



WWF's 10 point-plan for effective ocean governance through the Ocean Act

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Europe has consistently failed to reach its environmental commitments. Member States did not reach Good Environmental Status in our oceans by the deadline of 2020 and are far off track to meeting the deadline of 2030 for protecting 30% of the ocean. The Ocean Act can correct the course.

Turn commitments into action to ensure a level-playing field across Europe

1. Enshrine effective protection of **at least 30% of EU's seas into law**, with at least 10% under strict protection including the **phase-out of destructive activities** in marine protected areas (MPA)
2. Establish **preferential access zones for small-scale, low-impact fishing** in coastal zones 12nm from EU shores
3. Make Member States' pledges to ramp up **offshore renewable energy** binding
4. **End overfishing and set fishing quota** above BMSY (biomass for the maximum sustainable yield) to rebuild fish stocks and ensure the sustainability of EU fisheries
5. Ensure the fulfilment of the objective to achieve **good environmental status (GES)** in all European seas by 2034 (at the end of the reporting cycle in 2034 aligned with quantifiable limits for each descriptor of GES per sea basin)

Protecting marine ecosystems safeguards the natural assets that underpin Europe's economy, food supply and coastal livelihoods. These measures support sustainable fisheries, strengthen energy security and provide certainty for businesses. By managing marine resources responsibly, Europe can secure long-term prosperity and opportunity for future generations.

Moreover, as the region with the world's largest maritime territories, Europe has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead by example in global ocean governance. The ocean is also central to the EU's geopolitical influence. Europe should therefore use the tools at its disposal, including **mirror measures and import controls**, to ensure that products linked to destructive activities such as fossil fuel extraction or destructive fishing, particularly in MPAs outside Europe, do not enter the European market. This would help create a level playing field while strengthening the competitiveness of Europe's sustainable industries.

Current ocean governance frameworks have not succeeded in putting in place planning systems that work for sea users and the environment. The Ocean Act can set this right by putting social and environmental concerns at the heart of ocean governance.



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Reinforce maritime spatial planning with proper ecosystem consideration

1. Mandate **Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) with ecosystem sensitivity mapping** as part of Maritime Spatial Plans. Fuller analysis that includes new data gathering earlier on can accelerate maritime spatial planning decisions, ensuring that more information is available on the state and sensitivity of marine ecosystems
2. Ensure any activity that may **individually or cumulatively** have a significant impact on the environment undergoes an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), including fishery activities. The Commission should clarify through the Ocean Act that cumulative impacts are understood within the criteria of the [EIA Directive](#).
3. Include a new, legally binding definition of the **ecosystems-based approach**, that ensures that no activity is planned at sea without full information on the potential impacts on marine ecosystems.

The full EBA definition (to be set out in an annex to the Ocean Act) should at least reflect [WWF's indicators](#) which was developed through broad stakeholder consultations

4. Conduct impact assessments for activities within MPAs **before** they are permitted, not after, and ensure that cumulative impacts are taken into account
5. **Simplify and accelerate the provisions needed to establish fisheries management** measures to support marine conservation (in connection to Article 11 of the CFP). The Commission must put time limits on the procedures and integrate tacit agreement from concerned Member States

A stronger ecosystem-based approach (EBA) to maritime planning can deliver socio-economic benefits by reducing conflicts between marine industries, providing greater certainty for investors and helping to avoid delays or legal challenges. EBA must be implemented by ensuring developments are planned in the right places while ensuring the caring capacity of the sea is preserved. This in turn will strengthen coastal economies, support sustainable fisheries and safeguard the natural resources on which businesses and communities depend.

The upcoming Ocean Act is a golden opportunity to set strong ocean governance for decades to come. Through legal clarity on environmental targets and reinforcing maritime spatial planning, the European Commission can establish itself as a global leader in ocean governance and safeguard ocean health for future generations.

For more information

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