

# OCEANA priorities on maritime affairs and fisheries



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## Introduction

European oceans are highly threatened by both pollution and dramatic loss of marine species and habitats. However, key drivers of the degradation of ocean ecosystems are overfishing and the existing harmful fishing practices.

Increasing human impacts such as climate change, increased industrial use of the oceans, pollution and ocean acidification add pressure to the marine ecosystems. At the same time, ecosystem resilience has declined, making it more difficult for ecosystems to recover from such impacts.

The resilience<sup>1</sup> of ocean ecosystems has already declined due to loss of biodiversity and dramatic changes in species composition. Oceans and their valuable ecosystems and biodiversity play a critical role in maintaining the climate and coastal areas, where most of the fish is caught, and must serve as crucial carbon storage areas.

The Marine Strategy Directive stresses that good environmental status shall be reached by applying an “ecosystem-based approach” to fisheries management

The ecosystem approach to ocean management must be based on the precautionary principle, which mainly involves applying precautionary management measures when there is a lack of scientific knowledge or advice. Fisheries must not operate without management measures and new fisheries should only operate when there is proof that they do not harm the ecosystem.

## Fisheries

### Common Fisheries Policy

The overarching objective of the Common fisheries policy must be long-term ecological sustainability in order to meet the obligation to achieve the Good Environmental Status of European Seas by 2020. The rebuilding and protection of ocean ecosystems and the recovery of ocean biodiversity must be the leading principle of the new Common Fisheries Policy as healthy ocean ecosystems are a prerequisite for a prospering economically and socially sustainable fishing industry. Oceana further recommends:

- The implementation of the precautionary principle and an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.
- Fisheries in European Union waters and by European Union vessels should only be carried out if ecologically sustainable management measures are established based on the best available scientific information.
- The restoration of depleted fish stocks to MSY by 2015. Replace MSY as a management objective for fisheries. Fisheries should be managed under the ecosystem-based approach and by integrating the precautionary principle.
- The eradication of by-catch and discards in European Union waters and by European Union vessels.
- Eliminate IUU fishing in the European Union and by EU vessels. Close the European market for IUU caught fish and seafood; prohibit trade with IUU caught fish.
- Manage the "external element" of the fishing fleet within the Common Fisheries Policy under the aim of protecting oceans biodiversity and rebuilding third countries ocean ecosystems towards a good environmental status of the oceans.
- Eliminate environmental harmful fisheries subsidies and introduce legally binding goals for a substantial capacity reduction of the fleet.

**TACs and Quotas**

The system of total allowable catches (TACs) is repeatedly being criticised, and some proposals have been made to dismantle it.

Oceana thinks that the management –not the system- of the TAC and quota system has proven ineffective in improving the state of marine resources. But while criticism about the system is increasing, the factors that hinder the correct TAC operation are not taken into consideration, although they are widely known. The fact is that scientific advice is consistently ignored.

78% of scientific recommendations on TACs for European Union fish stocks have been continuously ignored. Over the last 20 years, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has produced over 1,500 scientific opinions for the EU and other governments in the North-East Atlantic for the correct management of fish stocks. However, only 350 (22%) have been properly translated into effective catch limits.

**Commercial species**

Scientists continue to recommend the closing of important fisheries and this advice has increased over 25% in the last 5 years. This year, scientists recommend closing the following fisheries: cod in the Irish Sea, west of Scotland and the Kattegat; herring in the northeast of the British Isles; anchovy in the Cantabrian Sea; anglerfish in the Iberian Peninsula, and sole and whiting in the Irish Sea, among others.

**Sharks:** The Fisheries Council recognized that effective regulation, management and conservation of shark fisheries are required to ensure sustainable exploitation. As a result, the Fisheries Council noted that proper action must be taken without delay. Oceana recommends that the following issues be promoted and furthered.

- Focuses on implementing the Shark Plan of Action
- Amendment of Council Regulation (EC) 1185/2003 on the removal of fins from sharks onboard vessels.
- Protection of threatened shark species and their habitats

**Bluefin tuna:** The collapse of the Eastern bluefin tuna stock is the most imminent and clear example of how the lack of political will associated with a disregard for scientific recommendations, could compromise a species' survival on the planet.

- Close fisheries until recover stock independently of CITES resolution.
- Declaration of marine reserves in relevant spawning areas of this species should be considered as a top priority

**Swordfish:** it is one of the species subjected to levels of overexploitation that threaten the Mediterranean stock's short-term viability.

- To lead the adoption of a comprehensive management plan for swordfish in the Mediterranean, in accordance with the stock status, that will guarantee a sustainable exploitation of this resource.

## Marine Habitats

Less than 1% of the European marine waters are currently legally protected. Biodiversity loss and extinction of species are accelerating at critically unsustainable levels. At present, many of the marine protected areas barely reach a surface area of one square kilometer and they are, mostly, in coastal areas, making them inefficient for conserving certain habitats and species. The EU is signatory to a large number of international Conventions mandating biodiversity protection, however implementation of commitments in EU waters remains poor and the EU lacks leadership at the international level.

The Habitats Directive (92/43/CEE) has been so far either poorly implemented or delayed as result of political compromises. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) requires that at least 10% of the world's marine and coastal ecoregions be legally protected by 2012.

- As required by the Convention on Biological Diversity, a minimum of 10% of the oceans must be designated Marine Protected Areas by 2012. Marine reserves should be expanded from 20% to 30% as recommended by the IUCN.
- To use of Maritime Spatial Planning to ensure management for 100% of European Union waters, to enhance the protection of marine protected areas under European legislation, and to ensure the ecosystem-based approach to the management of all human activities that have an impact on the marine environment.
- To advocate for the need to get a real representative and coherent marine-protected area network, by expanding many of the existing areas, and also new offshore and larger zone additions to the MPA network.
- Securing regular discussions on the status of marine conservation and protection at Council, and with stakeholders with a view to immediate implementation of existing rules by the Member States

## Clean energy

The oceans absorb roughly 30% of global carbon emissions and 80% of the heat generated by increased levels of greenhouse gases<sup>2</sup>, thereby mitigating some of the climate change that would otherwise occur. As a result of climate change, ocean water temperature has already increased significantly and recent scientific studies show that climate change leads to increased ocean acidification.

The higher acidity can affect growth, reproduction, disease resistance and the other biological and physiological processes in many species, including corals, pteropods and some types of coccolitophores, which are essential elements for healthy oceans ecosystem and balanced marine food. Acidification will have serious consequences on a number of economic activities such as tourism, fisheries and coastal development.

- Development of plans for future EU marine energy, especially offshore wind energy. Offshore wind power is vital for Europe's future and provides the answer to Europe's energy and climate dilemma, exploiting an abundant energy resource which does not emit greenhouse gases and reduces dependence on increasingly costly fuel imports.
- Ocean acidification to be fostered in EU climate change policies, with a dedicated EU scientific assessment applied and a high-level technical working group set up.

<sup>1</sup> The resilience of ocean ecosystems describes the oceans ability to recover from impacts and disturbances.

<sup>2</sup> Nellemann, C., Corcoran, E., Duarte, C. M., Valdés, L., DeYoung, C., Fonseca, L., Grimsditch, G. 2009. Blue Carbon. A Rapid Response Assessment. The role of healthy oceans in binding carbon. UNEP 2009.