



OCEANO AZUL
foundation

Building an Ocean Union:

Is the European Ocean Pact really the solution to Europe's long-standing need for science-based and coherent ocean policies?



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KEY FOCUS AREAS



Ocean Conservation

Supporting the creation of effectively implemented and well-managed **MPAs**, including the establishment of a MPA network in the Azores, the largest MPA network in the North Atlantic.



Scientific Exploration

Conducting and participating in **scientific expeditions** that serve as powerful platforms for institutional and research collaboration, and as essential tools for advancing the designation of Marine Protected Areas.



Ocean Advocacy

Facilitating dialogue and influencing the **ocean agenda** by advising international decision-makers, including national governments, to take informed, science-based action that contributes to ocean-based solutions for the planet's most pressing challenges.

The **Oceano Azul Foundation** works to protect the ocean and promote sustainable management, accelerating science-based innovation with the aim of reversing the current decline in ocean health.

Using a science-based approach, its model of change supports the establishment of Marine Protected Areas for ocean conservation, fosters partnerships with governments and civil society organisations to advance an ambitious global ocean agenda with a disruptive vision of the blue economy, while contributing to capacity-sharing and ocean literacy.

Oceano Azul Foundation's focus is to bridge the gap between ambition and action.

An Ocean Union?



Jean MONNET (1888-1979) & Robert SCHUMAN (1886-1963)

Coal,
Steel, and...
Water?

Europe is inherently maritime.

- **68.000 kms of coastline** – 3x more than the US or 2x more than Africa;
- World **largest coastal tourism industry**, itself the largest EU blue economy sector;
- **One of the biggest merchant fleet in** the world (35% of the world fleet in GT), and state-of-the-art shipbuilding facilities, sustainable shipping technologies, marine equipment, and maritime logistics;
- **2nd largest market of fishery and aquaculture products** in terms of trade, and the 3rd in consumption;
- **40.8% of Europeans live in coastal areas;**
- **Thriving offshore renewable energy industry** (one of the fastest growing sector in EU economy).



European regional seas

With this comes a complex regulatory landscape.

The European Union has one of the most comprehensive regulatory framework when it comes to the Ocean.

Still, the EU's approach to ocean governance remains **too piecemeal**, with no overarching framework.

For instance, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive for instance does not refer to the Maritime Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD); sectoral policies operate under different governance structures and mandates than environmental policies (e.g. CFP and MSFD, CAP and WFD); and the EU Blue Economy also lacks a strategic oversight; no reference in the CAP to the marine environment...

In other words:

we are an Ocean Union without an Ocean Policy.



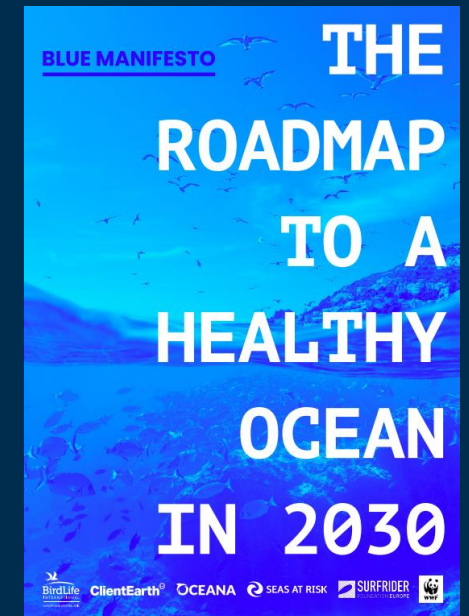
An Ocean Union without an Ocean Policy



Because of this, many started believing that **a unified reference framework for all ocean-related EU policies was necessary.**

The Oceano Azul Foundation and Europe Jacques Delors therefore published a **Manifesto for a European Ocean Pact** in 2024, ahead of the EU elections.

Other initiatives, such as the Blue Manifesto, pushed for such an overarching framework.



The Manifesto for a European Ocean Pact



This Manifesto, co-written with a group of high-level stakeholders, called **for the adoption of a Pact which would drive forward a comprehensive agenda, across 5 themes, that recognises the intrinsic link between the wellbeing of our societies, the competitiveness of our economies and the health of our ocean and waters.**

The Manifesto for a European Ocean Pact

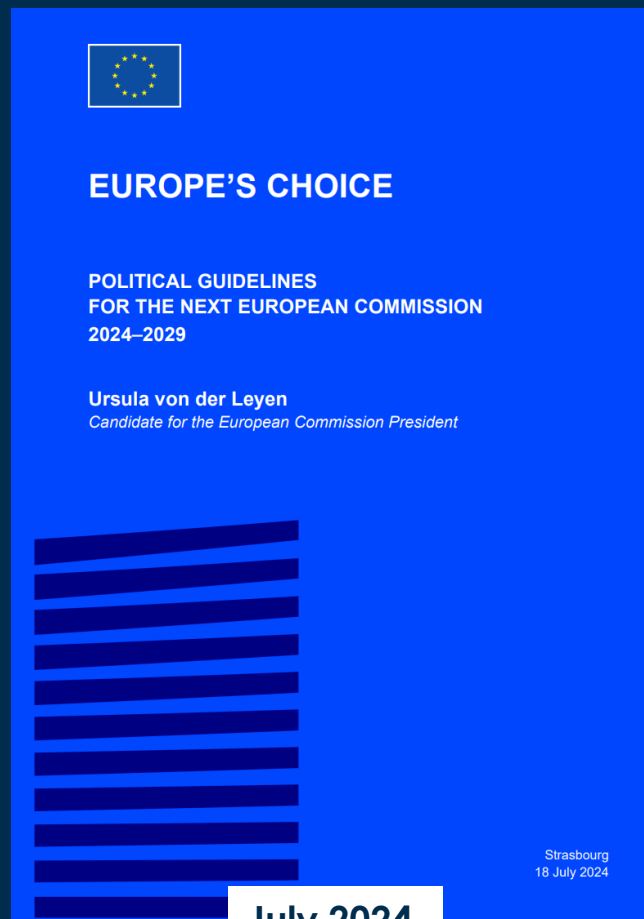


The **idea** became an **announcement**...

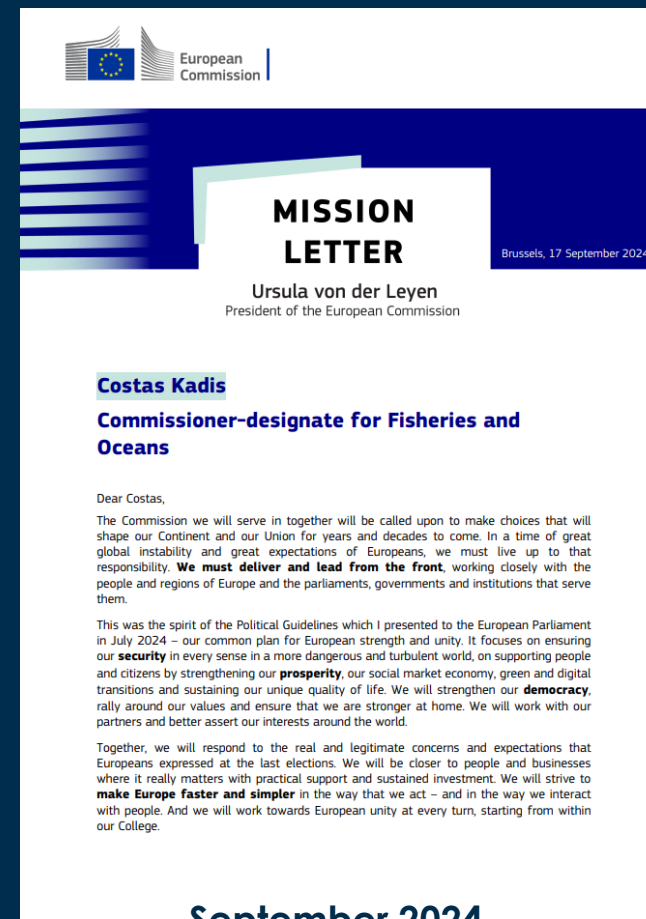
...And the **announcement** became a **commitment**



May 2024



July 2024



September 2024

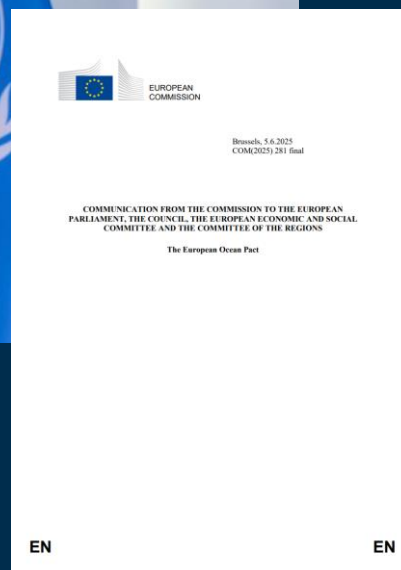


And the commitment became a reality



“I am very proud, and very grateful, that today we can present our first ever **European Ocean Pact.**”

President Ursula Von Der Leyen (9th June, UNOC3)



What's in there?

Six strategic objectives



Healthy ocean

- Evaluation and revision of the Maritime Spatial Planning directive.
- Designation and management of marine protected areas.



Competitive and sustainable blue economy

- Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture.
- European blue carbon reserves and new business models for coastal communities.
- Industrial Maritime Strategy, EU Ports Strategy and Sustainable Tourism Strategy.



Coastal communities & islands

- EU Coastal Communities Resilience and Development Strategy.
- Consultation for a strategy for islands.
- Updated strategy on outermost regions.



Maritime security & defence

- Removal of unexploded ordnance in EU waters with innovative technologies.
- A pilot European drone fleet.



Ocean knowledge, skills & literacy

- EU Ocean Observation Initiative
- European Ocean Research & Innovation Strategy.
- Deployment of the European Digital Twin of the Ocean by 2030.



Ocean Diplomacy

- Combating Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) with mandatory digital catch certification from January 2026.
- Piloting an International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS).
- Swift ratification and entry into force of major international agreements, such as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement and the Global Plastics Treaty.

What's in there?

HEALTHY OCEAN

The Pact focuses on attaining the **30x30 protection target** and the **20x30 restoration target**. It announced, amongst others:

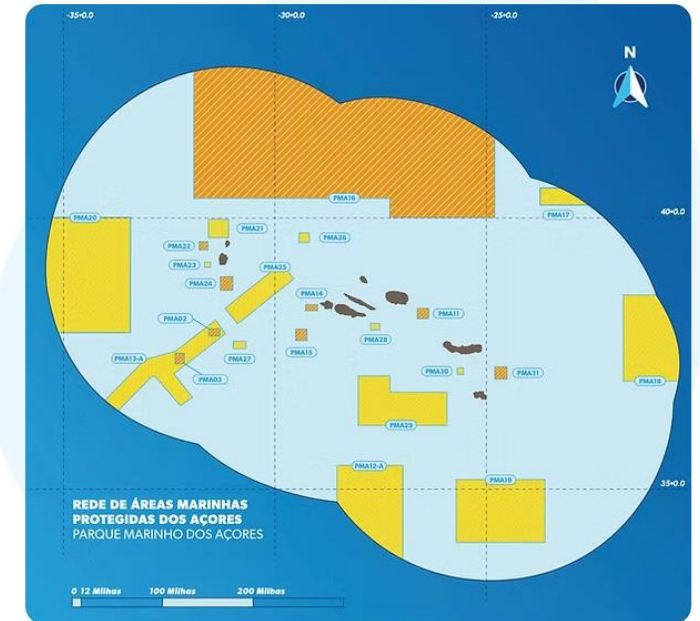
- The revision of the **Maritime Spatial Planning Directive**
- A push for **management plans for all MPAs** (only 2.04% of EU seas are currently covered by MPAs with management plans (WWF))
- Efforts to **tackle pollution** including land-based (through the Water Resilience Strategy)

AZORES APPROVES THE **LARGEST** AMP NETWORK IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

CAPTION

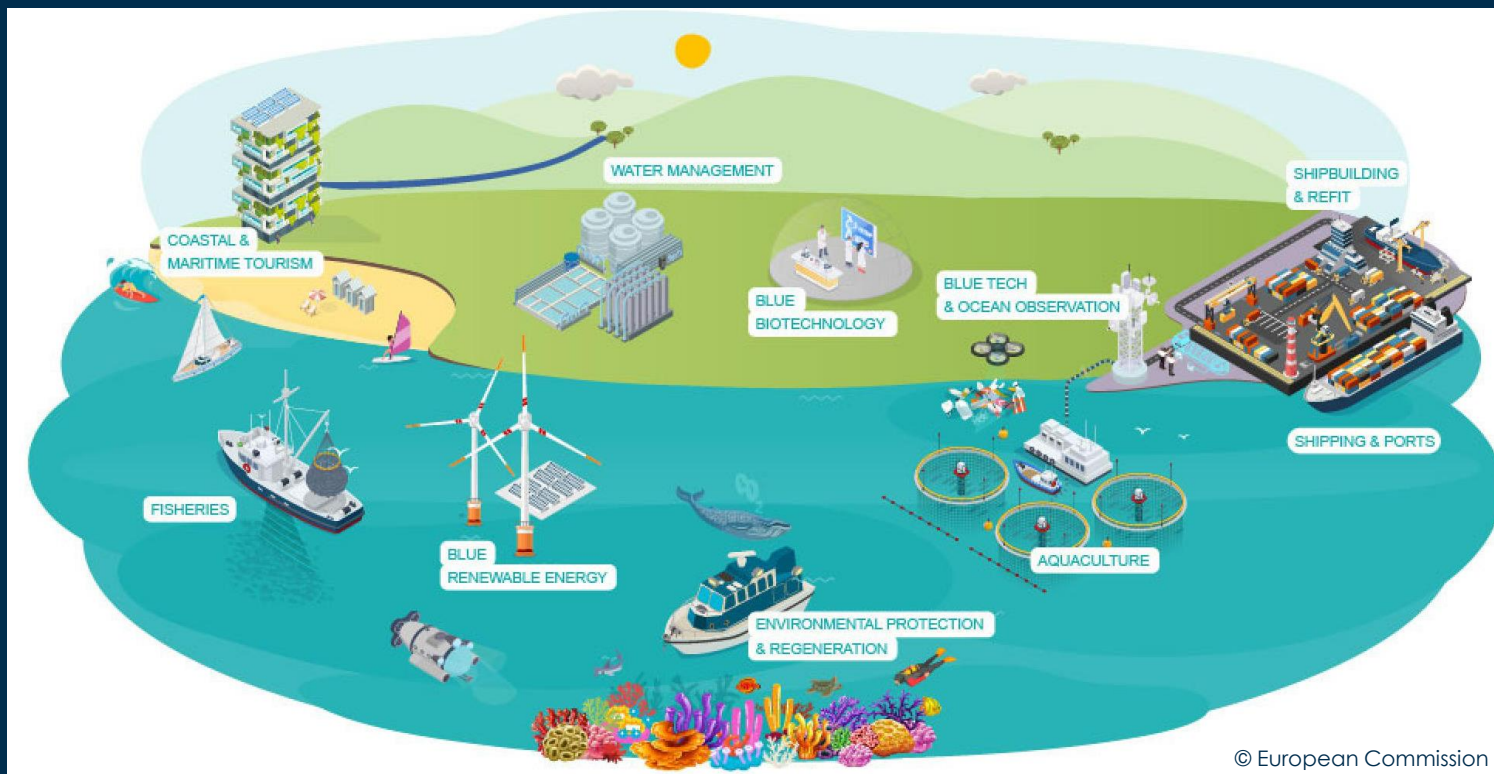
-  **Marine Total Protection Areas**
-  **High Protection Marine Areas**

DETAILED MAP



What's in there?

SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY



Focuses on competitiveness while accelerating the transition to sustainability and decarbonization, through:

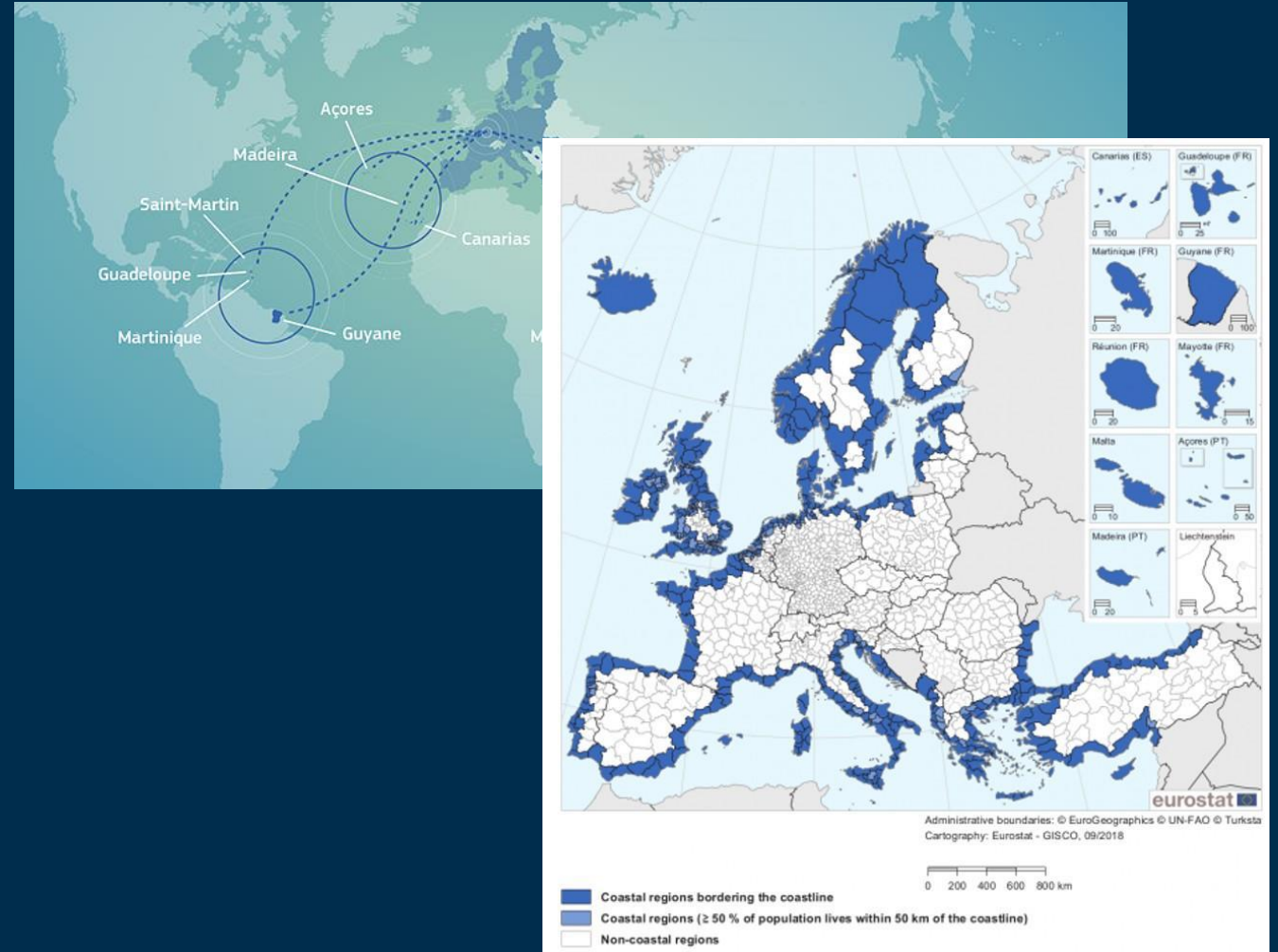
- New **(sectoral) strategies:** Industrial Maritime Strategy, EU Ports Strategy, Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Generational Renewal Strategy...
- Upscaling **regenerative aquaculture and algae production**, evaluating and possibly revising the **EU Common Fisheries Policy...**

What's in there?

COASTAL COMMUNITIES AND ISLANDS

...More strategies:

- **EU Coastal Communities Development and Resilience strategy**, a framework to foster local economic development
- **New Island Strategy** and updated **Strategy for the Outermost Regions**




What's in there?

MARITIME SECURITY AND DEFENCE






- Coordinated and technology driven response to various threats.
- Not much new... Already have the European Maritime Security Strategy, Action Plan on submarine cable security. European Internal Security Strategy
- New UXO Removal Strategy
- Strengthen cooperation with Arctic States, particularly on maritime surveillance.

MARCH 2023
#EUDefence
#StrategicCompass






EU MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY

MAIN OBJECTIVES




 <p>Protect EU interests at sea - citizens, economy, infrastructure and borders</p>	 <p>Protect our natural resources and the marine environment</p>	 <p>Uphold international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea</p>	 <p>React promptly and effectively to growing threats (e.g. cyber and hybrid threats)</p>	 <p>Ensure relevant training and education to counter threats (e.g. cyber skills)</p>
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Why do we need to act?

Ensuring safe and secure oceans is vital for the European and world economies:

 <p>Over 80% of global trade is seaborne</p>	 <p>About two-thirds of the world's oil and gas supply is extracted at sea or transported by sea</p>	 <p>Up to 99% of international data transfers and communications are done through submarine cables (over 400 submarine cables extending over 1.3 million kilometres)</p>
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We need to deal with an increasing number of traditional and new threats:

 <p>Traditional threats (piracy, armed robbery, smuggling, human trafficking, arms and narcotics, etc.)</p>	 <p>Hybrid- and cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure (submarine cables, pipelines, etc.)</p>	 <p>Climate change and environmental degradation (marine pollution, depletion of fish stocks, loss of biodiversity)</p>
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What's in there?

OCEAN KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND LITERACY

- **Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy**, building upon the HORIZON Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” which will address the fragmentation of EU R&I initiatives.



- An **EU Ocean Observation Initiative**, to become autonomous about critical ocean data services by securing historical data, mapping knowledge gaps, coordinating ocean observation activities, and developing an integrated observation system.
- An **Ocean Youth Ambassador Network** will be created, and a **new EU4Ocean internship programme**.

What's in there?

INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE

In line with the 2022 Communication on International Ocean Governance, the Pact reaffirms the EU's stances on crucial matters, such as Deep-Sea Mining, the BBNJ Treaty, Global Plastics Treaty, support for IPOS, WTO Subsidies Agreement, large scale MPAs in the Southern Ocean...

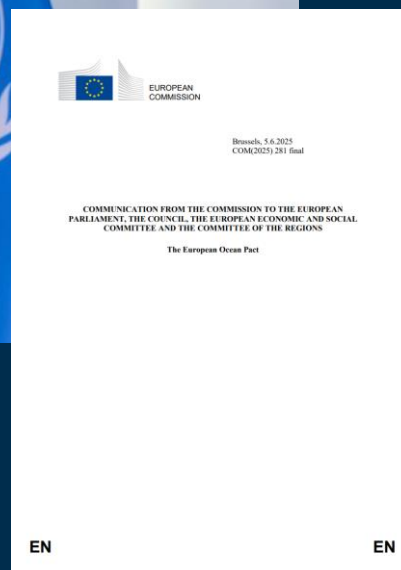


And the commitment became a Policy



“I am very proud, and very grateful, that today we can present our first ever European Ocean Pact.”

President Ursula Von Der Leyen (9th June, UNOC3)



... “First ever”?

Integrated Maritime Policy 2.0?

IMP

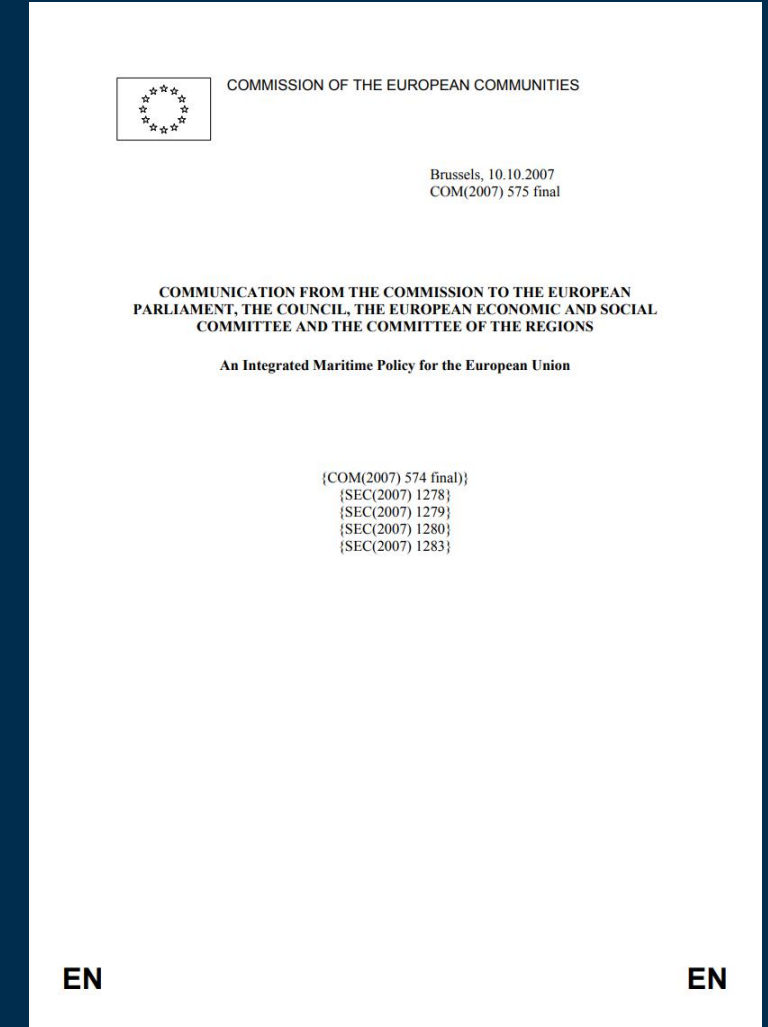
"...the Commission proposes an Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union, based on the clear recognition that **all matters relating to Europe's oceans and seas are interlinked, and that sea-related policies must develop in a joined-up way if we are to reap the desired results. This integrated, inter-sectoral approach** was strongly endorsed by all stakeholders. Applying it will require reinforced **cooperation and effective coordination of all sea-related policies at the different decision-making levels.**

An Integrated Maritime Policy requires a **governance framework that applies the integrated approach at every level**, as well as horizontal and cross-cutting policy tools. It will also require a sound financial basis, taking into account the results of preparatory actions."

Ocean Pact

"The European Ocean Pact builds on existing legislation and initiatives and will, for the first time, **provide a holistic approach across all policy areas.**

A strong **governance framework is needed to align actions at Union, regional, national, and local levels** through the various sea basins, involving both EU and non-EU countries."



Integrated Maritime Policy 2.0?

The IMP had the MSFD...

...The Pact will revise it.

The IMP had the MSPD...

... *The Pact will revise it.*

The IMP had a European Strategy for more Growth and jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism...

... The Pact has a Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

The IMP had strategic goals and recommendations for the EU's maritime transport policy...

... the Pact has an Industrial Maritime Strategy.

The IMP had a Ports Policy...

... The Pact has an EU Ports Strategy.

The IMP had a comprehensive European Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research...

... the Pact has an Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy.

From this perspective, the Pact appears more as a new cycle of the IMP in a post Green Deal era, than a true "European first".



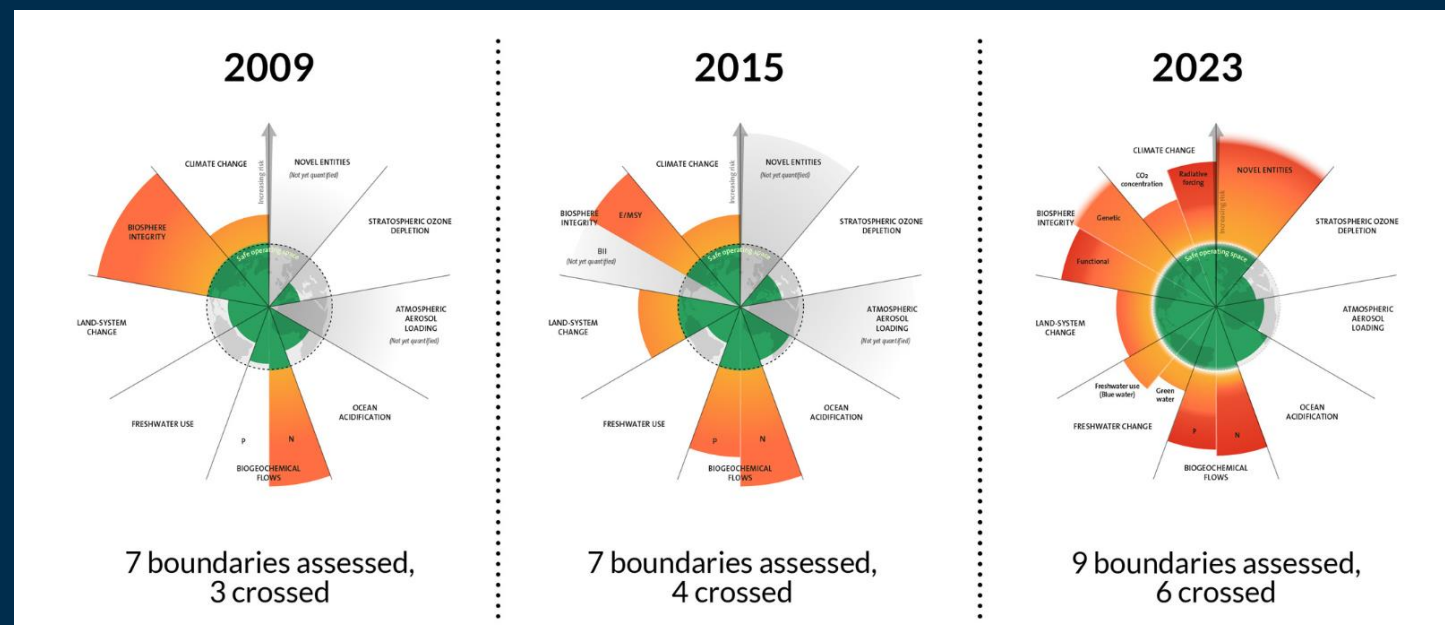
Is this a problem?

Not really...

- Policy coherence in matters as complex as the ocean **takes time**.
- This shows **consistency** in the work done at the EU level.

...But it begs the question:

as time is running out, what is our guarantee that the Pact will deliver, at pace and scale, if the recipe is so similar?



No guarantee, but...

The World has changed... A lot – also when it comes to the Ocean. One could argue that **more has been achieved on the international ocean agenda in the past 3 years than in the past 30.**

BBNJ Treaty, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement... adoption of IMO net-zero framework for global shipping and maybe Global Plastics Treaty?



No guarantee, but...

The **Ocean Pact** has itself created significant momentum.

- In March 2025, the European Council, for the first time, **had a standalone agenda item** (and conclusions) **on the Ocean**. EU leaders called for an ambitious, holistic and forward-looking European Ocean Pact.
- **The European Parliament** is also heavily mobilised, with regular debates and events on the Ocean Pact.
- **There was a strong show of leadership at UNOC3.**
- In comparison, initiatives like the **EU Marine Action Plan** was a failure in terms of buy-in.



No guarantee, but...



The Ocean Pact that became an Ocean Act

Stockholm University Baltic Sea Centre < News

The European Commission has launched its EU Ocean Pact after a long period of preparatory discussions. The Ocean Pact was launched in conjunction with the UN Ocean Conference currently taking place in Nice, France, and the communication states that an 'Ocean Act' will be proposed by 2027.

The **European Commission** announced a **European Ocean Act by 2027.**

Still unclear... But a **legally-binding initiative** and will help ensure that the Ocean remains high on the European Agenda for at least 2 years.

The *Path* Beyond the *Pact*

So, is the European Ocean Pact really the solution to Europe's long-standing need for science-based and coherent ocean policies?

... Potentially.

If, *at minima*:

- It brings forward a **true blue economy revolution**, where all sectoral policies are aligned along the same, science-based, objectives and principles.
- It truly puts “**Neptune Before Mars**” – including **funding-wise**.
- It strengthens **Europe's leadership in global ocean action**, and ensure policy coherence with the **EU's international commitments**.



The *Path* Beyond the *Pact*



The Ocean Pact, despite its ambition, still presents a rather siloed perspective.

🚢 On the **blue economy**, many strategies are announced, but **none that would ensure that all these are coherent** and guided by the same science-based objectives.

🔬 Likewise, the **Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy** is promising, and 1/3 of the announced € 1 billion EU commitment will go to science and innovation. But **that is not nearly enough**, and the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework does not provide further guarantee.

The Ocean Act – less pillars, more layers

On the other hand, the Ocean Act holds great potential.

 It could be to the Ocean Pact what the European Climate Law was to the Green Deal. It could write into law clear interim and ultimate objectives.

 It can start thinking in layers rather than pillars and address the **disconnect between the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive** (the “economic pillar” of EU ocean policies) and the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** (the “environmental pillar”).

 It can establish **a robust monitoring and compliance mechanisms** to avoid missing even more deadlines.

 It can reinforce and streamline **the four key principles defended by the Pact**: a source-to-sea approach on tackling pollution; a precautionary principle; a science-based approach to policy decisions; and an ecosystems-based approach.

What can be done?

EU Council Conclusions and EU Parliament Resolution: Now is the time to provide input to your MEPs or national authorities, as they prepare their response to the Ocean Pact.

Consultations: Given all the strategies and legislative revisions announced, many public consultations, events and debates on a variety of topics are expected, both thematic and regional.

Implementation Tracking: An Ocean Board will be created, as well as an “EU Ocean Pact Dashboard” to monitor and report progress on the Pact’s relevant indicators and targets and feed into a regular State of the Ocean Report. **This will provide space for contributions and scrutiny.**



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Thank you!

