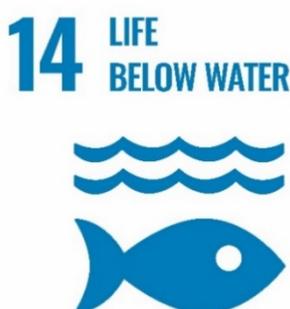**European Parliament**

# EU action on ocean governance and achieving SDG 14

## SUMMARY

The United Nations 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, set the global roadmap for achieving sustainable development. It includes SDG 14 on 'life below water', which focuses on the sustainability of the oceans, thereby recognising their essential role in life on our planet. Oceans contain 80 % of all life forms, produce more than 50 % of the Earth's oxygen and play a central role in regulating the climate. In addition, the 'blue economy' provides 4.5 million direct jobs in the EU. It covers traditional sectors, such as fisheries, maritime transport and coastal tourism, as well as innovative sectors, such as renewable ocean energy and the blue bioeconomy, which show great potential for sustainable blue growth. However, human activities threaten the health of our oceans. The effects of climate change are devastating, resulting in rising water temperatures, acidification, increased flooding and loss of marine biodiversity. The combination with other man-made stressors, such as pollution, including from land-based resources, and overexploitation of marine resources exacerbates the problem, reduces the resilience of oceans and poses a serious threat to the planet as a whole.

To manage maritime activities sustainably and cope with different environmental pressures, the EU has implemented a wide range of policies. This includes established policies, such as the common fisheries policy, the marine strategy framework directive and the maritime spatial planning directive, as well as specific legislation related to marine litter. Other new initiatives under the European Green Deal also play an important role in relation to ocean governance and sustainable blue growth, such as the 2030 biodiversity strategy, the offshore renewable energy strategy, the 'Fit for 55' package and the new guidelines on aquaculture. The external dimension of EU policies, its international ocean governance agenda and its global commitments make the EU a global player in shaping ocean governance and contribute to its commitment to deliver fully on SDG 14. On the occasion of World Oceans Day on 8 June 2022, this publication provides an overview of the main EU policies and initiatives in the field of ocean governance.

**14 LIFE BELOW WATER**

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# Background

## Oceans and their benefits

Oceans and seas, covering around 70 % of the Earth's surface, are essential to life on our planet for many reasons. They provide habitats for a vast and unique **biodiversity**, most of which is still unknown. About half of Earth's **oxygen** production comes from marine photosynthesisers, such as phytoplankton. Coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves and sea grasses, capture **carbon** faster and more efficiently than forests. Oceans also have a great capacity to store and redistribute heat, thereby regulating our **climate** and weather and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Marine biological resources play a growing role in food security. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) report on **fisheries and aquaculture**, marine capture fisheries and marine aquaculture reached a global production volume in 2018 of 84.4 million and 30.8 million tonnes respectively. In per capita terms, annual food fish consumption increased from 9.0 kg in 1961 to 20.3 kg in 2017. Fish consumption accounted for 17 % of the global animal protein intake in 2017 and as much as 50 % in certain developing countries and small island states.

Other traditional sectors also depend on oceans. Overall, the **blue economy**, covering all sectors related to oceans, seas and coasts, provides about 4.5 million direct jobs in the EU, of which the vast majority, 2.8 million, are in the **coastal tourism** sector. Figure 1 below shows the number of jobs and gross value added for the main traditional sectors of the blue economy in the EU in 2020.

Figure 1 – Direct jobs and gross value added in 2020 for the main EU blue economy sectors
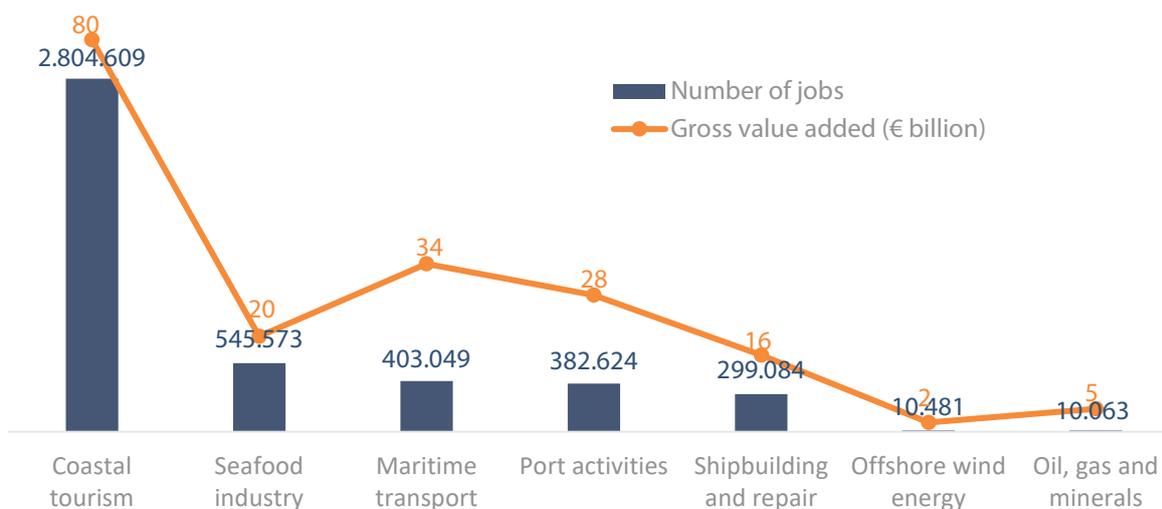


Data source: Blue economy indicators – established sectors, European Commission.

In addition to these main sectors, the blue economy also includes emerging sectors with great potential for sustainable growth. For example, the EU is not only a leader in the established offshore wind energy sector, but also a frontrunner in the innovative **ocean energy sector** (i.e. energy from waves, tides, currents or temperature gradients). Another promising sector is **blue biotechnology**, which uses renewable aquatic biological resources to make new products. It includes the **algae sector**, which creates a variety of products, such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, biomaterials, biofuel and food products (as an alternative source of protein). **Desalination** is another growing sector, which aims to ensure the availability of fresh water, especially in the Mediterranean region.

## Pressures on oceans

However, human activities, both on land and at sea, threaten the health of our oceans. In particular, the effects of climate change pose a major threat to marine biodiversity and the communities that

depend on it. A special report on the oceans and cryosphere from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that the oceans literally took the heat from global warming by absorbing more than 90 % of the excess heat in the climate system. As a result, **marine heatwaves** are increasing in frequency and intensity, damaging ecosystems, especially coral reefs, causing harmful algal blooms, and contributing to heatwaves and heavy precipitation on land. Warmer water also retains less oxygen, increases the oxygen demand of organisms and decreases inter-layer mixing, which affects oxygen supply. This all leads to **oxygen deficiency**, especially in the upper layers, or even to so-called 'dead zones', areas with too little oxygen to support marine life. Furthermore, by absorbing human-induced $CO_2$ emissions (some 20 % to 30 % of these emissions to date), marine water contains more dissolved carbon, causing **acidification**. The combination of these climate change effects has a great impact on marine ecosystems and leaves little time for adaptation. Unabated emissions would result in a strong **global loss** in primary productivity, biomass and maximum fisheries catch potential, with increases only at the Poles (due to a poleward shift of species). Small-scale fisheries in tropical areas are projected to experience the largest impacts. As a result, livelihoods that depend highly on seafood and fishing are at risk of food insecurity and loss of income. As these communities live in coastal areas, they are also most immediately affected by **sea level rise**. Elevated sea levels can be further increased by storm surges and tidal changes, in Europe especially along the northern European coastline.

Other man-made stressors aggravate the problem and further erode the resilience of marine ecosystems. The Marine Messages II report of the European Environment Agency (EEA) includes an overview of the pressures and the overall condition of Europe's seas. In the EU's coastal waters, the declines in oxygen are also often linked to excessive nutrient inputs from agricultural production, in a process called **eutrophication**, a long-known problem in the Baltic Sea, for example. Other important **polluting factors** are oil spills, industrial contaminants (such as heavy metals or chemicals) and marine litter (especially plastics). **Plastics** constitute up to 95 % of the waste that accumulates on shorelines, the sea surface and the sea floor; the majority of the plastic litter items are packaging, fishing nets and small pieces of unidentifiable plastic or polystyrene. The introduction of non-indigenous species (mostly through shipping), the **exploitation of the seabed** (for extracting living and non-living resources) and **underwater noise** (e.g. from shipping or for energy production) also have adverse effects on marine species. And while progress has been made towards sustainable fishing in EU waters, eliminating **overfishing** remains a challenge, especially in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Worldwide, about one third of fish stocks were fished at unsustainable levels in 2017.

# EU marine and maritime policy framework

In order to manage maritime activities sustainably and to deal with the various environmental pressures, the EU has developed, over the years, a set of well-established policies that together form a comprehensive framework. The main policies and initiatives are listed below.

## Fisheries management in the EU

The **common fisheries policy** (CFP), adopted in 1983 and reformed three times since then, is one of the EU's long-standing policies. Its core area, the conservation of marine biological resources, is one of the few exclusive competences of the EU. This means that legislation related to **marine fisheries** is implemented through EU regulations directly applicable in the Member States. An important tool of its conservation policy is the system of total allowable catches (TACs), shared as quotas among Member States. The most recent reform of the CFP in 2013 introduced a major milestone, by fixing the target of achieving exploitation of stocks at sustainable levels. It meant that, by 2020, fish stocks had to be restored and maintained above levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), i.e. the highest amount of fish that can be taken from a stock without affecting its reproduction. Several tools to achieve this target were introduced, such as the adoption of multi-annual plans to ensure long-term management of stocks, an obligation to land all

catches (to end the practice of fish discards) and regionalisation of decision-making (by sea basin). In its latest communication on the state of EU fisheries, the Commission reported on the good progress in the North-East Atlantic and adjacent seas, where the majority of the fish stocks are managed in line with the sustainability objective. However, the post-Brexit cooperation with the UK and other northern third countries on sustainably managing joint stocks is a new challenge, while the situation in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, despite EU efforts to reduce overfishing, remains a concern. The CFP has a dedicated fund – the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund** (EMFAF) – with a budget of about €6 billion for the 2021-2027 period. It covers support for fisheries, aquaculture, the blue economy and marine conservation.

## Blue growth and the Green Deal

Due to a growing awareness that all marine policies and maritime activities are interconnected, in 2007 the Commission launched an **integrated maritime policy** (IMP). As an overarching framework aiming at a coherent approach to all sea-related EU policies, it came at the start of a series of legislative initiatives and actions, such as those in the area of maritime spatial planning, the development and promotion of blue growth, integrated maritime surveillance and marine research.

**Maritime spatial planning** (MSP) is the instrument for managing sustainably the increased competition for maritime space. It is implemented through the MSP Directive, adopted in 2014 and which required the 22 coastal Member States to establish MSP plans by March 2021; an online platform was set up to facilitate implementation. A study commissioned by the European Climate Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) and published in November 2021 provided guidelines for applying an ecosystem-based approach in MSP, thereby linking it to environmental objectives. In May 2022, the Commission published a report on the implementation of the MSP Directive. It highlighted some good practices among Member States, such as identifying potential for multi-use of the maritime space, taking into consideration land-sea interactions and organising local consultations with stakeholders. It concluded that MSP is an effective tool to coordinate maritime activities and to prevent conflicts between sectors, with the EU being a global leader in this area. The report also noted that, while the majority of the coastal Member States have an MSP plan in place, eight countries had not made sufficient progress.

In 2012, the Commission launched its first blue growth strategy, with a specific focus on those sectors with high potential for growth, namely 'blue' energy (offshore wind and ocean energy), aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism, blue biotechnology and the mining of marine mineral resources. More recently, in May 2021, the Commission adopted a 'new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU', which puts the **blue economy** into the context of the European Green Deal, a set of initiatives and proposals towards climate neutrality. The approach includes actions on decarbonisation and depollution of activities (e.g. greening maritime transport, supporting circularity and sustainability in coastal tourism), coastal resilience (e.g. nature-based solutions for protecting coastlines against sea level rise), training and skills for blue economy jobs, innovation and knowledge and regional cooperation.

**Maritime transport**, an important pillar of the blue economy, plays a key role in the world's economy and holds a crucial contribution to decarbonisation. It is the most carbon-efficient mode of transport, regarding emissions per distance and weight carried. Furthermore, **European ports** provide for new equipment and handling technology required by the growing offshore energy industry and are developing as sustainable energy hubs. Ports have thereby become an important and growing blue economy sector and play a crucial role in the implementation of the Fit for 55 package, a set of legislative proposals put forward in July 2021 to bring EU legislation in line with the target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030. It covers the proposed FuelEU Maritime regulation, which aims to boost the production and uptake of sustainable, low-carbon fuels in maritime transport, and obliges ships to use shore-side electricity supply (also known as 'onshore power supply', OPS). Ports are expected to facilitate both. Another proposed regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure seeks to ensure the availability of a dense

alternative fuels network, including liquefied natural gas at EU ports. It requires that, by the beginning of 2030, at least 90 % of demand for OPS will be met in the maritime ports of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T). Furthermore, the **European shipbuilding and repair sector**, another important traditional blue economy sector, is fully active in cleaner shipping. This includes the manufacture of equipment and machines.

**Integrated maritime surveillance** aims to provide authorities involved in surveillance – i.e. border control, safety and security, fisheries control, customs, environment and defence – with ways to exchange information. A common information sharing environment (CISE) is therefore being developed jointly by the European Commission and EU/EEA Member States. It is currently in a transitional stage towards an operational system and is managed by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). By enabling an effective understanding of maritime activities, CISE contributes to the protection of the marine environment, for example through preparedness and response to marine pollution and environmental disasters. Since 2014, CISE has been one of the actions supporting the implementation of the EU maritime security strategy (EUMSS).

In 2008, the European marine and maritime research strategy was launched, recognising the importance of research in reconciling sustainable blue growth with environmental conservation. The strategy was complemented by a marine knowledge 2020 strategy, adopted in 2010, focusing on marine data, and in particular the European marine observation and data network (EMODnet), a EU flagship project that collects, processes and makes freely available all sorts of marine data, currently from over 120 organisations. An important product under EMODnet is the European Atlas of the Seas, which includes more than 275 map layers on various marine topics and which enhances ocean literacy in education, research and the economy. Another project enhancing ocean literacy is the EU4Ocean platform, which connects currently 125 members to collaborate and mobilise efforts on ocean literacy. The Commission's new communication on the blue economy reiterated the importance of research and knowledge, proposing some new initiatives. In particular, Horizon Europe, the EU's research programme for 2021-2027, contains a mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030', supporting research to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems, to prevent and eliminate pollution, and to make the blue economy climate neutral and circular. A concrete example is the call for research proposals to prevent, minimise and remediate marine litter in the Mediterranean Sea basin. On marine knowledge, another important project is the marine component of Copernicus, the EU's satellite earth observation programme, providing data on the physical state and dynamics of oceans and marine ecosystems, and evolving to the EU reference for ocean forecasting.

In May 2020, the Commission adopted, as part of the Green Deal, the farm to fork strategy. It addresses sustainability in the food supply chain and aims to bring environmental, health and socio-economic benefits. While its primary focus is on agriculture, it noted that seafood and farmed fish generate a lower carbon footprint than land-based animal production and announced the update of the **strategic guidelines on aquaculture**. The strategy also expressed support for the **algae industry**, as 'an important source of alternative protein for a sustainable food system and global food security'. The updated aquaculture guidelines were published in May 2021. They address the well-known challenges, such as improving access to space and water and licensing procedures, but also many other areas, such as environmental performance, animal health and welfare, adaptation to climate change and the aim of increasing the share of organic production as envisaged in the farm to fork strategy. The Commission is also working on an initiative and platform to promote algae production.

Another important initiative in the context of the blue economy and the Green Deal is the offshore renewable energy strategy, published by the Commission in November 2020. It aims to massively increase the EU's electricity production from **offshore renewable energy** sources, and targets an installed capacity of at least 60 GW offshore wind energy and at least 1 GW ocean energy by 2030, with a view to reaching 300 GW and 40 GW respectively by 2050. For offshore wind, this would be an almost 20-fold increase from the 16 GW of installed capacity at the end of 2021. It would make a

significant contribution to meeting the EU's $CO_2$ reduction targets for 2030 and the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The strategy aims to facilitate the necessary (mostly private) investments and to improve regional cooperation. The North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC), currently comprising nine European states and the European Commission, supports the development of the cross-border offshore grid in the North Sea region. In a North Sea wind summit on 18 May 2022, Denmark, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands committed to achieving together at least 150 GW connected offshore wind capacity in the North Sea by 2050, delivering half of the EU target. Expansion of offshore wind in the Mediterranean Sea will require the deployment of floating wind farms because of the deeper waters. Figure 2 illustrates the potential increase in offshore wind capacity in the EU by 2050, based on an estimation by the organisation WindEurope.

Figure 2 – Current and potential EU offshore wind energy capacity in 2050 (in gigawatts)
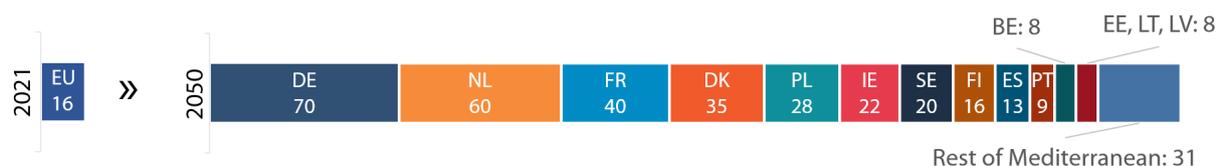


Data sources: 2021: WindEurope statistics; 2050: 'Our Energy – Our Future' WindEurope report, adjusted upwards for DE and BE according to their commitments in the North Sea wind summit declaration.

Ocean energy, on the other hand, is mostly in a pre-commercial state, but the outlook is positive, showing great potential especially for wave and tidal energy along the Atlantic coast. Other technologies considered by the strategy, especially for research funding, are emerging technologies such as floating photovoltaics and the use of algae to produce biofuels. In response to the recent energy crisis, on 18 May 2022 the Commission presented its REPowerEU plan, which aims to further boost renewable energy, for example by encouraging rapid development of offshore grids.

## Protecting the marine environment

The **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** (MSFD), adopted in 2008, can be regarded as the IMP's environmental pillar and introduced an integrated approach to the entire marine ecosystem. It required Member States to set environmental targets, along with national programmes of measures, in order to achieve 'good environmental status' (GES) in their marine waters by 2020. The GES characteristics had to be determined based on 11 descriptors, addressing various pressures such as eutrophication, damage to the sea bed, marine litter, introduction of non-indigenous species and underwater noise. In 2020, the Commission adopted a report on the first implementation cycle of the MSFD. It highlighted some main achievements, such as the holistic view on the cumulative pressures of human activities, the development of an ecosystem-based approach, improvements in data gathering and increased coordination between all stakeholders, including cooperation with third countries. However, it also concluded that Member States did not adequately cover all pressures on the marine environment. A second implementation cycle is ongoing and the directive will be reviewed by mid-2023.

In addition, since **marine litter**, in particular plastics, has received greater attention in recent years, two directives were adopted in 2019:

➢ A directive to update the existing rules on port reception facilities for the collection of waste from ships. It restructured relevant fees in a way that does not incite ships to dump waste into the sea, as well as to check what waste they have delivered.
➢ A new directive which introduced a series of measures regarding the top 10 single-use plastics and discarded fishing gear. It introduced bans and requirements relating to consumption reduction, product design, labelling and awareness-raising and additional extended producer-responsibility requirements.

Member States had two years to transpose the two directives into their national legislation and their provisions are now gradually entering into force. Support for the collection of marine litter is also

possible through the EMFAF – for example, for the passive collection of litter by fishermen, also called 'Fishing for litter' – and for investments in ports to provide reception facilities for marine litter collected from the sea.

As a crucial part of the Green Deal, in May 2020 the Commission adopted its biodiversity strategy for 2030. It calls for stronger action to restore the good environmental status of marine ecosystems, in particular through full implementation of the CFP, the MSFD and the Birds and Habitats Directives. The latter two, also known as the nature directives, protect the EU's vulnerable habitat types and bird species, both on land and at sea, through a network of protected areas. From a wider perspective, marine protected areas (MPAs) are considered to be an important tool for preserving marine ecosystems. They increase fish productivity, enhance resilience to the effects of climate change and enable greater carbon uptake. The new biodiversity strategy sets a target of **30 %** MPAs in EU waters by 2030 (compared to around 11 % in 2019), of which one third would fall under strict protection. Furthermore, the zero pollution action plan, adopted in May 2021, proposes pollution reduction targets for 2030 and includes the target of reducing plastic litter at sea by 50 %.

# EU and global ocean governance

## SDG 14 – Life below water

UN SDG 14 Targets

➢ **14.1** - By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

➢ **14.2** - By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

➢ **14.3** - Minimise and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

➢ **14.4** - By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

➢ **14.5** - By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

➢ **14.6** - By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognising that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

➢ **14.7** - By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

➢ **14.a** - Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

➢ **14.b** - Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

➢ **14.c** - Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of The Future We Want

In September 2015, under the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, government leaders adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). Goal 14 focuses on 'life below water' and includes 10 targets and related indicators (see box). They aim to protect and

ensure the sustainable use of oceans, including reducing marine pollution and ocean acidification, the ending of overfishing, and conserving marine ecosystems. In the 2022 SDG progress report, the UN states that 'the world's oceans and seas continue to struggle against increased acidification, eutrophication and plastic pollution'. On the regulatory framework, it noted progress as more countries adopted instruments to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, support small-scale fisheries and promote participatory decision-making. SDG target 14.6 to ban harmful fishery subsidies has not been achieved but is the subject of ongoing negotiations (see next section).

The EU has been monitoring its own progress, with indicators adapted to the EU perspective (see Table 1). It noted that marine conservation efforts have increased and fishing activities in EU waters appear to have become more sustainable, but the trends in ocean health remain mixed.

Table 1 – EU indicators measuring progress towards SDG 14

| SDG 14 - EU indicators | Short term trend | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ocean health | | | |
| Coastal water bathing sites with excellent water quality | 87 % (2015) | 88.4 % (2020) | ➚ |
| Marine waters affected by eutrophication | High annual variability | | ✖ |
| Global mean surface seawater acidity (pH value) | 8.063 (2015) | 8.053 (2020) | ➘ |
| Marine conservation | | | |
| Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas | 7.4 % (2016) | 10.7 % (2019) | ⬆ |
| Sustainable fisheries | | | |
| Relative value of fish stock biomass (index 2003 = 100) | 107 (2014) | 127 (2019) | ⬆ |
| Estimated trends in fishing pressure (a value <= 1 indicates sustainable fishing level) | 1.14 (2014) | 1.12 (2019) | ➚ |

⬆          ➚          ➘          ✖

Data source: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context (2022 edition).

## The role of the EU in global ocean governance

Through its established marine and maritime policies, new legislative initiatives and international commitments, the EU is a key player in shaping international ocean governance.

The external dimension of the CFP provides the framework for activities of EU vessels beyond EU waters and aims to ensure that they are based on the same principles as those inside EU waters. It covers the sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs), wherein the EU gives financial and technical support in exchange for fishing rights. Fishing activities in areas outside national jurisdiction are covered by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). These are international bodies, subject to international law and formed by countries with fishing interests in those areas. As a member of 18 of these bodies, the EU is an important contributor to sustainable and science-based fisheries management in the high seas. As regards the high seas of the Central Arctic Ocean, the EU is one of 10 signatories to an agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in this area. It entered into force on 25 June 2021 and prevents commercial fishing for a period of 16 years. As the world's biggest market for seafood, the EU is also an important player in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, in particular through the 2008 IUU Regulation, which mainly aims to prevent and eliminate the import of IUU-caught products into the EU. Its main component is a multi-step flagging system for dealing with third countries that are non-cooperative in the fight against IUU fishing.

Also in the fisheries sector, important negotiations are ongoing at World Trade Organization (WTO) level to ban harmful subsidies. Fishery subsidies are considered harmful to the environment if they contribute to overcapacity, thereby encouraging or sustaining overfishing, or if they subsidise operators engaged in IUU fishing activities. The WTO negotiations on fishery subsidies have been

ongoing since 2001. They stalled in 2011, but were revived thanks to the SDGs, in particular SDG 14.6, which aimed to ban harmful subsidies by 2020. The current draft text includes a ban on subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing, such as support for the construction of vessels and for operational costs. A number of exemptions would apply – for example, for certain developing countries and, as strongly advocated by the EU, where 'measures are implemented to maintain the stock or stocks in the relevant fishery or fisheries at a biologically sustainable level'. The 12th Ministerial Conference, which serves as a deadline for concluding negotiations, was postponed several times due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and now takes place in Geneva on 12-15 June 2022. Ahead of the meeting, WTO members held intensive negotiations during the week of 16 May, aimed at resolving remaining issues. The EU is strongly committed to reaching an agreement that would finally prohibit harmful fisheries subsidies.

The **maritime shipping** sector is an important user of the world's oceans in delivering essential goods, as well as taking passengers to their destinations. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), a specialised UN agency, responsible for regulating international shipping, has an integral role to play in meeting SDG 14. The IMO's work in this case is directly linked to another goal, namely SDG 13 on climate action, since the oceans are directly affected by increased carbon emissions. Full membership of the IMO is reserved for EU Member States with maritime interests; the European Commission holds observer status at the IMO.

The most relevant IMO instrument in this framework is the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, called MARPOL, in place since 1973 (see box).

Regarding $CO_2$ emissions, the IMO adopted an international climate agreement for maritime shipping in 2018. It encompasses an initial strategy on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from this sector, to which EU members of the IMO formally agreed. In the short term, it will aim to reduce carbon intensity of international shipping, by reducing $CO_2$ emissions per transport work, as

> MARPOL covers the prevention of pollution from ships by oil, chemicals carried in bulk, and garbage and sewage from ships. This includes atmospheric pollution. Other existing IMO anti-pollution measures are anti-fouling systems on ships and ballast water measures to avoid the spread of invasive aquatic species, and environmentally friendly recycling measures. These are dealt with by separate IMO treaties. Since 1997, the regulation of air pollution and emissions from ships, as well as energy efficiency, has been included in MARPOL. The MARPOL agreement was accompanied by the so-called London Convention and Protocol (1975), which aims to control all sources of marine pollution and prevent pollution of the sea through regulation of dumping of waste materials. These are described on a black and grey list according to their hazard to the environment. In 2018, the IMO adopted an action plan to address marine plastic litter from ships.

an average across international shipping, by at least 40 % by 2030. The objective is to reduce the total annual GHG emissions by at least 50 % by 2050 (compared to 2008). Several actions and instruments are needed to realise decarbonisation of this sector, among which improving energy efficiency (since 2013 in MARPOL), developing alternative fuels, and market-based measures, e.g. a possible fuel-levy. A recent meeting at IMO level in May 2022 reached a consensus to recommend to plenary the pricing of emissions, as part of a basket of (mid-term) measures. Sufficient financing, governance and advanced technology are important horizontal conditions in this case. For its GHG strategy, the IMO is engaged in a global capacity-building network of Maritime Technologies Cooperation Centres (MTCC). The EU is working on alignment of its instruments (i.e. monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of $CO_2$ emissions of maritime transport) to IMO GHG instruments. Regarding pricing, it is proposed to include maritime shipping in the European Emissions Trading System (ETS). Of importance is to safeguard a level playing field for the European maritime sector.

IMO support for SDG 14 is also reflected by its established practice of designating special areas due to their ecology, and 'particularly sensitive sea areas' (PSSAs), such as the Antarctic and the Baltic Sea or Wadden Sea in Europe. These increasingly cover and protect MPAs from international shipping traffic; the IMO thereby points out mandatory ship-routes. This recognition of Special Areas under MARPOL reflects the IMO's commitment to the importance of protecting and preserving the

world's seas and oceans from pollution, as vital life support systems. With regard to Europe, several areas have been earmarked in this framework, such as the Mediteranean Sea, the Baltic Sea and North West European waters. The North Sea and the Baltic Sea are currently earmarked as airborne emission (sulphur, nitrogen) control areas. The Mediteranean Sea will acquire a similar status as of the first of January 2025, whereby sulphur emissions from marine fuels will be restricted. The Antarctic and Arctic have been covered by the IMO's Polar Code since 2017. In addition, the IMO has issued guidance on reducing underwater noise from shipping to avoid negative consequences on marine mammals in oceans.

Regarding governance and ocean partnerships, the IMO plays an active role in environmental cooperation mechanisms, such as UN Oceans and other UN and international bodies.

The EU is playing an active role in the negotiations on a new international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). It would be the third UNCLOS implementing agreement (after the agreement on deep seabed mining and marine scientific research in the seabed area beyond national jurisdiction and the agreement on conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks). The intergovernmental conference (IGC) already held three negotiating sessions in the course of 2018 and 2019. The fourth session, postponed due to the pandemic, was held in March 2022. Prior to this session, the EU and its Member States, along with other countries, formed a 46-country coalition, the 'High Ambition Coalition on BBNJ', launched at the 'One Ocean Summit' hosted by France in February 2022. With this initiative, the EU took a leading role in showing commitment at the highest political level in order to achieve an ambitious result in the BBNJ negotiations. In the fourth negotiation session, good progress was made in the procedure to establish MPAs in the high seas. Other areas discussed cover environmental impact assessments, marine research and support to developing countries in implementing the agreement. Although only four negotiation sessions were initially mandated, the conference agreed a fifth session would be needed, which would take place in August 2022. The EU is also a prominent actor on the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. In the ongoing 15th conference of the Convention (COP15), the EU is pushing for an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The EU also secured global support for the launch of negotiations on a new legally binding UN agreement on plastic pollution.

Other examples of EU action in the field of global ocean governance are the commitments made each year during the 'Our Ocean' conferences. At the 2019 conference in Oslo, the EU made 22 new commitments (worth almost €540 million), and at the 2022 conference in Palau (postponed from 2020) the EU presented a list of 44 commitments for the 2020-2022 period, for an amount of almost €1 billion. The 'Ocean Tracker', an interactive map launched by the EU, allows users to follow the commitments made by governments, businesses and NGOs. The EU also supports work on MSP processes worldwide via the MSPglobal initiative, launched in 2018.

## EU's international ocean governance agenda

In November 2016, the Commission adopted the first communication on international ocean governance. The communication aimed to deepen the EU's ocean policy and take a more integrated approach to it; it was also part of the EU's response to SDG 14. It presented 53 action points, grouped under the three priority areas: improving the international ocean governance framework; reducing pressure on oceans and seas and creating the conditions for a sustainable blue economy; and strengthening international ocean research and data. They covered many different areas, such as developing ocean partnerships, working on international guidelines (e.g. on maritime spatial planning), building capacity for better ocean management, banning harmful fisheries subsidies and expanding existing EU research and observation tools and activities (e.g. EMODnet).

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the agenda in January 2018, asking the Commission to set clear deadlines, submit legislative proposals and publish a progress report. In March 2019, the Commission adopted a progress report, highlighting the results achieved so far –

for example, the ocean partnerships with China and Canada – and reporting on further actions, such as the establishment of a stakeholder forum bringing together experts, civil society representatives, academics and decision-makers. The forum took place through a series of online dialogues in April 2020, December 2020 and April 2021 and was complemented with a targeted consultation. A summary of the results of the consultation was published in February 2021 and a report with the forum's recommendations was published in April 2021. In its communication on the blue economy, the Commission announced the update of its international ocean governance agenda in the light of these consultations and recommendations. More concretely, in its work programme for 2022, the Commission announced that it would set out an action plan, addressing threats such as pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss, which is expected to be adopted on 22 June 2022.

## Position of the European Parliament

The European Parliament supports the EU's role as an active player on SDG 14 and this is reflected in many of its resolutions. Notably, in its above-mentioned 2018 resolution, entitled 'International Ocean Governance: An Agenda for the Future of Our Oceans in the Context of the 2030 SDGs', Parliament welcomed the Commission's 2016 communication and proposed actions to implement SDG 14. The resolution called on the EU to take a leading role, given its expertise in developing a sustainable approach to ocean management. Parliament also called for a number of actions to improve the international framework for ocean governance, such as ocean partnerships with key players, aimed at ensuring better coordination and cooperation for the successful implementation of the ocean-relevant SDGs. The resolution also called for greater attention to marine litter and a moratorium on deep-sea mining until the effects have been studied.

In the current legislative term, Parliament is also putting oceans high on the Green Deal's agenda. In its 2020 resolution on the Green Deal, Parliament urged the Commission to give it a 'blue' dimension and, prior to the publication of the new biodiversity strategy, advocated for the target of at least 30 % MPAs in EU waters. Parliament reiterated its 'strong support' for that target in its 2021 resolution on the biodiversity strategy. In the same resolution, it also expressed concern over the widespread physical disturbance of the seafloor in coastal EU waters, in particular as a result of bottom trawling. It therefore called on the Commission to limit, where necessary in order to protect coastal ecosystems, the use of bottom trawling. Also on fisheries, Parliament called in its 2021 resolution 'More fish in the seas?' to improve fisheries management to end overfishing, to expand the network of MPAs and to improve their management, and to tackle other environmental factors that threaten the recovery of fish stocks.

In a 2021 resolution on the farm to fork strategy, Parliament expressed disappointment at the lack of prominence and ambition for the seafood sector. It called on the Commission and the Member States to build on existing sustainable practices, such as the use of selective fishing gear, environmentally friendly aquaculture, including organic aquaculture, and energy efficiency solutions. It also urged the Commission and Member States to tackle the root causes of water pollution, end practices harmful to the marine environment and human health, and incentivise fishermen to collect waste while avoiding additional fuel consumption. Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH) is also working on a report regarding aquaculture and the new guidelines.

In February 2022, Parliament adopted a resolution on the offshore energy strategy. It the resolution, Parliament calls for the Commission to conduct an impact assessment to clarify the socio-economic impacts, with a focus on job creation. It recognises the potential in all EU sea basins and underlines the importance of jointly defining the amount of capacity to be deployed by Member States in 2030, 2040 and 2050. It also considers it of paramount importance to build consensus around offshore renewable energy projects and called for actions to streamline the issuing of permits. An earlier resolution from 2021 focuses specifically on the impact on the fishing sector, in particular on small-scale, coastal fisheries given their relative proximity to the coast. This resolution urges the Commission and the Member States to ensure that MSP guarantees the sustainable continuation of fishing activities and proposes to assess the combination of offshore wind farms and MPAs.

In a recent resolution on the blue economy, adopted in May 2022, Parliament considered, inter alia, that traditional blue economy activities, and regions depending on them, should not be omitted in any blue economy strategy. It also stressed the need for an integrated ecosystem-based approach and for a level playing field with fisheries and aquaculture products imported from third countries, ensuring that products consumed in the EU are produced by sustainable food systems. On coastal tourism, the resolution recognises that it can have positive impacts on developing countries, but can be detrimental when mass tourism strategies are developed. Therefore, it calls for the EU to promote fair and low-impact models of tourism. With regard to MPAs, the resolution stresses their importance as a tool for ocean protection and highlights the role of local and regional authorities in designating them. It also proposes to fund research to map carbon-rich marine habitats, as a basis for identifying such areas as strictly protected MPAs. This would protect and restore marine carbon sinks and ecosystems, in particular those on the seabed, and protect them from human activities that could 'disturb and release carbon into the water column', such as bottom-contacting fishing operations. The resolution also calls for the EU to prohibit all environmentally damaging extractive industrial activities such as mining and fossil fuel extraction in MPAs.

Parliament's Committees on Environment (ENVI) and Development (DEVE) are currently working on a report regarding the implementation and delivery of the SDGs. The draft report calls on the Commission to develop a robust comparative analysis of SDG 14 with sufficient comparable data.

## FURTHER READING

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