



EUROPEAN BLUE FORUM

Workshop 1:

What do we need from European Seas by 2030?

Are we asking too much?

GET STARTED

The ocean is fundamental to all life on earth and plays an essential role in our daily lives.

It covers 70% of the planet, produces 50% of the oxygen and is critical to the global climate system, absorbing and redistributing CO2 and heat. It is home to a wide variety of biodiversity and unique ecosystems which support human life and socio-economic activities with food, medicines, renewable energy, transport, tourism, and communications. The ocean is at the heart of human well-being, beliefs, and cultural values, and its beauty has inspired artists for centuries. And we have still to discover all it has to offer.

Encompassing all sectors and activities related to oceans, seas, and coasts, the blue economy is becoming a central concept for all coastal states. Under this “Blue Wave”, initiatives and developments at sea are being driven forward and encouraged all over Europe. However, in some cases, this continuous development has already led to overexploitation, unsustainable practices, and overcrowded spaces. New tensions have emerged between uses of the sea competing for space.

While economic activities have long been concentrated on coastlines, their increasing development further offshore could be a significant game changer, opening up new areas of sea space for potential economic development. This multiplication of activities and their cumulative impacts could be highly damaging to the marine environment if not well managed and monitored.



**Provides every second
breath we take**



**Hosts 80%
of all biodiversity**



**Only 20% of
the seabed mapped**



**Supports 80% of
goods transport**



**€670 billion in
turnover in the EU**



**200 million EU citizens live
in coastal regions/islands**



**4,5 million people
employed in the
EU Blue Economy**

Is everything Blue sustainable?

Is the debate on sustainable blue economy actually about degrowth?

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These challenges are accentuated by multiple ongoing crises. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, resulting in the ongoing energy crisis and has inevitably impacted the European blue economy sectors, pushing EU Member States to urgently seek solutions for their energy needs. In addition, the biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse characterized by the decline in wildlife populations is one of this decade's biggest threats, further worsened by climate change.

The rate of the ocean warming has doubled since 1998, associated with increased acidification and a reduction in oxygen, which are major threats for marine biodiversity. The average global sea level is rising, with acceleration in recent decades, exacerbating coastal erosion, and jeopardising socio-economic sectors and increasingly populated coastal communities. These impacts, predicted for decades by scientists, are now observed with, for instance, new annual records for temperature frequently exceeded and the acceleration of weather-related extreme events (heat waves, downpours, floods, etc.). Climate change is inevitably accelerating and so must our actions, as everything we know about the ocean is about to change.



2030 has been set as a milestone by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Green Deal, to address these multiple challenges. Accordingly, we have strengthened our commitments for biodiversity protection, low-impact food systems and targets in terms of energy transition. **We now have set ambitious goals that require radical change and the uptake of strong measures in order to tackle the crises we are all facing.**

To meet these objectives, EU seas need to accommodate five times more renewable energy by 2030 and 25 times more by 2050. The European demand for seaweed, for food and feed products, pharmaceuticals, bio-based packaging, and cosmetics, is estimated to increase by 30 times, reaching eight million tons by 2030. Protection of marine space needs to increase from 12,1% in 2021 to 30% by 2030. All these sectoral commitments can only be fulfilled by using more space, and using our available space smarter, not only at sea but also on the coast. On top of this, we as humans expect our oceans and coastal spaces to be protected as places of well-being and beauty, with nothing but a blue horizon. Considering these objectives, goals and the challenges related to food and energy security, is making space for our wellbeing and "blue health" a priority?

2030

Acknowledging both the limits of the marine and coastal ecosystems and the need for nature protection, can human activities continue developing at sea? To protect our seas, we need to think differently, and change the way we do things.

Are we asking **too much** of our seas?



Restore at least 20%
of EU land and seas



30% marine protected areas
and 10% strictly protected



60GW of offshore wind
and 1GW of ocean energy




The maritime community is already mobilized in designing social and technical solutions, such as alternative propulsion towards zero emission vessels, the recycling of fishing nets to create new fashion items and the production of innovative biodegradable materials derived from algae to replace plastic. Innovative approaches are being developed such as the multi-use of sea space, combining offshore wind with nature protection or mussel/seaweed farming, to create synergies between uses.

New sectors and initiatives are emerging, designing pathways towards a more sustainable future, requiring new skills and knowledge. At the same time, existing sectors need to further adapt to the environmental, social, and economic changes ahead with new equipment, competences and practices. This evolution needs to be supported by suitable training and education, developing ocean literacy, but also with the necessary financial support.

However, the solution will not be the same for all sectors and stakeholders. It needs to be **holistic** (considering the complexity of marine environment as a whole), **integrated** (between all sectors and activities) and **multidisciplinary** (bringing together all lessons learnt). It is about making sure we support a fair and equitable transition for all.

Are we doing enough?



To achieve successful implementation, these solutions should be deployed alongside continuous dialogue and through a trust-based bottom-up approach. Stakeholders need to be involved in the decision-making process from the outset. Bringing local stakeholders into the discussion enables us to highlight existing and novel solutions, so the actions we take can deliver the greatest impact, based on local knowledge.

People need to have an active role in creating the changes they want to see, and they need guidance and support to do so. Within the European Blue Forum, we need to work together across all scales and sectors as one maritime community, to shape the seas we want for tomorrow and to build the legacy we will leave to future generations. How? By empowering individuals and creating a collective ownership of the sea to engage all sea users, not only sectoral representatives but also European citizens.

Achieving cooperative and effective collaboration would require all parties to reach a shared vision, with guiding principles from the outset, and to be genuinely invested in mutual success. Nevertheless, is avoiding tensions at sea really achievable? These tensions certainly need to be acknowledged and understood to identify trade-offs within sectors and between existing alternatives.

How do we make sure we have the right information to address these challenges?

Sharing of knowledge and the use of science as a basis for consensus are of vital importance and a fundamental objective of the European Blue Forum. To take decisions, we need good observations of what is happening in the ocean and how things evolve, both in time and space, to provide common knowledge and feed models to anticipate upcoming changes. Initiatives such as the Digital twin of the ocean might allow us to understand what “butterfly effect” our actions may have. Debates should be based on independent and multidisciplinary science, but cooperation with industry on data and expertise sharing is also key to build a common understanding of our seas.

Is this possible?

This is what we will be discussing on the 25th of September in our first “deep-dive” workshop of the European Blue Forum. We count on your active participation as blue economy stakeholder to enhance both the quality and relevance of the solutions we have to find together.



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