

BLUE MANIFESTO

THE

ROADMAP

TO A

HEALTHY

OCEAN

IN 2030



We need a healthy ocean and abundant marine life to build a climate-proof future

Photo OceanImageBank/Liam McGuire



Time to add the “blue” to the EU’s green transition

The ocean, where life began some 4 billion years ago, is vital to the survival of all life on Earth. It provides half the oxygen on Earth, stabilises our climate, and supports all of the life on our planet. It contributes to food security, delivers renewable energy, connects countries and continents, supports a wide array of blue businesses, and is a source of well-being and happiness.

The EU boasts the world’s largest maritime territory with almost half its population living within 50 kilometres of a coastline. In past decades, the EU has adopted a succession of strategies and action plans to protect its seas and ensure the well-being of coastal communities. Yet, while well intended, a lack of policy coherence, poor implementation and fragmented governance have hampered progress. The European Green Deal’s goal to secure a climate-neutral EU by 2050 is commendable, as well as its commitment to leave no one behind, do no harm, and reduce pollution to zero. However, these ambitious yet achievable objectives are only partially addressed in the EU’s existing blue policies.

Imagine a world where the ocean teems with life, marine ecosystems flourish, and where coastal communities thrive in harmony with nature. This vision is not just a dream; it’s an achievable reality, and the Blue Manifesto is our urgent call to action to make it happen. Civil society organisations across Europe have united to provide EU decision- and policy-makers with a clear roadmap to a healthy and resilient ocean by 2030, and to a more sustainable and equitable future for generations to come.



Photo Valentina Muñoz-Farías



Europe's seas are at tipping point

Against this backdrop, the relentless pursuit of “blue growth” is pushing European seas to the brink. Member States missed 2020 targets to achieve a good environmental status for Europe's seas, especially in terms of contaminants, eutrophication, invasive alien species, commercial fishing, and marine litter, paving the way for ocean health to deteriorate further. Over 90% of Europe's marine area is over-exploited as a result of intensive fishing, shipping, oil and gas drilling, tourism and other coastal activities, while emerging activities like the large-scale rollout of offshore wind energy add to these multiple pressures.¹ Destructive practices such as bottom trawling continue in 90% of EU offshore marine “protected” areas, and more than 14 million tonnes of plastic still enter the ocean each year.

Climate change is also hitting the ocean hard and fast. Sudden and steep rises in ocean temperature observed in recent years are accelerating de-oxygenation and acidification, which in turn devastate marine biodiversity.

We need to reverse the decline of ocean health to protect marine life, public health, and livelihoods for generations to come.²



Photo OCEANA/Carlos Minguell

THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF BLUE GROWTH IS PUSHING EUROPEAN SEAS TO THE BRINK

A three-point plan to turn the tide by 2030

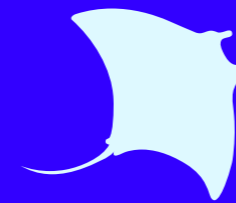
The current policy landscape cannot bring about change at the scale and pace needed. Some EU policies are no longer fit for purpose, others need an urgent injection of funds and political will, and emerging challenges demand new measures. To protect and restore the ocean and its marine life, policy coherence must be strengthened and the transition to a socially just and low-impact blue economy accelerated.

We propose a three-point rescue plan and a step-by-step roadmap of EU policy action:

1 Adopt an overarching and ambitious EU Ocean Deal to make sure all policies and legislation that impact the ocean are working in harmony with one another. The Ocean Deal would create a framework to integrate existing and new legislation, guaranteeing that all ocean-related policies are fit for preserving and restoring the ocean and coastal communities. The Ocean Deal should improve compliance with and enforcement of environmental rules at national and international levels, promote transparency in ocean-related activities, and integrate strong reporting and access to justice provisions.

2 Turn ambition to action with an EU Ocean Fund dedicated to the long-term restoration and conservation of the marine environment, and to the just transition to a sustainable, low-impact blue economy for the benefit of all. Subsidies that are harmful to the marine environment should be eliminated as soon as possible and no later than 2027, both at the EU and Member State levels. Taxpayers' money should be invested in delivering the objectives of the Ocean Deal; the revision of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in 2027 will be an opportunity to do so, as well as a chance to increase the level of funding dedicated to the ocean overall.

3 Put the ocean at the heart of EU decision-making, ensuring coherence between different policies and initiatives that impact the ocean. European Parliament Committees responsible for policies impacting the Ocean Deal and Fund (e.g. Environment, Fisheries, Transport and Tourism, Industry and Energy, and Budget Committees) should hold regular joint sessions to ensure coherence among sectoral policies related to the ocean, including climate and marine protection. A crosscutting Ocean Commissioner should be appointed in the new European Commission, and joint Council meetings of Environment, Energy, Fisheries and Transport ministers should be held within each Council Presidency to make progress on the implementation of the Ocean Deal.



1) *Multiple pressures and their combined effects in Europe's seas*, European Environment Agency, Briefing no. 18/2020.

2) *European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA)*, European Environment Agency, Briefing no. 1/2024.

20
25

20
26

20
27

20
28

The step-by-step roadmap to a healthy ocean

The Ocean Deal must serve as the overarching framework for the many policy initiatives that need to be rolled out in coming years, outlined in this Blue Manifesto. Under this umbrella, current ocean-related policies will need to be revised and new policies adopted to ensure robust protection and effective restoration of marine biodiversity by 2030.

We propose the following timeline for achieving these objectives.

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

The European Commission publishes an "Ocean Deal" communication, outlining a policy roadmap to achieve healthy, clean and resilient marine ecosystems by 2030. This plan ensures a coherent and balanced framework for reaching the EU's climate, zero pollution, and biodiversity goals, while also guaranteeing a just and socially fair transition.

- The **European Commission** establishes an **Ocean Commissioner**.
- Each Presidency of the **Council of the EU** holds a **joint ocean meeting** attended by Environment, Climate, Energy, Fisheries and Transport ministries, with stakeholder representation at all meetings.
- The **European Parliament** establishes a forum for **all matters related to maritime activities and marine ecosystems**, such as an inter-group or a gathering of MEPs from relevant Committees, including Fisheries, Environment, and Transport and Tourism.

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- From 2024 onwards, the Council of the EU establishes sustainable, **ecosystem-based and precautionary limits on fishing opportunities** in line with the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the best available scientific advice in an era of climate change.
- The European Commission advocates for an ambitious **Global Plastic Treaty** that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics, including single-use plastics, microplastics and fishing gear, as well as hazardous chemical additives and upstream measures focusing on plastic production and reduction.
- To tackle ocean pollution and finalise the work of the 2019-2024 mandate, the European Parliament and Council of the EU adopt the regulations on **preventing plastic pellets losses, Packaging and Packaging Waste, the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, and the revised list of surface and groundwater pollutants**.



Photo OceanImageBank/Fabrice Dudehofer

2025

2024

2026

2027

2028

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission establishes an **EU Ocean and Seas Agency** or a cooperation mechanism between Agencies and ocean-related monitoring systems that streamlines ocean data and knowledge collection, ensures open access, and issues regular reports on the environmental and climate status of the ocean.
- The European Commission presents **an action plan for a just transition to a well-being blue economy that respects ecological limits**, promotes sufficiency principles over pure economic growth, enables a transition towards low-impact and regenerative activities, supports sustainable livelihoods, fosters social justice, health and well-being, and supports workers and communities affected by the transition.
- From 2025 onwards, the European Commission **increases resources for compliance and enforcement units** to address potential marine-related legislation violations and enhances the **capacity of units dealing with international negotiations on the ocean**.
- The European Commission **strengthens the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)** by tightening the link with the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), establishing legally binding targets and thresholds, introducing criteria for a non-deterioration principle, reinforcing cross-border cooperation, enforcing nature restoration and marine protection measures as well as climate adaptation and resilience targets and measures, and ensuring strong enforcement provisions.
- At **UNOC 2025**, the European Commission pledges its commitment to the **Ocean Deal and Ocean Fund and confirms its strong engagement for international ocean governance**, including by presenting a plan for the rapid implementation of the BBNJ High Seas Treaty and a long-term vision for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.
- The European Commission proposes **new legislation on ocean resilience and coastal adaptation** emphasising nature-based solutions for better preparedness for climate-related challenges and including an EU-wide and evidence-based **monitoring system on carbon sequestration in marine ecosystems** (“blue carbon”). For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission **adopts a proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-2034** that transforms the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund into a much more substantial **Ocean Fund**, removes environmentally harmful subsidies, earmarks funding for the ocean in other related budget programmes, and ensures sufficient funding for related EU Agencies such as the Ocean Agency, European Environment Agency and European Fisheries Control Agency. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission proposes **new legislation to restrict the import and trade of aquatic food products** that cause harm to endangered species and bycatch of sensitive species. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission proposes **new legislation with binding 2030 targets for the effective management of at least 30% of EU seas**, including at least 10% under strict protection, with a clear definition of “effective” (e.g. banning harmful activities) and “strict protection”. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission proposes **new legislation to ban destructive activities in all EU Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** including, but not limited to, bottom trawling. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- In line with the **EU Deep Sea Access Regulation**, the European Commission adopts a delegated act to include seamounts in the list of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) and a revised Implementing Regulation to protect deep sea VMEs in EU waters between 400m and 800m depth.
- The European Commission proposes a **revised Energy Taxation Directive** to phase out fuel tax exemption in fisheries and redirect funds to finance a just and fair transition in the fisheries sector. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.
- The European Commission adopts **delegated and implementing acts to strengthen the EU fisheries control system**, including digital traceability of all seafood products, engine power monitoring, and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) of vessels at high risk of violating EU fisheries rules.
- The European Commission **introduces a legislative framework for the traceability and labelling of all seafood products in the EU** to prevent sourcing from Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities and ensure environmentally and socially responsible practices. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

20
25

20
24

20
26

20
27

20
28

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission proposes a **revised Bathing Water Directive** with high standards for safe access and high environmental and health criteria, including additional parameters for monitoring water quality and obligations to address identified pollution at its source. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

- Taking an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, particularly in the context of climate change, the European Commission seeks scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) **for setting Total Allowable Catches (TACs) that guarantee food supply for thriving predator populations.**

- The European Commission ensures **full public transparency on the allocation of fisheries opportunities** either by publishing annual EU-level reports or by creating a new database with precise catch and effort data in a usable form per Member State.

- The European Commission proposes **a ban on deep-sea mining** in European seas and advocates for the adoption of a moratorium within the International Seabed Authority and other international ocean governance bodies.

- The European Commission assesses whether designation of **suitable and acceleration areas for offshore renewable energy and permitting regimes fully comply with REDIII requirements**, the Habitats and Birds Directives, the MSFD and other nature protection laws, and ensures that such projects are not developed within Natura 2000 sites or other MPAs and takes corrective actions when needed.

- The European Commission publishes an implementing act on auction design criteria for offshore renewable energy auctions under the **Net Zero Industry Act** requiring Member States **to introduce mandatory non-price criteria** on biodiversity, social aspects and circularity, and conduct annual assessments of those criteria.

- The European Commission proposes **a ban on all new offshore oil and gas exploration and extraction**, and a strategy to phase out offshore oil and gas drilling. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

- To reduce chemical pollution in our seas, the European Commission proposes **revisions to the REACH Regulation and Cosmetic Products Regulation** that accelerate the ban on harmful substances. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

- On the topic of bycatch of sensitive species and mobile bottom fishing in MPAs, the European Commission **oversees implementation of the Marine Action Plan**, taking emergency measures if Member States miss deadlines to adopt national measures or submit joint recommendations, **and initiating enforcement actions if environmental obligations are not met.**

- The European Commission sets guidelines for Member States to effectively implement threshold values for all descriptors of **Good Environmental Status under the MSFD** by 2030, including for example underwater noise pollution.

- **Instead of reopening the CFP Basic Regulation**, the European Commission revises the Multiannual Plans of Fisheries Management to include legally **binding measures for an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management**, strengthened provisions to safeguard fish populations, and clear and binding deadlines for the joint recommendation process.

- The European Commission **proposes legislation on unintentionally released microplastics in the environment**, notably from textiles, geotextiles, paints, tyres, detergents, construction materials and the shipping industry. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2027.

Photo João Rodrigues



Photo OCEANA/Juan Cuetos



20
26

20
27

20
28

20
24

20
25



SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- As requested by citizens in the **European Citizens Initiative**, the European Commission proposes legislation addressing the **international shark fin trade**.
- The European Commission enforces a **ban on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)** to prevent further ocean pollution under the REACH Regulation.
- The European Commission ensures marine geo-engineering technologies and practices are excluded from the Carbon Dioxide Removal Certification Framework and 2040 EU Climate Target, enforces **the moratorium on geo-engineering** under the Convention of Biological Diversity and supports efforts to regulate additional marine geo-engineering technologies under the London Convention and Protocol, **proposes a ban in European seas**, and refrains from funding research on marine geo-engineering.
- The European Commission **prohibits carbon storage in the water column and at the seabed**, halting Carbon Capture and Storage in sub-seabed geological formations until there is proof of no environmental harm.
- The European Commission adopts delegated acts establishing ecodesign requirements for textiles, furniture, tyres, and paints, including **a zero-emission target for microplastics**, in accordance with the **Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation**.
- To **reduce the risk of IUU fish entering the EU market**, the European Commission encourages swift implementation of the mandatory IT CATCH system, taking action against Member States that fail to implement the new requirements.
- The European Commission proposes a **revised Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Directive**, expanding the scope and introducing additional measures to reduce SUP production and consumption. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2028.
- To prevent profits from illegal fishing flowing back to the EU and allow more equitable access to marine resources, the European Commission **publicly discloses ownership of fishing vessels** by EU citizens, both within the EU and worldwide.
- The European Commission fully **monitors National Restoration Plan implementation** by Member States, evaluating effectiveness and **using its enforcement powers** to ensure the goals of the Nature Restoration Law will be achieved in time.
- As a continuation of its **Circular Economy Action Plan**, the European Commission proposes a **Sustainable Resource Management Directive** with binding science-based resource reduction targets for land- and sea-based sectors. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2028.

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission revises the **State aid rules for the fishery and aquaculture** sectors to align with the new Ocean Fund and to **remove all environmentally harmful subsidies**.
- The European Commission proposes a **revised MSPD that requires ecosystem-based planning** aligned with MSFD targets and thresholds, introduces nature-based climate adaptation and resilience measures, incorporates the EU's protection and restoration targets, ensures coherence with energy, climate, fisheries, sustainable finance and other relevant policies, promotes responsible multi-use, and strengthens the link with land-use planning and coastal management for effective adaptation to climate change. **For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2028.**



Photo João Rodrigues

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission includes sector-specific guidance on **seafood** under the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive**.
- The European Commission advocates for the inclusion of **underwater noise reduction** in an **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** Regulation.
- The European Commission proposes an ambitious **revision of the Fuel EU Maritime Regulation** to reduce ship CO2 emissions including via energy efficiency and wind propulsion measures, include black carbon emission factors, and require all ships listed under the EU MRV Maritime Regulation to use distillates or other cleaner fuels when operating in/near the Arctic. For adoption by the European Parliament and Council in 2029.
- The European Commission adopts new **Strategic Guidelines for the aquaculture sector**, setting clear guidelines for Member States **to reduce the amount of wild-caught fish used as feed** by diversifying the feed supply chain and shifting production to non-fed and low-trophic aquaculture.

20
28

20
24

20
25

20
26

20
27

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission proposes an **EU Strategy for a healthy ocean extending to 2040** that focuses on the regeneration of European seas while charting a path for the EU's implementation of the new SDGs.

SECTORAL POLICY ASKS

- The European Commission **introduces mandatory ship speed reduction measures** and rerouting away from critical habitats to reduce GHG emissions, underwater noise pollution, and ship strikes on marine life and sensitive species.
- To prevent **seafood** linked to human rights or environmental abuse circulating in the EU, the European Commission imposes robust due diligence requirements for seafood trade, and investigates – and where necessary, bans – **products linked to forced labour**.

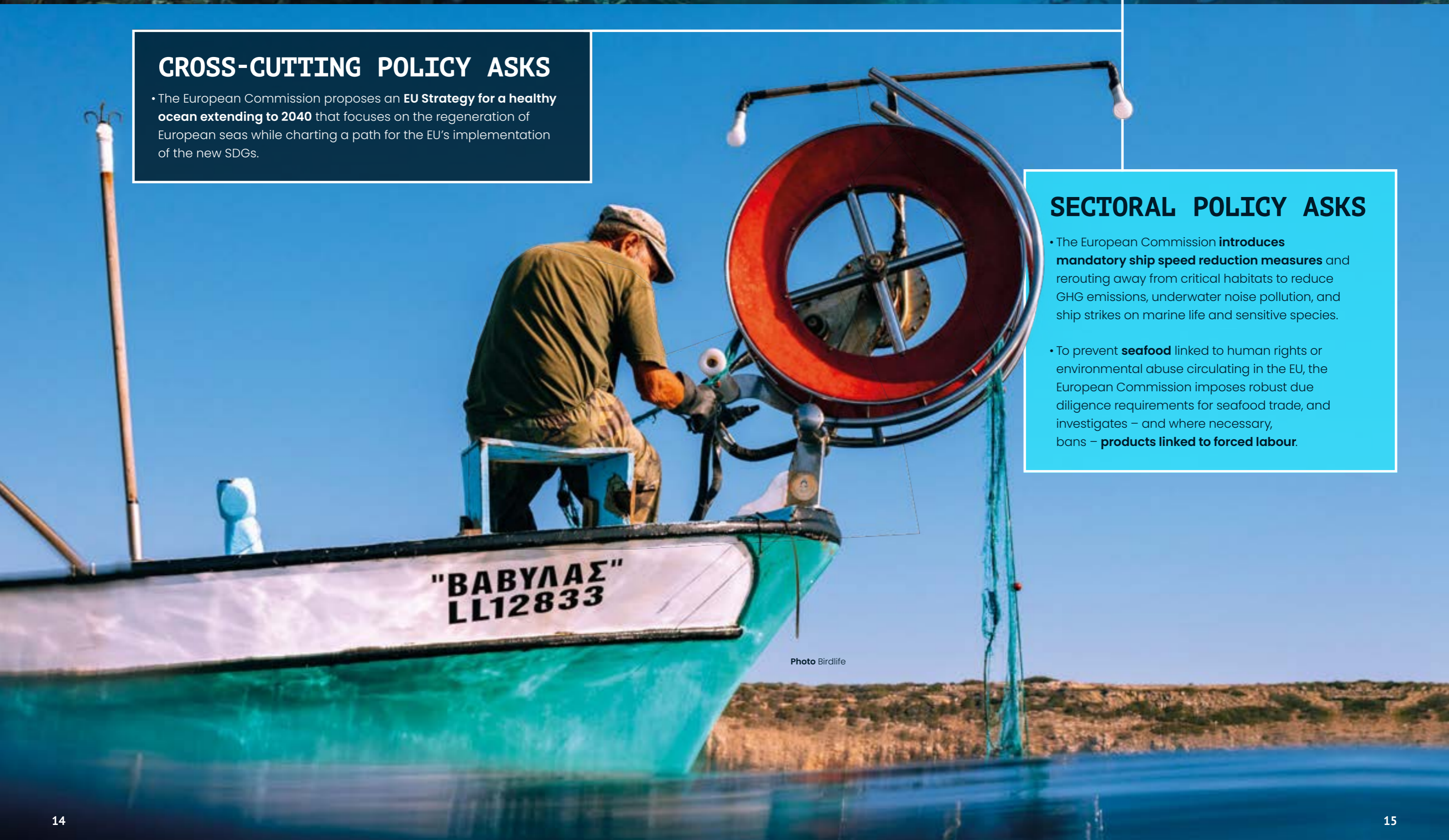


Photo Birdlife

A healthy ocean is an achievable reality

This vision for 2030 is not just wishful thinking. Our step-by-step roadmap is a pragmatic, well-researched and science-based plan to guide the EU in restoring marine life by ending overexploitation, destructive practices, and pollution.

2030

And we're not starting from zero; a wealth of ready-to-deploy solutions already exist. Across Europe, innovative initiatives by startups and local communities are making a difference, from wind-powered commercial vessels to nature-inclusive design for wind farms. Restoration initiatives are contributing to climate mitigation and flood protection. Regenerative cooperative farms for seaweed, mussels, and oysters are using farming methods that avoid fertilisers, pesticides and freshwater and help coastal communities thrive. Low-impact fishers are working with local NGOs, scientists, and administrations to co-manage fish resources, resulting in abundant fish populations, fairer prices and very short local supply chains. With EU support, examples like these can be rapidly upscaled.

Nature undeniably has intrinsic value in and of itself, and we are lucky that with the right policies in place, we can also benefit from a healthy ocean. By investing in a blue economy that is nature-positive and promotes social standards, the EU can restore marine life and biodiversity while creating quality employment that enables gender equality, social inclusion, and access to adequate wages.

THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

Europe has a unique opportunity to become an inspiring global leader by taking bold action to safeguard marine ecosystems.

The stakes are high, and with 2030 fast approaching, the coming years will be decisive if the EU institutions are to leave a positive legacy for generations to come.

The European Ocean Pact, as announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029, represents a promising first step in the right direction. It will be crucial to ensure that such a Pact aligns with the Ocean Deal vision and policy roadmap proposed in this Blue Manifesto.

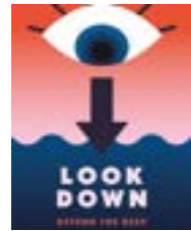
Public support is undeniably strong: a recent Eurobarometer poll shows that an overwhelming majority of EU citizens see climate change as a serious threat, and agree that tackling climate change should be a priority to improve public health.³

It is therefore up to these leaders to take the urgent actions needed to nurse the ocean back to health and ensure the prosperity and longevity of the communities they represent. With unwavering political commitment and robust implementation, we can achieve the change that the ocean, and all of us, need.

³) *Citizen support for climate action*, European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 538, Climate Change, 2023 survey.

Supported by





BLUE MANIFESTO



This work was made possible through the support of Oceans 5 and the European Union. Oceans 5 is a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders. Neither the European Union, nor Oceans 5, can be held responsible for them.

© Seas At Risk, September 2024.

Authors:
Seas At Risk, BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, ClientEarth,
Oceana, Surfrider Foundation Europe, WWF Europe.

Please reference as follows:
'Seas At Risk et al, (2024). Blue Manifesto: The roadmap to a healthy ocean in 2030.'

Brussels

Contact: secretariat@seas-at-risk.org

Design by **Hutch Agency**