



Brussels, 23.2.2018  
SWD(2018) 49 final

**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**on**  
**the mid-term review of the Atlantic action plan**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	2
1. Introduction .....	4
1.1. The Atlantic Ocean area today .....	5
1.2. The Atlantic action plan .....	6
2. Review of the action plan .....	8
2.1. Four years on: what has been achieved? .....	8
2.2. Achieving the objectives of the four priorities .....	8
2.2.1. Enabling smart growth in the Atlantic (in line with priority 1) .....	8
2.2.2. A cleaner and more predictable Atlantic (in line with priority 2) .....	13
2.2.3. A better connected Atlantic (in line with priority 3) .....	20
2.2.4. A socially inclusive Atlantic (in line with priority 4) .....	21
2.2.5. Bridging the Atlantic: the international dimension .....	23
3. How has the action plan worked? .....	26
3.1. Relevance of priorities and thematic content .....	26
3.2. Influencing policy developments and investment decisions .....	27
3.3. Bringing stakeholders together .....	28
3.4. Development of new project ideas .....	29
3.5. Governance and management structures supporting the action plan .....	30
3.6. The role of the assistance mechanism .....	30
4. Lessons learnt .....	31
4.1. Improving the architecture and coherence of the action plan .....	31
4.2. Developing a framework for monitoring and evaluating performance .....	31
4.3. Strengthening governance and better involving regions .....	31
4.4. Improving communication on the action plan .....	32
5. Conclusions .....	32
ANNEX I .....	33

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Atlantic action plan was adopted in 2013 in order to support the ‘blue economy’ of the EU Member States in the Atlantic Ocean area. It identified four priority areas to help generate sustainable growth in coastal regions and drive forward the blue economy, while preserving the environmental and ecological stability of the Atlantic. This mid-term review of the action plan is based on an **independent study** and **stakeholder consultation**, and takes stock of progress to date in its implementation. It highlights main achievements and weaknesses, and points out potential avenues for improving the action plan in future.

### Key achievements

With a track record of only four years since the action plan was launched, any assessment of its **impact** can only be **tentative**. Nevertheless, the independent study informing this review identified more than **1 200 projects** that can be attributed to implementation of the action plan across the Atlantic area. Altogether, these projects represent **investment** of nearly **EUR 6 billion, including funding from the EU, the European Investment Bank and national, regional and private sources**. In particular, the action plan contributed to the following main achievements across the four priority areas:

- *enabling smart growth in the Atlantic*

**About 500 projects** related to the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation in the Atlantic area, accounting for investment of around **EUR 750 million**, e.g. targeting broadband connectivity in remote areas of Scotland and supporting maritime spatial planning in Macaronesia;

- *cleaner and more predictable Atlantic*

**Around 500 projects** related to the protection, security and development of the environment in the Atlantic area. These represented investment of around **EUR 2.1 billion** and included projects aimed at marine renewable energy investment in France and the development of novel marine products with biotechnological applications in Portugal;

- *a better connected Atlantic*

**About 100 projects, worth EUR 2.4 billion**, were aimed at improving accessibility and connectivity. These mainly targeted port developments in Spain and Ireland;

- *a socially inclusive Atlantic*

**Around 100 projects** were aimed at socially inclusive regional development, with **EUR 360 million** of investment in tourism infrastructure in Wales and remote health monitoring in Ireland, for example.

In addition, the **stakeholder community** in the Atlantic Ocean area has arguably **grown stronger** and more competitive when it comes to obtaining funding for marine and maritime projects, particularly when one looks at the success rate of the regular grant schemes financed through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

Furthermore, the **international dimension** of the action plan has been **strengthened** due to the signing of the Galway statement in May 2013, which led to the creation of the EU-US-Canada Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance. As a result, a dedicated EUR 140 million budget from Horizon 2020 (the EU's framework programme for research and innovation) was invested across 15 marine projects, including an integrated Atlantic Ocean observing system.

### **Weaknesses**

Despite the above positive developments, the mid-term review has revealed some important weaknesses as regards **strategy design, implementation and governance** structure. In particular, these concern:

- the wide-ranging nature of the objectives of the action plan – this meant that it was not possible to influence concrete policy developments at national and regional level;
- the absence of a solid framework for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the action plan; and
- the informal and thus rather weak governance mechanism.

### **Lessons learnt**

With a view to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the action plan, the mid-term review puts forward a number of lessons learnt. These could serve as a basis for discussion on the way forward for maritime cooperation in the Atlantic sea-basin. The key points include:

- improving the architecture and **internal coherence** of the action plan;
- developing a framework for **monitoring and evaluating** performance;
- strengthening **governance** and better **involving the regions**; and
- further improving the **strategy** for **communication** on the action plan among funding authorities and investors.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Commission adopted an Atlantic maritime strategy<sup>1</sup> in 2011 in response to repeated calls from stakeholders for more ambitious, open and effective cooperation in the Atlantic Ocean area. The strategy sought identified the challenges and opportunities facing the region, grouping them under five thematic headings:

- implementing the ecosystem approach;
- reducing Europe's carbon footprint;
- sustainable exploration of the natural resources on the sea floor;
- responding to threats and emergencies; and
- socially inclusive growth.

Following bottom-up consultation in the five Member States with Atlantic coasts (Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal), an action plan was developed that set out practical steps to be taken in these areas. The Atlantic action plan<sup>2</sup> was adopted in May 2013.

The plan states that 'the Commission will closely monitor the implementation of the action plan, draw lessons learnt and assess progress made. It will prepare a mid-term review of the implementation of the action plan before the end of 2017. An independent evaluation of a sample of completed projects will feed into the review, which will be discussed with Member States and other stakeholders'. The evaluation took the form of a study<sup>3</sup> by an external consultant which was finalised in December 2017.

This staff working document takes stock of the implementation of the action plan on the basis of the above study, the results of a public consultation<sup>4</sup> between June and September 2017, and input from interested parties, including an opinion of the European Committee of the Regions<sup>5</sup> and a report on the Atlantic strategy published by the Réseau Transnational Atlantique / Atlantic Transnational Network (RTA-ATN).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [COM/2011/0782 final](#).

<sup>2</sup> [COM/2013/0279 final](#).

<sup>3</sup> EY, Study feeding into the mid-term review of the implementation of the Atlantic action plan, 2017, DG MARE; <https://publications.europa.eu/s/fwh7> (Executive summary); <https://publications.europa.eu/s/fwh8> (Final report)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-implementation-atlantic-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-implementation-atlantic-action-plan_en); see also Annex 1 to this review

<sup>5</sup> <http://webapi.cor.europa.eu/documentsanonymous/cor-2017-01995-00-00-ac-tra-en.docx>

<sup>6</sup> [www.rta-atn.eu](http://www.rta-atn.eu)

## 1.1. The Atlantic Ocean area today

The Atlantic area<sup>7</sup> supports a dynamic ‘blue economy’ generating gross value added<sup>8</sup> of about EUR 27 billion and over 800 000 jobs.<sup>9</sup> Maritime industries still represent a significant part of the economy in regions such as Brittany, Galicia and Cornwall, but the profile of local economies remains very diverse. Maritime employment retains economic significance for the UK, France, regions such as the Basque Country and the Algarve and cities such as Lisbon. The area is home to 10 cluster organisations that focus specifically on maritime technologies;<sup>10</sup> these are concentrated in Spain, France and Portugal, with relatively fewer in the UK. Major urban centres including Porto, Nantes, the Liverpool area, Bilbao and the region around it host a healthy ecosystem of research, development and innovation actors. The science and technology sector provides ample employment opportunities, employing around 14.5 % of the active population on average (around 11 million people across the Atlantic area in 2016).

The Atlantic area has abundant natural resources and many marine protected areas. The Atlantic provides an important source of food, pharma and feed. The preservation of these natural resources and the sustainability of their exploitation is crucial to ensure that the Atlantic can continue to contribute to feeding a growing population (expected to reach 9 billion people by 2050).<sup>11</sup> However, many coastal areas are also subject to intense environmental pressure, in particular around major ports. Intensive tourism (and as a consequence urbanisation) of coastal areas is another major economic resource and at the same time a threat for the environment. These areas are also affected by invasive species and pollution from farming and industrial activity. Marine litter<sup>12</sup> and contaminants pose problems for marine birds and mammals. Not least, climate change has introduced pressures on the Atlantic environment and on the economic dependencies from the Atlantic Ocean, for example through an increase in water temperature and storm water levels.

Tidal waters, waves and wind provide immense opportunities for the production of renewable energy. The area is the second biggest transnational area for wind power in Europe. The UK boasts the largest number of offshore wind parks. Its Atlantic capacity amounts to 1 993 MW

---

<sup>7</sup> The Atlantic area comprises 49 NUTS2 regions in the western and southern part of the UK, Ireland and Portugal, the northern and south-westernmost part of Spain and northern and western France. It also includes EU outermost regions in Macaronesia and Caribbean-Amaozonia.

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Gross\\_value\\_added](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Gross_value_added)

<sup>9</sup> 2014 ECORYS study on blue growth.

<sup>10</sup> Source: The European Cluster Observatory is a single access point for statistical information, analysis and mapping of clusters and cluster policy in Europe. More information and source data can be found at <http://www.clusterobservatory.eu>

<sup>11</sup> SAM HLG report on "Food from the Oceans" from 29 November 2017: <https://ec.europa.eu/research/sam/index.cfm?pg=oceanfood>

<sup>12</sup> Measures against marine litter are taken by EU Member States under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and through other EU policy instruments affecting generation or prevention of marine litter. At the same time an action plan on addressing marine litter is being implemented at regional level in the context of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR).

and accounts for around 17 % of all offshore turbines in Europe. While the amount of renewable power generated in the Atlantic is for now eclipsed by that generated in the North Sea, projections are very promising. France is expected to catch up, with some 3 GW bottom-fixed offshore wind projects already approved. Ireland will be next. In addition, progress on floating offshore wind technologies in the UK, France and Portugal is opening up new opportunities and markets. There is potential in almost all regions to promote other types of marine renewable energy, such as wave and tidal power, and thus create new jobs and foster innovation.

At policy level, national maritime strategies have increasingly been put in place to stimulate sustainable ‘blue growth’ and improve coordination. Ireland and Portugal developed tailored maritime strategies in 2012 and 2013 respectively, while France adopted a sea and coast strategy in 2017. In the UK, the vision for policy coordination is set out in maritime strategies for Scotland, Wales and Cornwall. The EU’s multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020 opened up a whole range of channels for the programming and funding of marine and maritime projects.

## **1.2. The Atlantic action plan**

Developed within the framework of the Atlantic strategy, the action plan was structured around four priorities and 10 specific objectives. It identifies a total of 37 actions under 20 headings that target activities and focus areas at project level. The plan was not intended to be exhaustive; rather, it sought to:

- draw attention to the challenges and opportunities for blue growth;
- trigger action at national level, but also collectively by Member States, coastal regions and stakeholders, that is structured around a set of agreed overarching priorities for research and investment, can help the blue economy thrive and generate ideas and direct funding for projects of mutual benefit. It was argued that addressing these priorities by 2020 could promote innovation, contribute to the protection and improvement of the Atlantic’s marine and coastal environment, improve connectivity and create synergies for a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development;
- encourage better alignment of national and EU funding sources, in particular the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) under shared management<sup>13</sup> with the Member States, including interregional, cross-border and transnational cooperation (Interreg) programmes,<sup>14</sup> and funds managed directly by the

---

<sup>13</sup> ERDF, ESF/YEI, EAFRD and EMFF.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of Interreg, see [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/)

Commission, such as the Horizon 2020 framework programme for research and innovation (H2020),<sup>15</sup> the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF),<sup>16</sup> the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), LIFE+ (the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action)<sup>17</sup> and the programme for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (COSME);<sup>18</sup>

- trigger private investment and business initiatives, not least by enabling complementary loan financing from the European Investment Bank (EIB);
- spur the development of new projects at national, regional and local levels; and
- catalyse intelligent collaboration between research networks, technology platforms and private investors on both sides of the Atlantic with a view to implementing the agreed priorities and actions.

The action plan was intended to serve as an overarching frame of reference for policymakers, maritime operators and investors in the Atlantic area. As such, it was meant to strengthen the fabric of Atlantic regions in policy, project and funding terms, and to bind together the vibrant stakeholder community that called for its development in the first place. It is against this background that the merits and the shortcomings of the plan are reviewed halfway to the end of its period of application in 2020.

To support the implementation of the plan and monitor its progress, a governance framework was agreed and a dedicated assistance mechanism was put in place in 2013. Representatives of the five Member States, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the European Parliament and the Commission meet regularly in the context of the Atlantic Strategy Group (ASG) to oversee implementation of the plan. The Atlantic Stakeholder Platform (ASP) organises an annual conference to provide a forum for networking and sharing information and good practices. The Atlantic assistance mechanism<sup>19</sup> is a dedicated tool to raise awareness of the plan, help project promoters find partners and access relevant information about funding opportunities, and track projects aligned with the Atlantic strategy and the plan. A network of national units in the five Member States ensures coordination on the ground and liaison with the relevant decision-makers, funding bodies and stakeholders.

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020>

<sup>16</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/emff\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/emff_en)

<sup>17</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/about/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme>

<sup>19</sup> Launched on 31.07.2014, Ref. MARE/2013/11 "Assistance mechanism for the Atlantic Action Plan" Contract nr.: SI2.686570.



## **2. REVIEW OF THE ACTION PLAN**

### **2.1. Four years on: what has been achieved?**

Because the action plan was launched only four years ago and most of the ESIF programmes, including Interreg, started later (so only a few calls for proposals have been published to date), the assessment of the impact of the action plan can be only tentative. Nevertheless, the study supporting this review identified over 1 200 unique projects that can be considered to support implementation of the plan across the Atlantic area. Together, these projects represent investments of an indicative total of nearly EUR 6 billion. They provide a useful overview and illustrate the diversity of action being taken across the region.

The stakeholder community has arguably grown stronger and more competitive in obtaining funding for marine and maritime endeavours. For instance, 8 of the 13 projects in the latest ‘blue calls’<sup>20</sup> funded in 2017 under the EMFF include Atlantic project promoters either as leaders or partners. The Atlantic assistance mechanism has played a role in this success by reaching out to over 4 300 stakeholders in the region through dedicated events and networking sessions (it has organised three annual stakeholder conferences, 11 national events covering all the Member States in question and 33 roadshows, and participated in over 180 other events). It has also provided guidance and support for project development (890 helpdesk queries, 178 project ideas, of which 22 were submitted for funding and 7 received funding from EU or national/regional funds).

The following sub-sections set out the main policy developments and specific projects that can be seen as supporting the four priorities of the action plan and its international dimension. These findings are largely based on the above study.

### **2.2. Achieving the objectives of the four priorities**

#### **2.2.1. Enabling smart growth in the Atlantic (in line with priority 1)**

##### *Projects contributing to the priority*

Of the 1 200+ projects identified as contributing to the action plan, over 500 related to the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation in the Atlantic area. These received total

---

<sup>20</sup> Altogether, over 130 project proposals were received for three calls:

- the ‘blue technology’ call (EUR 2 million) to help bring research results faster to the market (<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/news/three-new-blue-technology-projects-be-launched>);
- the ‘blue career’ call (EUR 3.45 million) supporting career opportunities in the maritime economy (<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/call-proposals-blue-careers-europe>); and
- the ‘blue labs’ call (EUR 1.7 million) helping young researchers to bring research results to the market (<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/news/european-commission-about-fund-10-new-blue-growth-projects>).

funding of around EUR 750 million. Priority 1 therefore accounted for over a third of the projects, but the average funding for each project was relatively small.

It is not possible to determine exact spending in the marine and maritime sectors, because many projects are implemented through intermediary bodies (national authorities, managing authorities, clusters, networks, etc.), so much of the investment channelled through general support instruments cannot be identified and attributed to the Atlantic area. Total investment can be expected to be significantly higher.

In terms of financial volume (total expenditure) and by way of example, important projects identified under priority 1 are:

- connectivity investments for rural maritime regions (EUR 49 million), supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)<sup>21</sup> to provide broadband connectivity in remote areas of Scotland;
- SEACAMS2 (EUR 18 million), supported by the ERDF to boost investment in renewable energy and sustainable resource sectors in Wales;
- Marine-I (EUR 10 million), supported by the ERDF to deliver business-led and market-driven research, development and innovation in marine technology in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly;<sup>22</sup>
- GENIALG (EUR 10.9 million), supported under H2020 to boost the sustainable production and exploitation of two high-yielding species of seaweed;
- SABANA (EUR 8.9 million), supported under H2020 to develop a large-scale integrated microalgae-based bio-refinery;
- NorFish (EUR 2.5 million), supported under H2020 to understand the restructuring of North Atlantic fisheries, fish markets and fishery-dependent communities in the late medieval and early modern world;
- IN 4.0 (EUR 1,9 million), supported by the ERDF to promote the modernization of the naval sector through the implementation of actions that help to transform SMEs in 4.0, identifying barriers that prevent the innovation of business model of naval sector, improving the companies` productive processes, transforming the work organization systems, knowledge and commercialization, as well as training workers of the naval sector in new occupations /tasks;

---

<sup>21</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/european-regional-development-fund](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/european-regional-development-fund)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.marine-i.co.uk>

- SIMCelt (EUR 1.8 million), supported under the EMFF to support maritime spatial planning in the Celtic Seas and to contribute to supporting related cross-border cooperation between Member States;<sup>23</sup>
- PLASMAR (EUR 1.9 million), supported under Interreg to establish the basis for blue growth in the Outermost Regions of Macaronesia through maritime spatial planning;<sup>24</sup>
- INvertebrateIT (EUR 860 000), supported under the EMFF to develop new approaches for fish feed to help aquaculture operators across the region mitigate their dependency on costly, volatile and often unsustainable feed;<sup>25</sup>
- BBMBC (EU contribution EUR 666 000), supported under the EMFF to provide knowledge and skills for jobs in health, nutrition and aquaculture;<sup>26</sup>
- ENTROPI (EU contribution EUR 595 000), supported under the EMFF to accelerate the deployment of multi-use offshore platforms, for renewables and aquaculture;<sup>27</sup> and
- Entrefish (EU contribution EUR 580 000), supported under the EMFF to improve the skills, in terms of innovation and sustainability, of fish and aquaculture SMEs<sup>28</sup> – targeting those working in the sector and attracting new high-skilled workers, developing and supporting the requisite multidisciplinary approach to sustainability (covering environmental, biological, social, managerial and marketing issues) and a cross-sectoral approach (fishery and aquaculture).

More generally, projects aimed at promoting knowledge-sharing or enhancing competitiveness and innovation capacities fall into four categories:

- enablers – projects that focus on improving public research and connectivity infrastructures in remote areas to create the conditions for economic development. For instance, the Canary Islands Oceanic Platform (PLOCAN) is a multipurpose offshore platform (including supporting facilities and vehicles) that supports national research and technological development capacities;
- facilitators – projects that provide targeted support to the sector by providing funding or access to expertise, or facilitating collaboration. For instance, the MarTERA H2020 Cofund organises a joint call for transnational research projects on various aspects of blue growth, while the Propel project provides access to a network of experts to create a culture of innovation and collaboration among marine SMEs;

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://msp-platform.eu/projects/supporting-implementation-maritime-spatial-planning-celtic-seas>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.plasmar.eu/objetivos-proyecto-plasmar/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/disruptive-and-forward-looking-opportunities-competitive-and-sustainable-aquaculture>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/blue-biotechnology-master-blue-career>

<sup>27</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/enabling-technologies-and-roadmaps-offshore-platform-innovation>

<sup>28</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en)

- supporters – projects that provide organisations (including SMEs) with funding to develop specific technologies, e.g. in the area of marine renewables, aquaculture or shipping; and
- cooperators – projects that strengthen local, transregional or transnational cooperation between companies and research facilities. For instance, SeaDataCloud<sup>29</sup> and JERICO-NEXT increase collaboration between marine research centres and other stakeholders on ocean data and environmental issues.

Some projects are aimed at adapting and diversifying economic activities; these generally target specific sectors:

- projects to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of fishery industries, mainly by exploring new markets or technologies. For instance, FishKOSM uses genetics, ecosystem modelling and risk assessment methods to achieve sustainable yields from fisheries that can also deliver better ecosystem, economic and social outcomes, and LIFE iSEAS promotes more sustainable fisheries by informing operators about new approaches to avoiding and managing discards; and
- a significant number of other projects on supporting aquaculture (including the cultivation of algae), for instance by supporting research into diseases affecting farmed fish, managing the environmental impacts of aquaculture, supporting collaboration between researchers, and using algae as a source of biomass.

### *Policies and funding instruments in line with the priority*

EU and national policy developments and funding priorities were found to be largely supportive of and aligned with the priorities of the action plan. In recent years, policymakers have focused on improving the framework conditions for innovation and entrepreneurship, *inter alia* by reducing barriers to entry, facilitating access to credit, investing in necessary infrastructure and improving the scope or quality of services offered to businesses, in particular SMEs. Significant ERDF, European Social Fund (ESF)<sup>30</sup> and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)<sup>31</sup> resources have been committed in support of entrepreneurship and innovation (even if the influence of the action plan on decision-making during the programming process was not the primary trigger for this). In particular, ERDF operational programmes<sup>32</sup> have supported the competitiveness of SMEs, and research and innovation

---

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.seadatanet.org/About-us/SeaDataCloud>

<sup>30</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/european-social-fund](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/european-social-fund)

<sup>31</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176>

<sup>32</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/o/operational-programme](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/o/operational-programme)

(R&I).<sup>33</sup> The ESF has promoted entrepreneurship alongside its support for more traditional employment, training and social inclusion measures. Overall, of the projects identified as supporting the implementation of the action plan at various levels, about a third concerned projects supporting entrepreneurship and innovation) in the context of smart specialisation strategies.

EU initiatives were also found to be in line with the priorities and objectives set out in the action plan. The European Research Area<sup>34</sup> reform agenda supports collaborative research and knowledge transfer across Europe, and related joint programming initiatives (JPIs),<sup>35</sup> such as the ‘healthy and productive seas and oceans’ JPI,<sup>36</sup> have been deployed with success in the Atlantic.

H2020 supports EU research policy and funds research in the agri-food, aquatic resources and marine sectors. Not least to follow up on the political commitment behind the Galway Statement on Atlantic Ocean Cooperation,<sup>37</sup> it has also supported marine-related research in the Atlantic and specifically earmarked a total budget of about EUR 140 million, including EUR 40 million for Arctic research. H2020 thus contributes to strengthening maritime industries and developing related economic activities; it not only supports innovation but also promotes entrepreneurship in the Atlantic area.

The EU has developed a suite of policies supporting the development of entrepreneurship, including in the Atlantic area, which complement the action plan. For instance, the Commission has implemented the Entrepreneurship 2020 action plan<sup>38</sup> and supports entrepreneurship education and the ‘Erasmus for young entrepreneurs’ exchange programme.<sup>39</sup> The COSME programme supports SME innovation and development, e.g. by co-financing the Enterprise Europe Network,<sup>40</sup> which helps SMEs with international ambitions find business and technology partners or understand EU legislation. COSME has also supported closer cooperation among trade promotion organisations to improve the range of services offered to SMEs.

Implementation of the Commission’s 2012 blue growth strategy<sup>41</sup> has been consistent with the priorities identified in the action plan, both in terms of thematic priorities and the specific sectors and enablers that were prioritised. A recent staff working document takes stock of

---

<sup>33</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Research\\_and\\_development\\_\(R\\_&\\_D\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Research_and_development_(R_&_D))

<sup>34</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:European\\_Research\\_Area\\_\(ERA\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:European_Research_Area_(ERA))

<sup>35</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/joint-programming\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/joint-programming_en.html)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.jpi-oceans.eu/what-jpi-oceans>

<sup>37</sup> The Galway Statement on Atlantic Ocean Cooperation was signed in May 2013 by the Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Maria Damanaki, and the Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn;

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/galway\\_statement\\_atlantic\\_ocean\\_cooperation.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/galway_statement_atlantic_ocean_cooperation.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)

<sup>38</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/action-plan_en)

<sup>39</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/support/erasmus-young-entrepreneurs>

<sup>40</sup> <http://een.ec.europa.eu/about/about>

<sup>41</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0494>

progress in implementing its blue growth agenda.<sup>42</sup> The blue growth initiative and various projects (e.g. MUSES, DATAMOR, MarInfo, SimCelt) have focused on growth enablers, such as maritime spatial planning and marine data, that can be expected to help boost economic growth and job creation in the long term.

The Commission has launched specific initiatives to promote and support the development of career opportunities in the blue economy. An example is the ‘blue careers in Europe’ call, which takes in the Atlantic area and has a budget of about EUR 3.5 million.

The focus on the adaptation and diversification of economic activity is reflected in the Commission’s latest initiatives on the common fisheries policy (CFP), which have a strong socio-economic dimension. The Commission has also promoted entrepreneurship in aquaculture, for instance through the publication of strategic guidelines and the development of multiannual plans to unlock the potential of the sector.

Looking ahead, the study suggests that new policy developments could focus on:

- improving the framework conditions for innovation and entrepreneurship;
- developing new research infrastructure and networks of expertise;
- greater recognition of the contribution of the blue economy to economic growth;
- developing maritime technologies and knowledge to exploit marine resources sustainably; and
- ensuring sustainable fisheries in the Atlantic.

### **2.2.2. A cleaner and more predictable Atlantic (in line with priority 2)**

#### *Projects contributing to the priority*

Of the 1 200+ projects identified as contributing to the action plan to date, over 500 related to the protection, security and development of the environment in the Atlantic area. These projects received around EUR 2.1 billion in funding (of the EUR 6 billion total). Priority 2 therefore accounted for more than a third of the projects and close to a third of the overall funding.

Of the projects identified as contributing to priority 2, the most important in terms of financial volume (total expenditure) and by way of example are:

---

<sup>42</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10102/2017/EN/SWD-2017-128-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

- the West of Duddon Sands offshore windfarm (EUR 797 million), supported by the EIB to develop, construct, operate and maintain a windfarm in England;<sup>43</sup>
- *Ports normands associés* (EUR 150 million), supported by the EIB to facilitate future developments relating to marine renewable energies in the ports of Cherbourg and Caen (France);<sup>44</sup>
- LIFE-Shad Severn (EUR 44 million), supported under LIFE to improve the conservation status of twaite shad in the Severn Estuary (England);<sup>45</sup>
- *Quai énergies marines renouvelables au port de Brest* (EUR 42 million), supported under the ERDF for the creation of a dock for the development of marine renewable energy in this area of France;<sup>46</sup>
- INNOVMAR (EUR 4.3 million), supported under the ERDF to support the main research lines of the Interdisciplinary Centre of Marine and Environmental Research at the University of Porto (Portugal), including the development of novel marine products with biotechnology applications;<sup>47</sup>
- LIFE CROAA (EUR 3.4 million) to combat invasive species that pose a major threat to indigenous wetlands in France;<sup>48</sup>
- RANGER (EUR 8 million),<sup>49</sup> supported under H2020 to deliver a surveillance platform for the long-distance detection of vessels across the EU in the framework of the common information-sharing environment on maritime surveillance (CISE);<sup>50</sup>
- TASC MAR (EUR 6.8 million), supported under H2020 to develop new tools and strategies to overcome bottlenecks in the biodiscovery and industrial exploitation of novel marine-derived biomolecules;<sup>51</sup>
- Amalia (EUR 465 000), supported under the EMFF to develop new uses for invasive seaweed as a resource for food, health and industrial applications;<sup>52</sup>
- LitterDrone (EUR 310 000), supported under the EMFF to develop a service for the monitoring and management of marine litter on coastlines;<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.eib.org/projects/loan/loan/20120430>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.eib.org/projects/loan/loan/20140076>

<sup>45</sup> [http://severnriverstrust.com/projects\\_categories/unlocking-the-severn/](http://severnriverstrust.com/projects_categories/unlocking-the-severn/)

<sup>46</sup> [http://www.bretagne.bzh/jcms/prod\\_404635/fr/-port-de-brest-quai-energies-marines-renouvelables](http://www.bretagne.bzh/jcms/prod_404635/fr/-port-de-brest-quai-energies-marines-renouvelables)

<sup>47</sup> <http://innovmar.ciimar.up.pt>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.life-croaa.eu/>

<sup>49</sup> <http://ranger-project.eu/about/overview/>

<sup>50</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/integrated\\_maritime\\_surveillance\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/integrated_maritime_surveillance_en)

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.tascmar.eu>

<sup>52</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/algae-market-lab-ideas-adding-value-marine-invasive-seaweeds-iberian-northwest>

- SpilLess (EUR 295 000), supported under the EMFF to pilot new viable solutions to tackle oil spills;<sup>54</sup>
- Circular Ocean project (EUR 1.5 million), supported under the ERDF and winner of the RegioStars award in 2016, to develop, share and test new sustainable solutions to incentivise the collection and reprocessing of discarded fishing nets and assist the movement towards a more circular economy;<sup>55</sup> and
- OceanWise (EUR 2.1 million), supported under the ERDF, to develop a set of long-term measures to reduce the impact of expanded polystyrene products (EPS) in the North-East Atlantic Ocean. This project is contributing directly and substantially to the implementation of the OSPAR Action Plan against marine litter.

More generally, projects aiming to protect, secure and develop the potential of the Atlantic marine and coastal environment fall into the following categories:

- maritime safety and security – projects focusing either on protecting man-made structures on land and water (in the context of shipping or to counter potential security threats) or on protecting coastal areas from natural disasters. For instance:
  - the PICASSO project addresses the human element in marine safety by testing information and communication technology solutions;<sup>56</sup>
  - Lynceus2Market is developing a localisation system for the safe evacuation of large passenger ships;<sup>57</sup> and
  - the EMFF is supporting the development of Spain’s maritime information sharing system in the context of the CISE;
- invasive alien species – projects focusing on the safety of the biological environment and seeking to counteract the environmental damage inflicted by invasive alien species. For instance:
  - the ‘algae-to-market lab ideas’ project develops new products and screens marine invasive macroalgae to ensure their sustainable exploitation;<sup>58</sup> and
  - LIFE-financed projects such as IAP-RISK<sup>59</sup> and CROAA<sup>60</sup> are aimed at combating invasive species;

---

<sup>53</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/development-and-exploitation-innovative-tools-remote-marine-litter-control-and-management-through>

<sup>54</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/first-line-response-oil-spills-based-native-microorganisms-cooperation>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.circularocean.eu/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport/projects-by-country/multi-country/2015-eu-tm-0108-s>

<sup>57</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/horizon-2020/projects/h2020-transport/waterborne/lynceus2market>

<sup>58</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/algae-market-lab-ideas-adding-value-marine-invasive-seaweeds-iberian-northwest>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.iap-risk.eu>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.life-croaa.eu/>



- exploration of the marine environment – projects often covering the deep sea and ecosystems with which humans are not yet familiar. For instance:
  - EMSODEV builds novel technologies to measure ocean parameters and, for example, explore deep sea vents; and
  - SeaDataCloud enhances SeaDataNet<sup>61</sup> services and promotes their use;
- climate change – projects to improve our understanding of climate change, in particular the risks for maritime environments and coastal areas, in order to help develop adaptation and risk-mitigation efforts. For instance:
  - the Blue Action project involves research on the impact of Arctic changes on the weather and climate of the northern hemisphere;<sup>62</sup>
  - the Bluefish project addresses knowledge gaps as regards the effects of climate change on commercial fish in the Irish and Celtic Seas;<sup>63</sup> and
  - the S/F SamueLNG for a blue Atlantic Arch project includes the liquefied natural gas retrofit of a dredger (operating on the Loire & Seine rivers) as well as risk and design studies enabling the future deployment of LNG bunkering in the Ports of Nantes Saint Nazaire, Gijon and Vigo);<sup>64</sup>
- environmental protection – projects ranging from reducing the environmental impact of human activities to protecting habitats. For instance:
  - LIFE LEMA improves the management of marine litter;<sup>65</sup>
  - other LIFE projects support the conservation of endangered marine species;
  - Biscay Line - Multiple port Finland-Estonia-Belgium-Spain long distance MoS, includes the installation of scrubbers as well as energy efficiency upgrades on 3 RoPax ferries operating between Kotka, Ruama and Helsinki (FI), Paldiski (EE), Zeebrugge and Antwerp (BE), El Ferrol, Santander and Bilbao (ES) and ST Petesburg;<sup>66</sup> and
  - Study and deployment of integrated gas & water cleaning system and biofuel-MGO blend for Atlantic Corridor upgrade that includes the pilot deployment of a new composite scrubber on a large passenger ferry Mont St Michel (operating between Portsmouth and Caen) as well as the equipment

---

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.seadatanet.org/About-us>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.blue-action.eu/index.php?id=3904>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.irelandwales.eu/projects/bluefish>

<sup>64</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport/projects-by-country/multi-country/2015-eu-tm-0307-w>

<sup>65</sup> <http://lifelema.eu/en/the-project/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport/projects-by-country/multi-country/2014-eu-tm-0487-m>

of a new auxiliary engine and generator enabling the use of biofuel and MGO for the production of electricity to reduce the carbon emissions on board the Normandie Express (operating between Le Havre and Portsmouth).<sup>67</sup>

- marine biotechnology – projects mostly focusing on the potential of algae. For instance:
  - MACBIOBLUE helps companies develop new products and processes;<sup>68</sup> and
  - GHaNA explores marine bio-resources for blue biotechnology applications in the aquaculture, cosmetics and food and health industries;<sup>69</sup>
- deep-sea mining – projects focusing on accessing resources on the sea floor safely and sustainably, whether by developing innovative autonomous underwater vehicles or assessing long-term environmental impacts (e.g. MiningImpact);<sup>70</sup> and
- marine renewable energy – projects for offshore wind parks, mainly relating to the construction of new capacity. As this requires big investments, relatively few projects account for the lion's share of the available funding. R&D is ongoing to make offshore wind energy technology more cost-effective. Projects on less developed wave and tidal energy, on the other hand, related to building knowledge and promoting innovation rather than actual construction are supported via various funding programmes like H2020, the EU Rural Development Programme (RDP), Innovfin Energy Demonstration Projects (EDP) and NER 300. In H2020, more than EUR 200 million were allocated to the development of marine renewable energy technologies.

Projects covering the Atlantic marine and coastal environment have generally been financed from the ESIFs or H2020, but funding from the largest projects has tended to come from H2020 and the EIB. Almost 50 % of all projects on the sustainable management of marine resources are transnational projects, with mostly average budgets.

#### *Policies and funding instruments in line with the priority*

LIFE finances projects through sub-programmes for the environment and for climate action. Calls under these sub-programmes also support projects that protect, secure and develop the potential of the Atlantic area's marine and coastal environment, and in particular, those aimed at building climate resilience and mapping risks related to land-sea interactions.

---

<sup>67</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport/projects-by-country/multi-country/2014-eu-tm-0723-m>

<sup>68</sup> [http://www.itccanarias.org/web/prensa/noticias/np\\_proyecto\\_macbioblue\\_primera\\_reunion.jsp](http://www.itccanarias.org/web/prensa/noticias/np_proyecto_macbioblue_primera_reunion.jsp)

<sup>69</sup> [http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/206519\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/206519_en.html)

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.jpi-oceans.eu/miningimpact>

The action plan is closely aligned with the objectives and activities of the Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic (OSPAR),<sup>71</sup> which also tie in with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD),<sup>72</sup> the aim of which is to protect Europe's marine environment more effectively. The plan supports OSPAR processes to help develop a coherent network of marine protected areas around Europe's Atlantic coast and calls for action and cooperation through OSPAR to restore ecosystems.

A significant level of resources supporting environmental protection and resource efficiency has been committed under the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund. More specifically relating to fisheries and the marine economy, the primary objective of the EMFF is to promote competitive, environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially responsible fisheries and aquaculture. This is in line with priority 2 of the action plan, as is the blue growth agenda, which supports the sustainable management of marine resources, including deep-sea mining and marine biotechnologies. Here too the action plan has contributed to the overall coherence of related policies.

The action plan is closely aligned with developments in the area of maritime safety and security, for instance as reflected in the EU's maritime security strategy<sup>73</sup> (although attention in that context has largely focused on migratory pressures in the Mediterranean). The roles of the EU agencies with responsibility for maritime security and safety in the Atlantic area – the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)<sup>74</sup> and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA)<sup>75</sup> – have grown in recent years. The same applies to the setting up of the inter-agency cooperation on coast guard functions involving these two EU agencies and the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). Likewise, cooperation between Member States has been strengthened: for instance, the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre Narcotics (MAOC (N))<sup>76</sup> fights drug trafficking in the Atlantic, with crucial support from the core node of the EMSA-hosted European maritime information exchange system. Also, the CISE for the EU's maritime domain will be developed further.

Policy developments in the area of environmental protection and sustainability were already largely aligned, but since 2013 the action plan has strengthened this coherence with existing policies (e.g. the MSFD), data collection efforts (e.g. Copernicus,<sup>77</sup> EMODNet,<sup>78</sup> SeaDataNet and AtlantOS)<sup>79</sup> and new requirements (e.g. for maritime spatial planning).<sup>80</sup> Since the action

---

<sup>71</sup> Work under OSPAR is managed by a commission made up of representatives of the European Commission and the governments of several Member States and non-EU countries; <https://www.ospar.org/about>

<sup>72</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index_en.htm)

<sup>73</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime-security\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime-security_en)

<sup>74</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/mission-and-tasks/>

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.emsa.europa.eu/about.html>

<sup>76</sup> <http://maoc.eu/>

<sup>77</sup> <http://marine.copernicus.eu/about-us/about-eu-copernicus/>

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.emodnet.eu/what-emodnet>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.atlantos-h2020.eu/about/>

plan was adopted, EMODNet data on European waters have improved considerably, resulting *inter alia* in a joint digital seabed map, which replaced a patchwork of efforts by researchers, hydrographers and geologists, and to which over 100 organisations contributed. The new map allows more accurate analyses at a sea-basin scale than were possible before. The UK meteorological office has stated that the map has massively improved its operational storm surge forecasts, meaning that EMODNet has helped reduce risks to coastal communities and offshore activities.

The Commission's 2014 Communication on the potential of ocean energy cites the action plan<sup>81</sup> and ties in with earlier initiatives, such as the three ocean energy projects financed under the NER300 programme.<sup>82</sup> The EU has funded various projects under research framework programmes and the ESIFs have played an important role in supporting the development of ocean energy. The Commission has issued best-practice guidance for national renewable energy support schemes.<sup>83</sup> Beyond the EU context, relevant cooperation takes place in a working group on marine renewable energies under the auspices of the CPMR's Atlantic Arc Commission<sup>84</sup> and through organisations such as Ocean Energy Europe.<sup>85</sup>

The Commission Communication also called for the creation of an ocean energy forum to develop a shared understanding of the problems and collectively find solutions.<sup>86</sup> A strategic roadmap published in 2016 was also closely aligned with the renewable energy objective of priority 2.

However, many stakeholders who should have an interest in priority 2 – such as businesses, ports, environmental NGOs, fishing and aquaculture operators, maritime security actors and industry representatives – have little or no knowledge of the action plan, partly because of their limited experience of EU projects, which they view as too difficult or costly to access given the legal requirements and administrative complexities of applying for EU funding. Awareness of the plan is relatively low even among groups that it specifically targets, including those concerned with marine renewable energies, environmental conservation and protection, and maritime safety and security. R&I actors, who have been exposed to strong efforts at EU level to push the blue growth and marine knowledge agendas, tend to be more knowledgeable on the EU support measures.

---

<sup>80</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime\\_spatial\\_planning\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime_spatial_planning_en)

<sup>81</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0008>

<sup>82</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/lowcarbon/ner300\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/lowcarbon/ner300_en)

<sup>83</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/renewable-energy/support-schemes>

<sup>84</sup> <http://cpmr-atlantic.org/event/atlantic-arc-commission-working-group-on-marine-renewable-energies/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.oceanenergy-europe.eu/about-oee/>

<sup>86</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/maritimeforum/frontpage/1036>

### 2.2.3. A better connected Atlantic (in line with priority 3)

#### *Projects contributing to the priority*

Of the 1 200+ projects identified as relevant for the action plan, only about 10 % relate to improved accessibility and connectivity. However, these projects account for over 40 % of the EUR 6 billion total, which means that priority 3 ranks first in funding terms. Its financial weight is partly explained by the fact that port infrastructure is particularly costly and requires significant public investment and financing.

In terms of financial volume (total expenditure), the three most important projects relating to this priority are:

- the Spanish state fund for ports accessibility (EUR 1.2 billion), supported by the EIB to improve land connectivity in key ports in the trans-European transport network (TEN-T);<sup>87</sup>
- Dublin Port Alexandra basin redevelopment (EUR 221 million), supported by the EIB to accommodate larger sea-going vessels;<sup>88</sup> and
- Dublin port development (EUR 200 million), supported by the EIB to improve operations and increase capacity for roll-on roll-off freight traffic.<sup>89</sup>

More generally, projects aiming to improve accessibility and connectivity mostly focus on three key approaches:

- developing and upgrading port infrastructures – projects to expand port capacities to accommodate future growth by improving connectivity with the hinterland and enhancing intermodality;
- diversifying ports into new business activities – projects to develop activities such as tourism or the maintenance of offshore renewable energy installations (by offering suitable facilities); and
- promoting networks and short shipping routes between European ports – projects to strengthen links between ports by eliminating barriers to uninterrupted network access.

In terms of project numbers, the ERDF is the first source of funding for priority 3 projects, but the EIB is the most important in terms of value. Priority 3 has the lowest percentage of

---

<sup>87</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/spanish-state-fund-ports-accessibility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/spanish-state-fund-ports-accessibility_en)

<sup>88</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport/projects-by-country/ireland/2014-ie-tm-0222-w>

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.eib.org/projects/pipelines/pipeline/20140463>

transnational projects (12 %), as infrastructure development requires large projects focused on a specific area.

#### *Policies and funding instruments in line with the priority*

There have been limited policy developments in the context of priority 3, but the EU's TEN-T support covers port infrastructure and remains highly aligned with the action plan objective of promoting cooperation between ports.<sup>90</sup> Regulation (EU) 2017/352 on the provision of port services and the financial transparency of ports pushed for a level playing-field for ports.<sup>91</sup>

#### **2.2.4. A socially inclusive Atlantic (in line with priority 4)**

##### *Projects contributing to the priority*

Of the projects identified as relevant for the action plan, 13 % relate to a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development; these projects account for 6 % of the overall funding. In other words, priority 4 projects are generally smaller, although some involve larger investments in the area of tourism infrastructure.

However, much of the 'social' investment in the Atlantic area could not be identified as such because most of it is channelled through general national programmes that may touch on a wide range of geographies and sectors. It is very difficult to identify which expenditures are in line with the action plan.

The same applies to EMFF-funded projects in the context of community-led local development (CLLD),<sup>92</sup> in particular involving fisheries local action groups (FLAGs).<sup>93</sup> While such projects support priority 4 (e.g. by helping fishermen with the investments needed to take tourists on board, or promoting local catches in restaurants and hotels) and account for a substantial proportion of the EUR 500 million available for CLLD under the current EMFF, they are often micro-projects that were not included in the list of projects for this review.

In terms of financial volume (total expenditure) or by way of example, important projects relating to this priority are:

- EDUSI (EUR 256 million) – strategies supported under the ERDF to promote sustainable urban development and improve social, economic and environmental conditions in Spain, including in 23 cities on the Atlantic coast.<sup>94</sup> All municipalities

---

<sup>90</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/transport/infrastructure/tentec/tentec-portal/site/en/abouttent.htm>

<sup>91</sup> Regulation (EU) 2017/352 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2017 establishing a framework for the provision of port services and common rules on the financial transparency of ports (OJ L 57, 3.3.2017, p. 1); <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32017R0352>

<sup>92</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/emff/clld\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/emff/clld_en)

<sup>93</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet/tools/flags-2007-2013>; <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet/tools/flags-2014-2020>

<sup>94</sup> *Estrategia de desarrollo urbano sostenible e integrado*; <http://edusi.es>

with over 50 000 inhabitants and almost half of those with 20 000-50 000 inhabitants presented strategies in the first round of funding;

- ‘Tourism attractor destinations’ (EUR 55 million), supported under the ERDF to deliver strategic regional tourism infrastructure projects to improve the quality of tourism destinations and encourage businesses to invest in tourism in Wales;<sup>95</sup>
- ECME, the Eastern Corridor Medical Engineering Centre (EUR 8.4 million), supported under the ERDF to improve medical wearables and remote monitoring in Ireland and Northern Ireland so as to allow people to ‘age in place’ in their own home and community;<sup>96</sup>
- CHERISH, the Climate Heritage & Environments of Reefs, Islands and Headlands (EUR 5.1 million) , supported under the ERDF to increase cross-border knowledge and understanding of the impacts (past, present and near-future) of climate change, storminess and extreme weather events on the cultural heritage of reefs, islands and headlands of the Irish Sea;<sup>97</sup>
- MAREA (EUR 1 million), supported under the ERDF to develop innovative digital tools to prevent erosion and flood risks in coastal areas before a storm;<sup>98</sup>
- the BlueHealth Consortium (EUR 6 million), supported under H2020 to investigate the relationship between the EU’s ‘blue infrastructure’ and the health and well-being of its citizens;<sup>99</sup> and
- the Wildsea Atlantic Ocean Heritage Route (EUR 300 000), supported under the EMFF to develop a sustainable diving network covering the EU’s Atlantic coastline between Portugal and Spain in the south and Ireland and the UK in the north.

More generally, projects aiming to create a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development in the area of the action plan do so by focusing on:

- sustainable urban development – supporting investment in sustainable urban development plans that bring about a lasting improvement in a city’s economic, physical, social and environmental conditions; and
- tackling demographic challenges and providing public services in remote areas – as populations age, public health and other systems must be able to keep up with their

---

<sup>95</sup> <http://gov.wales/newsroom/culture-tourism-sport/2016/160318-funding-boost/?lang=en>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.ecme-research.com>

<sup>97</sup> <https://rcahmw.gov.uk/coastal-heritage-and-climate-change-project-launched/>

<sup>98</sup> [http://www.atlanticstrategy.eu/sites/default/files/images/apa7\\_marea\\_val.pdf](http://www.atlanticstrategy.eu/sites/default/files/images/apa7_marea_val.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> <https://bluehealth2020.eu/about/>

needs, but delivering public services effectively and efficiently in remote and rural areas is a major challenge in its own right.

The vast majority of these projects (about 80 %, accounting for over 90 % of the funds invested), in particular the Spanish EDUSI projects, have received support from EU structural funds. To a lesser extent, funding has also come through instruments such as COSME. Only around 20 % of the projects are transnational, which is in line with the focus on addressing local social issues and preserving local cultural heritage. One project covering all Atlantic Member States is AtlanticOnBike (supported under the Atlantic area Interreg programme), which seeks to develop a sustainable European tourism destination based on a transnational cycle route.<sup>100</sup>

#### *Policies and funding instruments in line with the priority*

Due to the breadth of this priority, it is difficult to pin down all the relevant policy areas and many related policy developments, such as the socio-economic aspects of the CFP and efforts to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, have been mentioned in other sections. The Commission aims (e.g. via its blue growth agenda) to develop sectors with high potential for sustainable jobs and growth in the marine and maritime sectors,<sup>101</sup> thus supporting the implementation of priority 4. In 2014, it adopted a Communication on a strategy for more growth and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism, identifying action to help the sector grow sustainably and provide added impetus to coastal economies.<sup>102</sup>

#### **2.2.5. Bridging the Atlantic: the international dimension**

The Atlantic strategy is designed to ‘cover the coasts, territorial and jurisdictional waters of the five EU Member States with an Atlantic coastline (...) as well as the international waters reaching westward to the Americas, eastward to Africa and the Indian Ocean, southward to the Southern Ocean and northward to the Arctic Ocean (...) [E]ngagement is also sought with other EU States that use this space and with international partners whose waters touch it’.

The action plan supports this international approach by recognising that the Atlantic Ocean is not confined to Europe, but ‘a shared resource and unified system linking the continent of Europe with Africa and America’. It highlights the potential for creating a solid foundation for cooperation with other Atlantic nations, underlining the prospect of engagement with the United States and Canada to establish a trans-Atlantic research alliance. This was achieved with the signing of the Galway Statement in May 2013, which led to the creation of the EU-Canada-US Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance. The Galway Statement is fully aligned

---

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.eurovelo.org/news/2017/05/29/good-news-eurovelo-1-atlanticonbike-project-approved/>

<sup>101</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue\\_growth\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue_growth_en)

<sup>102</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/coastal\\_tourism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/coastal_tourism_en)



with the challenges identified in the Atlantic strategy and its trilateral working groups offer concrete avenues for the successful implementation of the strategy.

To give practical expression to the political commitment behind the Galway Statement, dedicated H2020 blue growth calls were published in 2014-2017 to support research in the Atlantic area;<sup>103</sup> these contributed directly to the objectives of priorities 1 and 2 of the action plan. As a result, 20 marine projects have received over EUR 140 million of H2020 funding, with over 320 international research teams working together on a healthy, productive, secure and resilient Atlantic Ocean. Some of the more important projects include:

- SponGES (EUR 10 million), supported under H2020 with the United States and Canada as partners, is developing an integrated ecosystem-based approach to preserve and sustainably use vulnerable sponge ecosystems in the North Atlantic;<sup>104</sup>
- AtlantOS (EUR 21 million ),<sup>105</sup> supported under H2020 and with 62 partners from 18 countries, to deliver an advanced framework for the development of an integrated Atlantic observing system, *inter alia* by:
  - improving international cooperation in designing, implementing and sharing the benefits of ocean observing;
  - promoting engagement and innovation;
  - facilitating free and open access to ocean data and information;
  - enabling and disseminating methods of improving the quality and authority of ocean information;
  - strengthening the global ocean observing system and sustaining observing systems that are critical for the Copernicus marine environment monitoring service and its applications; and
  - contributing to the aims of the Galway Statement; and
- ATLAS (EUR 9.1 million),<sup>106</sup> supported under H2020 to improve understanding of deep-sea ecosystems and associated species, and to predict future changes to these ecosystems and their vulnerabilities in the face of climate change. A global effort is under way to improve this understanding, which is essential to developing maritime spatial planning and supporting blue growth.

---

<sup>103</sup> <http://europa.eu/!mF76Yw>

<sup>104</sup> [http://www.deepseasponges.org/?page\\_id=242](http://www.deepseasponges.org/?page_id=242)

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.atlantos-h2020.eu/about/>

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.eu-atlas.org/about-atlas/atlas-work-package-descriptions>

- INTAROS (EUR 15.5 million), supported under H2020 and with a transnational partnership of about 40 partners, to extend, improve, and unify Arctic observation systems, including community-based ones, contributing to filling critical gaps and creating an integrated data access platform;
- APPLICATE (EUR 8 million) and Blue-Action (EUR 7.5 million), supported under H2020, to explore the predictability of Arctic climate and its impact on climate and weather at lower latitudes. The projects are aiming at improving models, contributing to the design of appropriate observing systems, and leading to the co-design – with stakeholders – of better climate services;
- Nunataryuk (EUR 11.5 million), supported under H2020, to address the issue of permafrost thawing in Arctic coastal areas.

The success of the Galway Statement led to cooperation in the south Atlantic, notably with Brazil and South Africa, which culminated in the signing of the Belém Statement on Atlantic R&I cooperation<sup>107</sup> in July 2017, launching the European Union-Brazil-South Africa Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Cooperation. The aim is to create a single Atlantic community, from pole to pole and coast to coast, and connect it with funding instruments and ongoing initiatives so as to enhance understanding of the ocean as a system, closely interlinked to Antarctica and the Arctic. To implement the Belém Statement, action grants worth over EUR 64 million are programmed under H2020 between 2018 and 2019. This funding will go towards assessing ecosystems, mapping the sea-floor and developing innovative aquaculture systems; the aim is to have over 500 research teams working from Antarctica to the Arctic by 2019.

The Galway and Belém Statements address the challenges highlighted in the Atlantic strategy and have been acknowledged as major achievements of the strategy and its action plan. The Galway Statement has been widely recognised as a model of international cooperation and science diplomacy, and its success has led to the development of a similar approach in the Mediterranean, with the endorsement of the BLUEMED Initiative.<sup>108</sup>

Despite being adopted earlier, the action plan priorities are generally aligned with the relevant UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), in particular SDG14, which concerns the

---

<sup>107</sup> The Belém Statement was signed in July 2017 by the Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Carlos Moedas, together with the Brazilian and South African science ministers;

[https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/belem\\_statement\\_2017\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/belem_statement_2017_en.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> BLUEMED was signed at the EuroMediterranean Ministerial Conference on Research and Innovation on 4 May 2017 in Valletta; <https://www.bluemed-initiative.eu>

conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.<sup>109</sup>

The SDGs are the result of a long process at international level, but the plan's specific objectives on knowledge-sharing and innovation, supporting the CFP, marine protection and the sustainable exploitation of marine resources may have helped in the formulation of SDG14.

The work of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) – the UN specialised agency for the safety and security of shipping, and the prevention of marine pollution by ships – is currently guided by its strategic plan for 2016-2021. Priority 2 of the action plan (improving maritime safety and security) is largely in line with the relevant IMO 'strategic directions'.

The action plan is aligned with the objectives and activities of OSPAR, as it includes action to support marine environmental protection and efforts to achieve the 'good environmental status'<sup>110</sup> of Atlantic waters by working through OSPAR.

### **3. HOW HAS THE ACTION PLAN WORKED?**

The precise extent of the action plan's role in the above developments is open for discussion. However, the study and the public consultation are important sources of evidence and input for this review. Therefore, it is possible to highlight some challenges and draw a number of lessons as regards the main features of the plan, its governance and its implementation.

#### **3.1. Relevance of priorities and thematic content**

The breadth of the four headline priorities and their underlying objectives reflect the role that Member States, regions and stakeholders were expected to play in the strategy. The principle of subsidiarity was followed in the initial consultation on the action plan and its priorities and thematic content were the result of a bottom-up approach that ensured that the objectives are comprehensive and can be pursued and applied in the context of EU policies with an Atlantic dimension. We discussed the latter in section 2.2 above, but the importance of the inclusiveness of the plan in securing stakeholders' involvement should not be underestimated.<sup>111</sup> This was also the diagnosis that emerged from the study. Where comments were made, they tended to be suggestions on fine-tuning certain priorities or objectives, rather than fundamentally altering the content of the plan.

---

<sup>109</sup> <https://sdgcompass.org/sdgs/sdg-14/>

<sup>110</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index_en.htm)

<sup>111</sup> Well over 75 % of respondents believed that the 10 specific objectives of the action plan remained 'to a very large extent' or 'somewhat' in line with the needs of the Atlantic area. Some public authorities underlined that they believed that maintaining an inclusive action plan was important to secure the buy-in of a wide range of stakeholders and take account of the large diversity of needs and challenges in the region.

On the other hand, the wide-ranging nature of the objectives meant that there was limited concrete scope for engaging with policymakers and funding sources, and this reduced the effectiveness of the plan. Ultimately, the broad scope of the plan makes it difficult to link concrete projects to its implementation, with the exception of action in the field of marine research. To overcome these challenges and effectively prioritise areas with the highest potential for sea-basin level cooperation, the study suggests improving the plan's structure and internal coherence, *inter alia* by selecting a limited number of well-defined objectives<sup>112</sup> that reflect particular needs for improved cooperation (on the basis of the model used for EU macro-regional strategies).

The failure to link the agreed operational objectives with a framework for monitoring and evaluating success (e.g. indicators with baseline, milestones and target values) is an obvious deficiency that hinders delivery and restricts the plan's overall impact. Means of addressing this include setting out specific, measurable and attainable indicators in order to manage implementation better and measure ultimate impact.

### **3.2. Influencing policy developments and investment decisions**

The comprehensive mapping carried out in the context of the study found that the action plan priorities were largely aligned with and supported by policy and funding priorities at EU and national levels. As regards policy developments at EU level, this again can be seen as a function of the generic nature of the plan's objectives and its alignment with priorities of EU policies with a maritime dimension (e.g. blue growth, the CFP, marine and maritime directives, ports, R&I). While this alignment did not seem to add decisive new elements to established policy frameworks such as the marine directives, port development or even fisheries, the plan did lead to changes as regards:

- R&I – additional political impetus with the setting-up of the Trans-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance; and
- the blue growth strategy – the plan created a case for extending the sea-basin approach to the Adriatic-Ionian Seas (maritime strategy adopted in 2013 and embedded in the EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region) and the initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean (adopted in 2017).

At the same time, there is little evidence that the plan has influenced concrete policy developments at national and regional level. The study found that EU policy had led to a proliferation of national and regional maritime strategies, but this could not be attributed to the plan alone. In fact, only one document reviewed made explicit mention of the Atlantic

---

<sup>112</sup> e.g. specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) objectives.

strategy (Ireland's *Harnessing our ocean wealth*) and only one mentioned the action plan (Ireland's marine and innovation strategy). This matches the perception shared by stakeholders: over 75 % of respondents to the public consultation believed that the plan had influenced policy developments at EU level, but not at national, regional and local levels.

Success in influencing funding priorities and investment decisions has been mixed. While some funding instruments at EU level<sup>113</sup> have specifically earmarked budget for the plan's priorities or published calls for proposals supporting its implementation, the independent assessment found no instances of operational programmes at national and regional level giving preference to projects that supported implementation of the plan or otherwise prioritised it. With one prominent exception (the Atlantic area Interreg programme), very few operational programmes made specific links between their priorities and those in the Atlantic strategy or action plan. This perception is shared by respondents to the public consultation, who saw the most direct influence of the action plan at EU level. The study attributes this to the lack of systematic and active engagement by relevant stakeholders in the programming process<sup>114</sup> and the broad nature of the action plan objectives. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, maritime projects provide ample opportunities to compete for funding in the more general framework of priorities set in the operational programmes. This partly explains why, over the past four years, funding has been given to over 1 200 projects that have a maritime link and are in line with the broad objectives of the plan.

The search for the right approach to securing funding has given us a new and better awareness of how ESIF funds are deployed in the maritime context. The independent assessment found that, while virtually all relevant managing authorities are aware of the plan and have some basic knowledge of its contents, only a small number contributed actively to drawing it up. The Commission continues to engage with funding authorities and involve them in the implementation of the plan. This is in addition to efforts at national level.

Ways to improve the situation include continuous communication on the action plan among funding authorities and investors, including through work in the ASG to develop a coordinated strategy for influencing the priorities of the relevant operational programmes in the next multiannual programming period. Another idea is to strengthen the role and mandate of the Atlantic area Interreg programme as regards implementing the plan.

### **3.3. Bringing stakeholders together**

The action plan has helped to bring key groups in and across the Atlantic area closer together, raise awareness and build support for a common set of priorities. The Atlantic Forum initiative to frame the process of elaborating the plan was highly successful in generating

---

<sup>113</sup> For example H2020, COSME, LIFE and the EMFF directly managed by the Commission.

<sup>114</sup> The action plan was published in 2013, at the end of the 2014-2020 programming process.

momentum and buy-in, while the regular national events that have been organised since 2013 continue to provide a platform for networking and disseminating information. The November 2017 conference in Glasgow is a case in point: representatives of 15 ERDF programmes met for the first time to exchange best practices and discuss joint support for maritime projects in the Atlantic.

While the plan has helped to strengthen links among the community of actors in the Atlantic, it has struggled to widen it beyond stakeholders with strong experience of participating in EU-level cooperation and to bring new stakeholders on board. The study cites universities, research centres and specialised clusters as being most knowledgeable of the plan, while public authorities, businesses operators and relevant industry representation groups at the level of the coastal regions have benefited less. Variations could be noted by region, meaning that stakeholders better acquainted with the plan tended to be concentrated in the same regions rather than evenly spread across the Atlantic area. This suggests that the quality of regional maritime cooperation mechanisms and the buy-in of key ‘thought leaders’ play an important role in determining the level of knowledge and buy-in in a given region.

Better and more targeted communication, including closer engagement with coastal regions, is needed to address the disparities in knowledge and engagement. It might help if the assistance mechanism were to be used more actively, in alliance with established regional networks and sectoral representation groups, especially if this focused on maritime issues in science and innovation, surveillance, ocean energy and maritime investments (as suggested by the Committee of the Regions). Another idea is to appoint an ‘Atlantic ambassador’ to increase visibility and strengthen regional identity.

### **3.4. Development of new project ideas**

It emerged from interviews with project promoters that the action plan has not really helped to support the launch of new projects or meaningfully influenced projects in their development. It seems that the demands and selection criteria of funding instruments had a greater influence on project proposals than the general priorities and objectives of the plan. While networking opportunities created through the plan with the support of the assistance mechanism, and the general momentum, have motivated stakeholders across the region to pursue their project ideas, the plan has not provided significant support for the successful launching of projects. Services designed to support project promoters, such as guidance and advice through the assistance mechanism, have been of limited use or relevance to users, who sought funding directly rather than advice on how to get it. As a result, apart from projects supported through H2020 and the part of the EMFF managed directly by the Commission, the plan had only limited success in securing funding to support its implementation. Of the large number of project promoters consulted in the context of the ERDF and ESF, all considered that their project would have been launched in the absence of the action plan.

Almost all stakeholders point to the lack of dedicated funding as an impediment to implementation. The evidence suggests that this has tended to undermine interest in the plan and the plan’s influence at project level. While it is difficult to refute these findings, this should not be considered as a deficiency of the plan itself. The plan was designed above all as a tool to enhance coordination of existing funding sources and policy frameworks and direct more funding to its priority areas where possible. At the same time, it is clear that the strategic deployment of a small envelope of funding could be considered as a means of improving

implementation. This could be done by giving project promoters greater and more targeted support via the new assistance mechanism and strengthening the role and mandate of the Atlantic area Interreg programme in supporting implementation of the plan.

### **3.5. Governance and management structures supporting the action plan**

The action plan did not explicitly set out the roles and responsibilities of those involved in its governance and that of the Atlantic strategy; these have largely developed organically over time. The ASG (made up of representatives of the national governments of the five participating countries) is the main body overseeing implementation and bringing together key actors in the region. It has fostered alliances among its members and steered the work of the assistance mechanism, but done little to agree on and coordinate projects of benefit to the Atlantic area as a whole, and even less to mobilise additional public or private investment in the plan. The study found that the wide range of priorities in the plan makes it difficult for ASG members to cover all issues effectively, thus limiting the effectiveness of the governance mechanism generally. The results of the public consultation are largely consistent with this finding. In addition, some respondents argue that regional, local and civil society stakeholders, whose role is often seen as developing and implementing projects on the ground, are not sufficiently involved in governance.

To strengthen the governance mechanism and add practical content to its work, the ASG could be given a clearer mandate to support implementation of the plan at operational level. A priority will be to involve other relevant actors (in particular, regional stakeholders) more in governance, possibly by setting up thematic working groups or consultation forums in the priority areas or through their participation in ASG meetings. Redesigning the assistance mechanism to provide regular feedback on opportunities and issues on the ground could also help to stimulate more qualitative and strategic discussion around implementation of the plan.

### **3.6. The role of the assistance mechanism**

Deployed through one of the few budget lines dedicated to the implementation of the action plan, the Atlantic assistance mechanism has been quite popular in the Atlantic stakeholder community. Both the study and the public consultation found that there was recognition across the region of awareness-raising, guidance on project development and ongoing communication on the action plan. The assistance mechanism paved the way for the effective mapping of genuine Atlantic projects aligned with the plan's priorities and objectives. On the other hand, support did not always match project promoters' needs and sometimes duplicated existing resources available at EU level (e.g. advice through the network of national contact points for H2020, Interreg programmes, LIFE and COSME, and match-making platforms such as CORDIS and the European Enterprise Network).

The evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the assistance mechanism as a tool for awareness-raising and communication on the Atlantic strategy and action plan, including any revised version of the latter. The evaluation suggests refocusing the plan and prioritising areas of greatest added value. This could include closer cooperation between decision-makers, funding authorities and business operators in the coastal regions, who to a large extent formulate and carry out maritime development projects and initiatives, and/or make funding decisions (including under the EU structural funds). Also, project promoters should be given tailored support to identify funding opportunities and access resources for developing funding

proposals and business projects. Lastly, greater synergy with existing collaborative networks, such as the European Enterprise Network, may help to extend the community of stakeholders and maritime operators.

#### **4. LESSONS LEARNT**

On the basis of the above assessment, various lessons can be drawn regarding the planning, governance and implementation of the action plan in the future.

##### **4.1. Improving the architecture and coherence of the action plan**

As shown by the mid-term review, the objectives of the current action plan are too broad. In order to improve the design and policy coherence, it could help to identify a limited number of more specific and realistic objectives, which could be aligned with overarching global and EU priorities. It might also help to sharpen the thematic focus and to put more emphasis on concrete projects that tackle challenges, in particular those with a transnational dimension. These improvements could help make the plan more effective in preparation for the new, post-2020 context.

##### **4.2. Developing a framework for monitoring and evaluating performance**

The mid-term review has identified the lack of a monitoring framework as one of the key weaknesses of the action plan and pointed to the need to establish a set of key performance indicators relevant to the Atlantic coastal regions in order to measure progress in its implementation.

In particular, it seems that it would help to set up a solid monitoring system building on the integrated territorial investment tools (so called ‘ITI’) used in Spain<sup>115</sup> and Portugal<sup>116</sup> to help monitor how investments and initiatives contribute to blue growth in the region and raise awareness of the results.

##### **4.3. Strengthening governance and better involving regions**

To strengthen governance of the action plan, it seems that the ASG should continue to consolidate alliances between its members, while leaving enough flexibility and scope for giving a voice to regional or local stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, business and members of civil society. Improving the effectiveness of the governance body might involve tasking it with drawing up a coordinated strategy for aligning relevant national

---

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.dgfc.sepg.minhfp.gob.es/sitios/dgfc/es-ES/ipr/fcp1420/p/ITIAzul/Paginas/ITIAzul.aspx>

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.dgpm.mm.gov.pt/itimar-qr>



funding decisions and instruments with the maritime dimension in the new, post-2020 context. Experience from EU macro-regional strategies with a strong maritime component<sup>117</sup> suggests that such proactive engagement by national authorities can create a basis for useful ministerial meetings to take stock of implementation and reconfirm or re-orient political priorities.

Lastly, to tackle transnational environmental challenges, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and increase innovation potential in coastal regions that will attract young talent, consideration could be given to engaging with non-EU regions in the Atlantic.

#### **4.4. Improving communication on the action plan**

The mid-term review has highlighted the need to update the architecture and optimise the tasks of the Atlantic assistance mechanism in order to improve the action plan communication strategy. To this end, the plan may benefit from the existence of a visible communication platform (e.g. webpage, social media, annual stakeholder conferences, national events) and tailored support helping project promoters to identify EU funding opportunities and access private investment. In addition, maintaining the assistance mechanism may help in providing regular updates about challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the plan. Improving communication and widening the support base for the action plan will involve working with well-known networks for engagement with specialised stakeholder groups, such as the European Enterprise Network, FARNET, regional and local clusters, and national/regional contact persons working for Interreg programmes.

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

This staff working document has looked at how the Atlantic action plan has performed to date. The mid-term review and underlying study aim to offer a basis for discussion with the participating countries on the way forward in structured cooperation on maritime affairs in the Atlantic area, including in view of the post-2020 context (new multiannual financial framework and an EU of 27 Member States). Depending on Member States' willingness to revise the plan, the Commission may consider organising a series of meetings with them and consult stakeholders in the coastal regions with a view to addressing the weaknesses identified here.

---

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/>; <http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/>

## ANNEX I

### SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ATLANTIC ACTION PLAN

In the context of its mid-term review of the Atlantic action plan (AAP), the Commission carried out a public consultation on the implementation of the plan between **29 June and 29 September 2017**, using a number of tools to maximise visibility and foster participation. The Atlantic assistance mechanism organised a campaign to raise awareness of the consultation<sup>118</sup> and respondents were able to fill in a questionnaire or submit a position paper via a dedicated website, which also provided links to the main documents relating to the plan.<sup>119</sup> The Commission designed the questionnaire to collect views on the first years of the plan's implementation (focusing on effectiveness, efficiency and EU added value) and to gather ideas for its further development.

Overall, **25 organisations and 13 individuals** from 11 countries responded to the consultation in four languages. Of the 25 replies from organisations, over half were from public authorities, while the rest were from research and academic bodies, NGOs, private enterprises and professional associations. In addition to the official replies, two Member States have submitted position papers on the review of the action plan, while two organisations submitted free-text responses by e-mail. While their views were considered for the review, their feedback is not reflected in the quantitative overview (below) of the answers to the questionnaire. Likewise, while the individuals' responses were fed into the review process, they are not included in the summary table. However, all replies submitted using the questionnaire are published online.<sup>120</sup>

The Commission would like to thank all respondents for their contributions. These confirm the starting assumption that the action plan is still relevant and reflects the wide range of needs and challenges across the Atlantic area, all of which continue to apply. However, experience of its implementation has highlighted various gaps that need to be addressed.

While views vary on how best to do this, contributors agree that revising some of the priorities could be a step in the right direction, that efforts to direct greater funding to action plan priorities and coordinate existing instruments should continue and that the governance

---

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.atlanticstrategy.eu/en>

<sup>119</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-implementation-atlantic-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-implementation-atlantic-action-plan_en)

<sup>120</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-implementation-atlantic-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-implementation-atlantic-action-plan_en)

structure needs to be optimised and leave scope for giving a voice to relevant regional or local stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, business and members of civil society. At the same time, the respondents confirmed that the EU has an important role to play in the context of implementation.

**Summary of quantifiable responses received from organisations**

	More positive/ agreement <sup>121</sup>	Unsure or more negative/ disagreement <sup>122</sup>
<hr/> Regarding the 10 specific objectives of the AAP, do these still correspond to the needs in the Atlantic area?		
Priority 1		
▪ Sharing knowledge between higher education organisations, companies and research centres	22	1
▪ Boosting competitiveness and innovation capacities in the maritime economy of the Atlantic area	22	1
▪ Supporting the adaptation and diversification of economic activities by promoting the potential of the Atlantic area	22	1
Priority 2		
▪ Improving maritime safety and security	18	5
▪ Exploring and protecting marine waters and coastal zones	22	1
▪ Sustainable management of marine resources	23	0
▪ Exploring the potential of renewable energy potential of the Atlantic area's marine and coastal environment	19	4
Priority 3		
▪ Promoting cooperation between ports	18	5
Priority 4		
▪ Promoting better knowledge of social challenges in the Atlantic area	21	2
▪ Preserving and promoting the Atlantic's cultural heritage	22	1
<hr/> Do you believe that the priorities and objectives of the AAP reflect the areas in which there is the most need for co-operation?		
	23	0
<hr/>		

<sup>121</sup> Consolidated score of ‘To a large extent’, ‘Somewhat’, ‘Yes, very much so’, ‘Yes, somewhat’.

<sup>122</sup> Consolidated score of ‘To a small extent’, ‘Not at all’, ‘No, not really’, ‘No, not at all’, ‘I don’t know’.

<hr/> Has the AAP been able to achieve any of the following results?		
Federating stakeholders in the Atlantic area around a common set of priorities	14	9
Contributing to the development of new networks or communities of actors around specific priorities of the AAP	13	10
Providing guidance to policy developments at EU and national level in the Atlantic area in line with AAP priorities	13	10
Supporting the development of new projects in line with the AAP's priorities	9	14
Creating new opportunities for financing relevant projects (e.g. alignment of EU and national funding sources with AAP priorities)	8	15
<hr/> To what extent has the AAP influenced policy developments in line with its priorities at:		
EU level (e.g. Integrated Maritime Policy, fisheries and environmental policy)	16	7
national level (e.g. national policy developments in relevant fields)	13	10
regional/local level (e.g. regional/local policy developments in relevant fields)	11	12
EU level (e.g. H2020, COSME, LIFE+, EMFF Blue Calls, etc.)	17	6
EU level regarding financial instruments (EFSI, EIPP, InnovFin, etc.)	7	16
macro-regional level regarding territorial cooperation programmes (Interreg)	15	8
national level with regard to EU structural funds (ERDF, ESF, EMFF, etc.)	12	11
national or regional level with regards to national funding sources	9	14
the private sector to mobilise financing towards AAP priorities	9	14
<hr/> To what extent has the international dimension of the AAP contributed to:		
the better understanding of the Atlantic Ocean?	15	8
the promotion of international cooperation on issues at stake in the Atlantic?	20	3
the start of new partnerships among stakeholders?	18	5
encouraging a transatlantic research alliance?	15	8
attracting additional funding for studying the Atlantic Ocean?	10	13
<hr/> Overall, to what extent has the AAP achieved its key priorities in terms of:		
promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in the Atlantic area	17	6
protecting the Atlantic marine and coastal environment	16	7
securing the Atlantic coastal environment (e.g. security, safety)	14	9
sustainably developing the full potential of the Atlantic marine environment	16	7
improving accessibility and connectivity	12	10
creating a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development	11	12

<hr/>		
What are the main bottlenecks regarding the implementation of the AAP?		
Limited access to funding to support projects of relevance to the AAP	17	6
Lack of proper support and guidance for project promoters	13	10
Limited ownership of the AAP by national authorities	17	6
Limited ownership of the AAP by regional/local authorities	16	7
Limited ownership of the AAP by stakeholders on the ground	18	5
Lack of knowledge of the AAP	19	4
Limited private sector involvement	17	6
Inefficiency of the governance structure	11	12
<hr/>		
Have you had direct contact with the support provided through the assistance mechanism (incl. 'National Unit' or contact point)?	16	7
<hr/>		
How useful is the Atlantic assistance mechanism for the implementation of the AAP in terms of:		
informing about the AAP and its objectives (e.g. conferences, workshops, etc.)	16	7
understanding the AAP and its objectives	15	8
assisting project ideas development	10	13
providing guidance about the available funding sources	15	8
providing quick answers to queries (helpdesk)	14	9
facilitating partnerships and networking	15	8
<hr/>		
Do you believe the AAP has allowed the area to accomplish more than what could be achieved by the Member States individually?	17	6
<hr/>		
Concerning any positive developments brought about by the AAP, would these be likely to persist in absence of an AAP?	12	11
<hr/>		
If the AAP ended tomorrow, would this have a significant negative impact on the Atlantic area?	17	6
<hr/>		