introduce **innovative funding mechanisms** to fisheries sector operators for green and digital **transition**.
2. Develop a fisheries-**specific technology** policy.
3. Develop market **standards** that ensure a **level playing field** in the production of seafood and other marine products imported into the EU.
4. Increase policy support for the fisheries sector **labour force**.
5. Tighten policy content and implementation mechanisms to better support **environmental objectives**.
6. Re-build trust between sector stakeholders and EU institutions through **review of policy** development, implementation and evaluation processes.

Aquaculture:

7. Increase emphasis on growing and diversifying EU aquaculture to meet EU **food security** and **environmental objectives**.
8. Consider a long-term strategic realignment of EU aquaculture to adapt to, and benefit from, the expected consequences of **climate change**.

9. Support the **development of coexistence** between aquaculture, local communities and other marine economic activities.

The Blue Economy:

10. Support existing Blue Economy operators in adapting to **climate change** and making the green and **digital transitions**.
11. Incentivise **co-location** of marine economic activities to maximise the use of space.
12. **Define** “Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures” (**OECMs**) and develop a **framework** for their implementation to supplement the EU’s MPA network.

International Ocean Governance:

13. Support the **entry into force of the international treaties** adopted but not yet into force, and ratification of existing instruments.
14. Continue to encourage coastal EU Member States to **ratify relevant IMO and ILO Conventions**.
15. Continue invest in **capacity building** of developing non-EU countries to support implementation of the provisions of international instruments.
16. Leverage EU influence as market state to incentivise international **progress towards sustainable fisheries**.

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