



Press information note - EU Ocean days - 3-7 March

EU Ocean Days 2025: Blue NGOs call for an ambitious Oceans Pact

What is happening?

Brussels - The second edition of EU Ocean Days organised by the European Commission will take place in Brussels from March 3rd - 7th, 2025, bringing together policy-makers, civil society and other stakeholders for a week of marine and maritime policy discussions and events.

The Brussels blue NGOs (Birdlife Europe & Central Asia, ClientEarth, Oceana Europe, Seas At Risk, Surfrider Foundation Europe, and the WWF European Policy Office) are calling on the European Commission to deliver an ambitious Oceans Pact that prioritises ocean health, across all ocean-related policies - including land policies with impacts on the ocean - that also supports coastal communities.

To provide the EU with clear direction and concrete proposals for its Ocean Pact, the Blue NGOs published the Blue Manifesto: Roadmap to a Healthy Ocean by 2030. This science-based roadmap includes a set of concrete policy targets for the European institutions during this mandate and is endorsed by 140+ organisations.

Why does this matter?

Europe's seas are at a tipping point and the relentless pursuit of blue growth is pushing our seas to the brink. At a time when the world faces interconnected climate, nature-loss and pollution crises, the ocean's role has never been more critical, including:

- Stabilising our climate
- Providing half the oxygen on Earth

- Being a critical source of nutrition
- Delivering renewable energy
- Supporting coastal economies and communities.

The proposed *European Ocean Pact*, as announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, represents a significant opportunity to halt pollution, reverse biodiversity loss, address climate change and increase the resilience of the ocean and that of coastal communities.

A thriving blue economy depends upon healthy marine ecosystems. Without fish, there are no fishers, without clean and healthy waters, there is no blue tourism. In a context of increasing insecurity, marine health is therefore an essential contributor to economic resilience and political stability. The Oceans Pact must recognise that there is no competitive economy in a polluted environment, amid nature crisis and climate chaos. Its core priority must be the achievement of healthy, clean and resilient marine ecosystems, and it must ensure that economic activities at sea do not come at the cost of nature's resilience.

What do the blue NGOs want?

The blue NGOs have identified 3 strategic priorities for an effective Ocean Pact:

1. Advancing Ocean Governance

The EU Oceans Pact must enhance compliance with existing maritime-related regulation across national, international and European levels, with a particular focus on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and Nature Restoration Regulation. Implementation, control and enforcement of existing regulations - rather than a revision - is crucial to the EU's transition to low-impact blue economy and a healthy ocean.

2. Legally binding targets and coherence

A comprehensive roadmap with clear timelines and legally binding targets must be developed to strengthen policy coherence across ocean sectors. Inconsistencies between environmental and sectoral policies must be addressed. This is vital to building a sustainable, low-impact blue

economy and ensuring long-term compliance, effectively protecting marine ecosystems and reducing marine pollution.

3. **Just transition**

Ensuring a Just Transition to a low-impact & regenerative blue economy, namely supported by an Ocean Fund and a comprehensive action plan that:

- respects ecological limits,
- promotes low-impact and regenerative activities,
- ensures sustainable livelihoods,
- and supports social justice, health, and well-being for coastal communities

The 53 policy proposals featured in the Blue Manifesto can represent a Blueprint for the European Oceans Pact, as only a healthy ocean can be the cornerstone upon which resilient and competitive economies can be built and the wellbeing of coastal communities guaranteed.

Quotes:

Seas At Risk:

Dr. Monica Verbeek said: *The EU Ocean Days offer a unique opportunity to bring the health of the ocean to key policy discussions. Our Blue Manifesto is an essential roadmap for policy makers to establish an Ocean Fund and comprehensive action plan that respects the planet while promoting regenerative activities. This isn't just about respecting the ocean, it's about ensuring sustainable livelihoods and social justice for coastal communities whose futures depend on a healthy ocean.*

Oceana:

Vera Coelho, Deputy Vice President for Oceana in Europe, said: *The Ocean Pact should be a tool to transform our relationship with the ocean. It needs to turn past commitments into action, for instance by implementing binding plans to protect 30% of the ocean and to end*

overfishing once and for all. It must support a transition to low-impact fisheries that respect livelihoods and ecological limits. The Ocean Pact also needs to address new challenges and strengthen EU competitiveness, for example by introducing transparency on the environmental and social standards of imported seafood. The Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues are an opportunity to discuss how we can prioritise both people's needs and ocean health.

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia: Cyrielle Goldberg, Marine Policy Officer

“Our blue economy - and the countless livelihoods that depend on it - can only thrive if our seas are healthy. The EU Oceans Pact is a historic opportunity to make this a reality. The laws we need are already in place, but what's missing is a clear sense of direction. The Pact must prioritize restoring and safeguarding marine ecosystems, not just managing their decline. The Nature Restoration Regulation is a powerful tool to get us there, enhancing coherence across environmental and sectoral policies while driving marine ecosystem recovery. Its implementation should lead the way, supported by a dedicated Ocean Fund to ensure restoration efforts are backed by the necessary resources while enabling a just transition for sectors that must adapt to more sustainable practices.”

Surfrider Foundation Europe: Gaëlle Haut, EU affairs Coordinator *“The EU Ocean Days offer a highly valuable chance for the Commission to integrate science- and community-based perspectives from youth, scientists, and environmental NGOs in the final drafting phase of the EU Oceans Pact. We firmly believe that the Pact's central and top priority must be to restore, maintain, and enhance ocean health. It should include ambitious measures such as the one we detailed in the Blue Manifesto to uphold the commitments made years ago—achieving good environmental status for our marine waters, eliminating pollution, boosting nature-based solutions in the face of climate change and transitioning to a sustainable blue economy. Failing to do so would keep our citizens, economy, and standards of life at serious risk and under existential threat.*

ClientEarth: John Condon, ClientEarth Marine Ecosystems Lead said:

"The Ocean Pact is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring our ocean back to life, protect and restore struggling fish stocks and ecosystems, and help coastal communities decarbonise - and thrive. What we need most is political ambition and commitment - strong laws are already in place, they

just need to be properly implemented and enforced so that protection on paper means protection in reality".

WWF European Policy Office: Jacob Amstrong, Oceans Policy Manager at WWF European Policy Office, said: *Europe's seas are in peril. The European Commission's recent assessment of its Marine Strategy Framework Directive—a policy designed to achieve good environmental status for European seas—reveals that pollution, climate change, and overexploitation are driving our oceans to the brink. The new European Oceans Pact offers a crucial opportunity to restore and protect EU waters. The Commission's first act should be to enshrine environmental limits into law—for example, by protecting 30% of EU seas.*

Available resources:

- [Blue Manifesto](#)
- [Blue NGO submission to Ocean Pact call for evidence](#)

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