



EU International Ocean Governance Forum



THEMATIC WORKING GROUP 2

REDUCING PRESSURE ON THE OCEAN AND SEAS AND CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE 'BLUE' ECONOMY

The importance of a clean, healthy and productive ocean as a **vital support system for all life as well as for sustainable development is recognised**. Nevertheless, marine ecosystems remain under many significant pressures that result in cumulative impact on their biodiversity and the functionalities of the ocean. This is, in consequence, a threat to life on earth and an impediment to sustainable development. These pressures originate from maritime sectors (e.g. over-fishing, polluting discharges from resource extraction activities/maritime transport/coastal tourism, noise from exploration activities, litter from fishing and aquaculture, illegal or accidental disposal of waste from ships, microplastics from products) and from many land-based sectors and human activities (e.g. industry, agriculture, or consumption) often located far from the ocean. They can be direct pressures on marine ecosystems - via the impacts of human activities on the water cycle (e.g. discharge of unused drugs into the sewage system or the washing out of plastics (from deficient waste management and waste water treatment), and agricultural fertilizers to rivers and then to the sea¹); or indirect pressures via climate change that has harmful impacts on oceans, marine ecosystems and coastlines through ocean warming, acidification, sea-level rise and extreme weather events, as highlighted in the recent IPCC 2019 report.

The degradation of marine ecosystems can have direct **significant economic and social impacts** for countries and services provided to people by the ocean and/or cryosphere including food and water supply, coastal protection, and consequences for health and well-being, cultural values, tourism, trade, and other that rely heavily on clean, healthy and productive ocean. This can put at stake sustainable development objectives, and also the development of some of the sectors at the origin of pressures. In addition: (a) **climate change** is likely to impact many functionalities of the ocean, including its buffering role vis a vis climate change, that will affect all of us in the medium to long term (e.g. via changes in biomass production and food chains, ocean currents, melting of the poles' ice...); (b) degraded marine ecosystems and poor status of marine and coastal environment are unlikely

to support sustainable development based on **sustainable blue economies**.

In support of the objectives of the EU's Green Deal and to ensure coherence with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 *Life Below Water*², and other ocean relevant SDGs, as well as other processes such as the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, the Thematic Working Group (TWG) **Reducing pressure on the ocean and seas and creating the conditions for a sustainable blue economy** will focus on key opportunities and points of action in which the EU can play a leading role to strengthen international ocean governance to ensure that the ocean can be clean, healthy and productive. Preliminary issues to be discussed, adapted, refined and added on to with TWG members include:

► **Achieving clean, healthy and productive oceans with a good status of marine environment** → is a prerequisite for any productive ocean-based economy. Irrespective of the efforts invested in reaching this objective, cumulative pressures are such that the status of the marine environment continues to deteriorate. Applying the holistic approach to managing human activities at sea remains a challenge. It is important to discuss how multi-disciplinary marine strategies, implemented in collaboration with Regional Seas Conventions, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and other relevant organisations with complementary mandates, can support the achievement of clean, healthy and productive oceans with a good status of marine environment. These strategies would need to identify ways of adapting to the effects of global warming and to reduce the vulnerability of natural and human systems to climate change effects. Monitoring, reporting and assessments at all levels are crucial in understanding the status of the marine environment and policy- adaptations that may be needed to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

► **Global agreement on plastics - circular economy as enabler of blue economy** → Between 8 million tonnes and 13 million tonnes of plastic enter the oceans each year. Most of it comes from land-based sources. UNEP esti-

mates that damage to marine environments is at least USD8 billion per year globally. With plastic production expected to double again over the next 20 years, it is estimated that by 2050, under current production and waste management trends, 12 billion tonnes of plastic waste will be in landfills or in the natural environment. It is clear that any action focused solely on waste management aspects is unlikely to bring about positive change on a global scale. Many initiatives and legal instruments aim at addressing the problem of plastic pollution however, they do so by targeting only some aspects of the problem or a specific geographic sea-region (transboundary movement of plastic waste covered by the Basel convention, IMO Action Plan against marine litter, activities under Regional Seas Conventions against marine litter). Despite these efforts, regulatory gap at the global level continues to exist. There is still no dedicated agreement at the global level in place that is specifically designed to prevent plastic pollution (both from land and sea based sources, including microplastics) by covering the entire life-cycle of plastics (product design, sustainable consumption and production, waste management) in order to make it resource efficient and to enable long-term circular use of plastics products.

► **Unfolding the climate and ocean nexus** → Measures are taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all relevant (including maritime) sectors (attenuation). At the same time the development of nature-based solutions that increase the resilience of the ocean and its ecosystems to climate change is supported including through Marine Protected Areas and other effective area-based tools, such as integrated coastal zone management and maritime spatial planning). However, climate change is not yet fully internalised in operational tools (e.g. Environmental Impact Assessments, including cumulative assessments), that can support the sustainable management of marine ecosystems. More efforts and innovative solutions are required for embedding mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change in the diversity of regulations, agreements and instruments of marine/maritime and land-based sectors. The challenge here is to shift from isolated pilot solutions and good practice to a collective shift to climate change mainstreaming.

1 The majority of plastics in our oceans is from land sources.

2 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



► **Managing ocean food resources sustainably** →

Supporting the sustainable management of ocean food resources requires a combination of initiatives addressing different components of ocean governance, including efforts to restore fish stocks and marine ecosystems, particularly those with high biomass potential, strengthening the role of regional players (e.g. regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and Regional Sea Conventions (RSCs)), halting harmful subsidies contributing to overfishing and seizing opportunities (e.g. vessel tracking) for addressing effectively (bilaterally, regionally or at international levels) illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

► **Creating the right conditions for supporting sustainable blue economies** →

More and targeted efforts are required to support blue economy initiatives that are truly “sustainable”, building *inter alia* on coordinated efforts and frameworks (e.g. among managers/policy makers, stakeholders, business and local communities, donors...), sound (participatory and transparent) processes and (ex-ante and ex-post) assessments, and financing conditionalities, that give priority to sustainable blue economies. Attention is required for mechanisms that deliver equitable share of the opportunities and benefits that arise from blue growth, and in particular ensuring that blue economies deliver value and societal benefits to local communities.

► **Managing marine space sustainably**

→ Managing pressures at sea requires spatial planning, with a specific focus on land-sea interactions and the coastal zone, underpinned by the ecosystem-based approach and backed by good scientific advice. Pressures from individual sectors and their cumulative impacts, the vulnerability of marine ecosystems (e.g. biodiversity hotspots), their intrinsic value (including

e.g. rarity or high ecological importance) and the services they deliver have to be accounted for in this regard. While an increasing number of area-based management tools (ABMTs) are put in place, their establishment and implementation, especially (but not only) in the high seas, remains uncoordinated and often lack proper management plans, and as a result are not delivering in terms of the overall protection of ocean ecosystem and socio-economic development or reducing risks for private blue growth investors. In some cases, mechanisms for supporting multifunctional multisectoral marine platforms, such as integrated coastal zone management and maritime spatial planning, can help to limit pressures from human activities to more reduced areas, thus facilitating the protection and restoration of high value marine ecosystems.

► **Identify and promote critical enablers for driving changes** →

Effective ocean governance to reduce pressures and support sustainable blue economies depends on various factors, including: good scientific knowledge (e.g. of oceans and their ecosystems, biological connectivity, cumulative impacts, etc.), adequate methods and technologies for monitoring and enforcement of regulations, adequate human, institutional and financial capacities, ocean literacy – including at high political level to deliver political will and comprehensive governance strategies that can support coordinated and informed action. Identifying such conditions for successful action within ocean governance and further developing and making use of these critical enablers for action should also be considered, in particular conditions that will accelerate the achievement of the SDG14, and other ocean relevant SDGs.

How will TWG2 operate?

Members of the TWG are selected on the basis of their expertise and are invited to participate in their personal capacity (i.e. not as representative of institutions or stakeholder groups, Chatham-house rules will apply during the discussions). TWG2 members will be invited to participate in 1-2 working group meetings per year, including the first IOG Forum in Brussels, 22-24 April 2020. Additional exchanges that might be required will be organized through web conference meetings to reduce the burden of travel.

TWG2 will produce a report on options for reducing pressure on the ocean and seas and creating the conditions for a sustainable blue economy that will be presented and discussed at a forthcoming IOG Forum. This report will identify key challenges to be addressed, identify possible solutions as well as conditions for their effective implementation, and put forward options for the EU how to best support global efforts. The recommendations will inform the further development of the EU's IOG Agenda. TWG2 members will provide their expertise and contribute to written outputs of the TWG, including through short written contributions, comments and reviews, linking to and ensuring consistency with TWG1 and 3. The final responsibility for drafting the reports and discussion papers lies with the TWG2 Secretariat.

Whilst TWG2 will focus on the issues outlines above and/or other issues to be agreed by the TWG, it will also address transversal issues in close cooperation with the other TWGs, in particular dealing with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including partnerships and (cross-sectoral) cooperation; capacity building, drivers to accelerate action; innovative financing; and building an effective knowledge base to support decision ■



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 <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/maritimeforum/en/frontpage/1469>