
Ocean Solutions for a Bright Blue Future: Restoration stories from ocean protectors

20 March 2023 | 18:00 - 19:30 | European Parliament, Brussels



From left to right: MEP Chabaud, Beth Thoren, MEP Carvalhais, Raquel Gaspar, Nikki Spil, Christian Decugis, Vera Coelho, MEP Roose

As the most important nature conservation legislation of the last 30 years, the Nature Restoration Law provides a unique opportunity to change the path of our impacts on marine ecosystems. On 20 March 2023, the Ocean Solutions for a Bright Blue Future film screening and panel discussion brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to provide direct experiences of ocean restoration, showcasing how business, science, and nature can unite. These first-hand stories, particularly that of Ocean Alive and Raquel Gaspar, show the importance of educating and empowering young women to join in the effort, which in turn offered Brussels-based politicians a more direct link to the Nature Restoration Law. In a rare, cross-party co-hosting venture, the hosting MEPs and panelists, all driven by their love of the ocean, discussed the urgent need for an ambitious regulatory framework that protects our marine environments.

Speakers

- **Isabel Carvalhais**, Member of the European Parliament (S&D, Portugal)
- **Caroline Roose**, Member of the European Parliament (Greens/EFA, France)
- **Catherine Chabaud**, Member of the European Parliament (Renew, France)
- **Beth Thoren**, Patagonia EMEA Environmental Director
- **Christian Decugis**, President, Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), France
- **Nikki Spil**, Chief farmer, The Seaweed Farmers, Netherlands
- **Raquel Gaspar**, Co-founder and CEO, Ocean Alive, Portugal
- **Vera Coelho**, Senior Director of Advocacy, Oceana in Europe

Opening statements

MEP Isabel Carvalhais (S&D, Portugal)

- MEP Carvalhais welcomed all speakers and attendees. She first reiterated the importance of the Nature Restoration Law (NRL), arguing it is a point of change, with new environmental objectives that will need to be accompanied by binding measures, and advocated for more ambitious yet achievable targets for nature preservation and conservation.
- The NRL does not put European food security or the livelihoods of fishers at risk. Instead, it promotes restoration to secure their existence and autonomy. We need to better communicate to the fishing industry the opportunity the NRL brings for their subsistence and encourage practices such as more selective fishing methods.
- Science must be taken into account and respected at all times. The recent UN's report on the climate crisis shows that the window for action is very small. Preserving the ocean is an ethical imperative that involves everyone, especially the new generations.

Beth Thoren, Patagonia

- There is a growing movement of responsible businesses that are standing up for nature. These businesses are expressing that they want to be part of the solution, but they need to learn how to use their voices. Patagonia is one of them, and it has numerous commitments to the environment: the company's purpose is to stay in business to protect the planet.
- Patagonia and its people are passionate about the sea and created this ocean protection campaign to tell the untold stories of those actively protecting and restoring it. People are often unaware that marine ecosystems such as seaweed meadows absorb a large quantity of CO₂ or that 7% of fishing in the Netherlands come from vessels that employ less than 1% of people.
- The ocean has a massive impact on human lives across the world as 680 million people depend on coastal economies. Therefore, it needs to be protected.



From left to right: MEP Chabaud, Beth Thoren, MEP Carvalhais, Raquel Gaspar

Short film screening

Film 1: Guardians of the Sea (Portugal, Sado Estuary)

Raquel Gaspar is a marine biologist, whose love of the ocean led her to collaborate with local fisherwomen in the Sado estuary in Portugal, an area is under severe threat from overfishing and pollution. Together, they are restoring the seagrass meadows as nursery grounds for key species, improving water quality, ocean acidification, drawing down carbon and improving fish stocks.

Film 2: Car y Mor, For the Love of the Sea (Wales & Netherlands)

The Seaweed Farmers is a Dutch company that grows and harvests seaweed in Car y Mor, Wales, via 3D ocean farming. This technique supports a polyculture of shellfish and seaweed, which in turn, helps filter and clean sea water, drawdown carbon and provides a haven for fish, birds and other wildlife. The harvested seaweed has many uses from organic fertiliser to bioplastics, showing its unique value as part of a regenerative, ocean-based economy.

Vera Coelho, Oceana

- The NRL could be a game-changer as it is our biggest opportunity to reverse all the damage done to the largest ecosystem on Earth. A strong NRL is needed to deliver solutions to an ocean in trouble.
- While a lot of Marine Protected Areas were created, marine biodiversity continues to decline due to the direct overexploitation of marine resources. Fisheries, while not the sole reason, are a large factor in this exploitation, particularly because of the destructive methods of fishing used. But there are things that can be done since fisheries are an exclusive competence of the European Union.
- But despite the EU having legislation in place, such as the Common Fisheries Plan (CFP), industrial fishing interests often trump environmental efforts. The CFP is not able to ensure timely protection from destructive fishing practices as member states are not using the tools provided by the plan at an acceptable speed. The implementation of radical change is needed to prevent catastrophic events, but the NRL will fail marine ecosystems unless it addresses fisheries adequately.
- There are three ways that can ensure the NRL does not fail the ocean:
 - Adopting strict deadlines for Joint Recommendations in the Nature Restoration Law.
 - Using passive restoration by default, which would allow nature to recover on its own without intervention.
 - Protect restored areas by ensuring that 10% of EU waters are strictly restricted.
- Restoring nature really does pay off. For food security to be guaranteed, we need to restore nature.
- For access to Vera's PowerPoint click [here](#).

Panel discussion



From left to right: Nikki Spill, Christian Decugis, Vera Coelho, MEP Roose

MEP Caroline Roose, (Greens/EFA, France)

- MEP Roose recalled that in 2020 the European Court of Auditors sounded the alarm on the dire states of EU marine ecosystems and that the EU had so far [failed to halt marine biodiversity loss](#) in Europe's waters and restore Oceans.
- As an introduction to the panel discussion, MEP Roose highlighted the need to help the oceans to regenerate without marine biodiversity there will be no fishing nor fishers. As such, a "binding" legislation with concrete deadlines and objectives to manage the effects of climate change is urgently required.
- The political discussions are difficult, particularly in the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH), because those who are 'defending' food sovereignty do not understand the urgency of this issue. If we miss this opportunity, it would be too late.

Raquel Gaspar, Ocean Alive

- Posidonia Oceanica is the only seagrass currently protected in the Natura 2000 regulation. Therefore, the NRL provides a great opportunity to include other species that are as important and play the same role in maintaining biodiversity in a good state. Passive restoration for our habitats is extremely important. In the case of Portugal and her initiative, it is difficult because the seagrass meadows they are trying to protect are not contemplated in Natura 2000.
- The Keepers of the Sea, women of the Sado river's fishing community who work with Ocean Alive to protect seagrass meadows, are on a mission to change people's perception of the ocean, and to show them there is a new way of living. They are also marine educators, who map and collect scientific evidence.
- There needs to be unity between communities, politicians, and scientists for progress.

Nikki Spil, The Seaweed Farmers

- The Seaweed Farmers is creating a new model for an otherwise destroyed marine business (collapsed fisheries) and aims to keep the fishing legacy and coastal communities alive. Seaweed provides a habitat for other species, which ultimately creates a more resilient ecosystem.

- The Seaweed Farmers – and the site of Car y Mor – also provides education and an economic resource for fishers, while preserving their small-scale fishing traditions and business models.
- While seaweed crops are growing in the best ecosystem needed, rising temperatures, acidification of water, and other industrial impacts on water can affect their farm. As an SME, there is a need for innovation and education as well as a desire to re-invent professions, and legislation sometimes makes it hard to undertake these initiatives, but people must be willing to do so.

Christian Decugis, LIFE

- Mr Decugis shared his experience as a small-scale fisher in a protected area of 450 hectares near Cap Roux, France: protecting this area was an initiative of local fishers to preserve their jobs and their future. The area is closed to all extraction and trawling because the reserve is *"like our garden, we do not want to pillage it. We must manage it instead."* The benefits of restoration are already visible: there are more and bigger fish. It helped repopulate stocks in adjacent areas at a quick pace. Similarly, this initiative helped improve the reputation of fishers.
- Climate change has a large impact on fisheries and particularly on small-scale fishers. Though fishers live to adapt, they face many hardships including not being able to follow fish migration patterns as they have to stay in their areas. In fact, fishers are the first to recognize the changes in the environment. Restoration processes cannot leave them aside. These restoration efforts cannot come at the detriment of fishers, there must be a preservation of marine ecosystem as well as natural capital.
- As a result of pressures exerted by NGOs, the Bluefin Tuna was recovered to levels higher than in 1970, which proves that restoration is possible. However, to do so we must give nature time to restore.

Vera Coelho, Oceana

- Courage is needed to reverse the harm we have caused. We must use the historic opportunity that the NRL presents to change the way we interact with nature.
- While some may seek to appease those arguing against the NRL or the need to restore marine ecosystems, we must remember that we will all suffer if we do not act. Time is the greatest gift we can give to the ocean, but we do not have the luxury of time. Restoration measures must take place now.
- We need to listen to different voices, including science and businesses.

MEP Catherine Chabaud (Renew, France)

- MEP Chabaud expressed her strong belief in the NRL and alluded to the need for a specific ocean restoration law.
- There is a strong connection between the sea and land, therefore all factors that make our oceans unable to capture CO₂ should be addressed.
- There is a collective responsibility to protect the ocean. We must work together to ensure no one is left behind in this transition, particularly fishers. We must work with fishers towards more sustainable practices.
- It is hard to hear the ocean's voice, so we must mobilize for it. Industry is also capable of mobilizing, and we will need their help to progress.



Ocean Solutions for a Bright Blue Future:

Restoration stories from ocean protectors

Short-film screening followed by a discussion
on the Nature Restoration Law

Speakers

Beth Thoren, Patagonia EMEA Environmental Director
Vera Coelho, Senior Director of Advocacy, Oceana in Europe
Christian Decugis, President, Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), France
Raquel Gaspar, Co-founder and CEO, Ocean Alive, Portugal
Nikki Spil, Chief farmer, The Seaweed Farmers, Netherlands

Supported by MEPs: Isabel Carvalhais, Caroline Roose and Catherine Chabaud

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Agenda

Opening remarks will be delivered by **Beth Thoren**, Patagonia EMEA Environmental Director and **MEP Isabel Carvalhais**.

The film screening will be followed by a panel discussion, moderated by **MEP Caroline Roose**, featuring:

Vera Coelho, Senior Director of Advocacy, Oceana in Europe

Christian Decugis, President, Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), France

Raquel Gaspar, Co-founder and CEO, Ocean Alive, Portugal

Nikki Spil, Chief farmer, The Seaweed Farmers, Netherlands

MEP Catherine Chabaud will provide concluding comments.

The event will be followed by a cocktail reception.