

EBCD & EESC PARTNERSHIP EVENT

On the road to UNOC3: How can the upcoming European Ocean pact advance ocean sustainability?

05/05/2025

In a nutshell:

On May 5th, EBCD in partnership with the **European Economic and Social Committee** organised a high-level event to explore how the upcoming **European Oceans Pact** could advance **global ocean sustainability** at the **3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3)**. With UNOC-3 set to convene in Nice in June 2025 under the theme “**Accelerating Action and Mobilizing All Actors to Conserve and Sustainably Use the Ocean,**” this event provided a timely platform to address sustainable use of our ocean. The discussion focused on the EU’s commitments to **SDG 14 (Life Below Water)**, its leadership via the upcoming European Ocean Pact, promotion of blue foods, as well as synergies, trade-offs and opportunities between various blue economy sectors. As the EU finalises its European Ocean Pact, this event brought together policy-makers, experts, and blue economy stakeholders to discuss how the Pact could enhance the EU’s contributions to UNOC-3. Special attention was given to strengthening regional and sub-regional cooperation, advancing sustainable ocean-based blue economies, and promoting the role of sustainable food from the ocean for food security, nutrition and to achieve SDGs. The discussion contributed to shaping the EU’s engagement at UNOC-3 and ensuring that the European Ocean Pact serves as a strategic tool for advancing ocean sustainability.

Agenda:

Moderators: Alexandra Philippe & Ilias Grampas (EBCD)

14.00 - 14.10 Introductory remarks:

- EESC member responsible for the opinion on the Ocean Pact, **Javier Garat** – presentation of the opinion
- **Ilias Grampas** – Deputy Director EBCD

14.10 - 14.40 Key notes:

- European Commission – **Costas Kadis**, Commissioner for Fisheries and Ocean (video message)
- European Parliament – **Stéphanie Yon-Courtin** (video message)

14.40 – 15.40 Panel 1: How to conciliate conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean to achieve SDG 14 through the Ocean Pact?

Moderator: Alexandra Philippe – EBCD

Presentation: The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, balancing conservation and sustainable development within planetary boundaries – A footprint for the Ocean Pact – **Mark Dickey Collas** (Chair IUCN FEG)

Discussions:

- **Christophe Tytgat** – Secretary General of SEA Europe
- **Rosalie Tukker** – Europêche

- **Béatrice Gorez** – Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements
- **Luisa Puccio** – ECSA

15.40 – 16.10: Coffee Break

16.10 – 17.10 Panel 2: The Ocean Pact – Breaking the silos and addressing the trade-offs – How to ensure that all ocean ecosystem services (food security, energy security, health, etc) are considered in UNOC 3?

Moderator: Ilias Grampas – EBCD

Presentation: Maritime spatial planning and ecosystem-based approach to achieve SDG14 – **Vanessa Stelzenmüller** (Thünen Institute)

Discussions:

- **Leonard Mizzi** – Head of Unit Sustainable Agri-food systems and Fisheries at DG INTPA (European Commission)
- **Pablo Cadarso** – Data Intelligence and Market Analyst at Conxemar
- **Szilvia Mihalffy** – FEAP
- **Mattia Cecchinato** – Offshore Wind Manager at Wind Europe
- **Jacob Armstrong** – Manager on Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office

17.10 – 17.30 Closing remarks:

- **Rosa Chapel** – Executive Director of CETMAR
- **Alexandra Philippe & Ilias Grampas** – EBCD

6 take-home messages:

1. The European Ocean Pact must be a strategic, inclusive, and actionable tool for ocean sustainability.

- It should bridge policy silos and align environmental protection with industrial competitiveness, food security, and social equity.
- Implementation must be backed by robust governance, stakeholder participation, and measurable outcomes—not just communication.

2. Coherence and integration across sectors are critical to reconcile ocean use and conservation.

- The Pact should promote cross-sectoral cooperation, particularly between fisheries, aquaculture, offshore energy, maritime transport, and conservation.
- Practical tools like ecosystem-based maritime spatial planning and co-management are essential.

3. The Global Biodiversity Framework offers a clear model for balancing conservation and sustainable use.

- The GBF is a comprehensive framework that includes 23 targets that goes beyond the 30x30 goals that aims at reducing threats while taking into consideration human needs.
- The GBF highlights the need to reduce threats (e.g. pollution, climate change) while recognising the ocean's role in supporting human well-being and livelihoods.

4. Unlocking sustainable ocean use requires investment, skills, and data.

- Stakeholders called for de-risking private investment, simplifying regulation, and scaling up clean technologies and blue food systems.
- Workforce renewal, upskilling, and ocean literacy are essential to meet current and future challenges.

5. Fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal communities must be at the heart of EU ocean governance.

- These sectors are not peripheral—they are essential for food security, culture, and resilience in coastal regions.
- The Ocean Pact must support inclusive maritime spatial planning, co-management, and fair access to funding and decision-making.

Summary of the discussions

Keynote speeches

Javier Garat - Member of the European Economic and Social Committee EESC Member

Javier Garat opened the event by welcoming participants and by acknowledging the strong collaboration with the European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD). He noted that the event followed a public hearing that had helped shape the Committee's opinion on the European Ocean Pact, which was adopted in the plenary session on March 23rd. In presenting the opinion, Garat stated that the EESC welcomes the Oceans Pact as one of the European Commission's new priorities. The Committee advocates for a comprehensive approach that combines economic competitiveness with environmental sustainability and social equity—particularly relevant for coastal communities across the EU. He outlined the multiple challenges facing these regions, including economic shocks from the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, Ukraine war, and climate-induced disasters. These events have disrupted supply chains, inflated energy prices, and strained maritime industries. Internally, increasing regulation and red tape have further weakened business competitiveness. Socially, many coastal areas are experiencing demographic decline, youth migration, and labour shortages. Garat stressed the need to improve working conditions and ensure fair access to services to make blue economy sectors more attractive and inclusive. Environmentally, he underlined the urgent need to protect marine ecosystems and resources while recognising the crucial role of oceans in climate resilience. To meet these challenges, the Committee calls for a sustainable and competitive blue economy based on innovation, marine research, and balanced resource use. Legislative simplification and reduced bureaucracy—especially for SMEs—are key. The Committee also supports stronger investment in maritime industries, innovation hubs, and local supply chains to foster EU strategic autonomy in food, energy, and transport. Garat recommended establishing a European Action Plan for Blue Food by 2026 to integrate low-carbon seafood into food policy, alongside tighter import controls to uphold sustainability standards. He also proposed creating an industrial alliance for the blue economy value chain and called for decarbonising maritime sectors by strengthening shipbuilding, infrastructure, and advanced technologies. He welcomed the Energy Transition Partnership for Fisheries and Aquaculture and highlighted the promise of tidal and wave energy, which he argued should receive greater support due to their low ecological impact and compatibility with fishing activities. In terms of funding, Garat urged more grants and investment to support innovation and community development, suggesting EU Emissions Trading System revenues be used to advance the maritime energy transition. While acknowledging the achievements of the Common Fisheries Policy, he noted that 70% of seafood consumed in the EU comes from third-countries. He emphasised the importance of boosting domestic sustainable production and aligning import standards with EU regulations. Balanced reform and economic incentives are needed to guide the transition. On education and workforce development, Garat called for more investment in blue economy skills and harmonised certification across the EU to enhance mobility and competitiveness. He also encouraged greater ocean literacy to raise awareness, especially among young people. Finally, he proposed establishing marine innovation hubs and a European Ocean Observatory to centralise data and support evidence-based policymaking. He emphasised the EU's role in leading international negotiations on ocean governance, including the plastics treaty, fisheries subsidies, and the implementation of biodiversity agreements. Concluding his

remarks, Garat wished participants productive discussions and, in his customary fashion, encouraged everyone to enjoy eating seafood—for both health and happiness.

Ilias Grampas – Deputy Director of EBCD

The session continued with remarks from **Ilias Grampas** who thanked Mr. Javier Garat for his thoughtful introduction and welcomed participants on behalf of the EBCD. He emphasised the timeliness of the discussion, as preparations advance for the upcoming United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3) in Nice, France. He acknowledged the complex challenges already outlined by Mr. Garat, stressing that coastal communities across Europe are grappling with interconnected environmental, economic, and social pressures. These include the degradation of marine ecosystems, the growing burden of regulations, and demographic issues such as youth migration. In response to these challenges, he underscored the need for more ocean science, inclusive partnerships, better access to funding, and the promotion of innovation and technology. He affirmed that these priorities reflect the EBCD's broader vision and align with the core purpose of the event. He welcomed the European Economic and Social Committee's call for action, particularly regarding the proposed Action Plan on Blue Foods. UNOC 3, he stated, presents a critical opportunity for the global community to move from ambitions to concrete actions. The theme of the conference—*Our Ocean, Our Future, Our Responsibility*—captures the collective effort needed to safeguard ocean health and secure sustainable livelihoods. He went on to explain that EBCD has played a central role in all United Nations Ocean Conferences since their inception. In the lead-up to UNOC 3, the organisation remains actively involved in coordinating side events and contributing to key policy inputs. EBCD has specifically worked to promote ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM), encourage cooperation at regional and subregional levels, and highlight the role of blue foods in advancing both SDG 1 (poverty eradication) and SDG 2 (food security). Within this global momentum, he argued that the European Union has a unique and essential role to play. The European Ocean Pact can act as a cornerstone of EU leadership in ocean governance. EBCD has already contributed input to both the EESC and the European Commission regarding the pact. He welcomed the initiative's strategic focus on three central pillars: the health and resilience of marine ecosystems, the development of a sustainable blue economy—including fisheries and aquaculture—and the advancement of ocean knowledge, science, and innovation. Bringing these elements together, he emphasised that the European Ocean Pact should reflect the EU's commitment to policy coherence and a balanced approach to ocean use. It must combine ecological conservation with sustainable economic activity. He reminded the audience that the ocean is a living system supporting millions of livelihoods worldwide, and that all sea users—whether in fisheries, energy, transport, tourism, or biotechnology—play an indispensable role in achieving SDG 14. He highlighted inclusiveness as a fundamental principle guiding the vision behind the event. Effective ocean governance, he argued, cannot be achieved without the full participation of those who work on, with, and for the ocean. Policymakers, sea users, and other stakeholders must be involved from the outset—not as observers, but as co-creators of the solutions needed. He concluded by stating that today's event offers a valuable opportunity to advance these objectives. With two expert panels and keynote speeches from the European Commissioner and MEP Stéphanie Yon-Courtin, Vice-Chair of the Fisheries Committee, the agenda is well-positioned to examine how the European Ocean Pact can promote ocean sustainability while aligning ambition with practical reality. Looking ahead to UNOC 3 in Nice, he called on all participants to commit to shaping a modern, inclusive, and coherent ocean agenda—one that fosters innovation and economic opportunity while respecting planetary boundaries. He thanked the audience once more and wished everyone an inspiring and productive event.

Costas Kadis – European commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans

The European Commissioner Kadis delivered a pre-recorded speech addressed to participants at the joint event. He began by expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to speak and conveyed his

regret at not being able to attend in person. He emphasised the relevance of the event's central question, noting that 2025 marks a crucial milestone for ocean sustainability, with only five years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. He acknowledged that progress is falling short and urged renewed commitment and ambition ahead of UNOC 3, scheduled for June. According to the Commissioner, the conference offers a vital opportunity for the international community to demonstrate a shared determination to tackle the triple environmental crisis—climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—through coordinated and decisive action. For UNOC 3 to be a turning point in global ocean governance, he stressed the need to intensify efforts and translate previous commitments into concrete results. The European Union, he explained, has established clear priorities. Chief among them is the implementation of agreements reached over the past two years. He highlighted the BBNJ Agreement, which was recently proposed for integration into EU law by the Commission. This agreement aims to protect marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and its incorporation into EU legislation will support member states in aligning their national frameworks accordingly. The Commissioner also underlined the urgency of concluding other major international negotiations, including a binding global treaty to reduce plastic pollution and an agreement to eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies. Both are seen as essential tools in halting environmental degradation and ensuring long-term sustainability of ocean resources. Beyond legal instruments, he stated that UNOC 3 represents a valuable occasion to strengthen the global science-policy interface for the ocean. To this end, the European Commission supports the development of an international platform for ocean sustainability (IPOS) that would reinforce evidence-based decision-making. A key highlight of his remarks was the upcoming presentation of the European Ocean Pact at UNOC 3. He explained that the Pact is designed to provide coherence across all EU ocean-related policies, while establishing a robust governance framework to guide its implementation. The Pact will address a wide range of challenges—both existing and emerging—by focusing on several priority areas. These include protecting ocean health, promoting a sustainable blue economy, building a strong marine knowledge base, enhancing international ocean governance, reinforcing maritime security, and supporting coastal and island communities. He emphasised that ocean health will be a foundational element of the Pact. Without safeguarding the ocean's ecological integrity, he warned, it will be impossible to unlock its full potential for climate regulation, food production, and economic activity. The Commissioner expressed hope that the Ocean Pact will serve as a leading example of science-based, inclusive, and effective governance, with sustainability at its core. He concluded by reiterating that presenting the Pact at UNOC 3 is only the beginning. True progress, he affirmed, will require collective effort to ensure full implementation in the years ahead. A thriving, resilient ocean, he added, is not only essential for global environmental health but also for Europe's economic competitiveness, security, and the wellbeing of its coastal communities. He closed his message by wishing participants a successful event and expressing his hope to meet many of them in person in Nice.

Stéphanie Yon-Courtin – MEP (Renew Europe) – Vice-Chair of the PECH Committee

In her address to the event hosted by the European Bureau for Conservation and Development and the European Economic and Social Committee, she began by expressing gratitude for the initiative and regretted her inability to attend in person due to commitments in Strasbourg for the European Parliament plenary session. She appreciated the opportunity to contribute a few words to such a timely discussion, noting the urgency of the moment. With the European Ocean Pact soon to be unveiled and UNOC 3 approaching, she emphasised that now is the time to clearly define expectations for these major milestones concerning the ocean and the communities that depend on it. She recalled that the European Parliament, particularly through her political group Renew Europe, has long championed stronger ocean policy, having been among the first to advocate for a “Blue Deal.” That vision, she explained, is now on the brink of becoming reality with the forthcoming European Ocean Pact. In March, Renew Europe adopted its position paper—an initiative she led—which lays out concrete proposals and a clear vision for the Pact. Central to this vision is the need for a coordinated, holistic, and coherent approach to ocean and maritime policy at the EU level, which has been lacking thus far.

She stressed that no topic should be off-limits when it comes to the Pact's content. The European Commission, she argued, must be prepared to introduce both legislative and non-legislative measures where necessary. Among the proposals she highlighted were a European strategy for vessel decarbonisation, an action plan on source-to-sea pollution, a green ports initiative, and a strategic dialogue on fisheries and aquaculture. However, she was also clear that the issue often lies not in a lack of legislation but in poor implementation. For this reason, the Ocean Pact must prioritise improving coordination and execution of existing frameworks. She urged the Commission to introduce a robust implementation mechanism to prevent the Pact from becoming yet another non-binding communication that gathers dust in policy drawers. Emphasising the importance of inclusion, she insisted that sea users and all relevant stakeholders to be fully involved in shaping ocean governance and the Pact itself. Speaking in her capacity as Vice Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries, she called on the Commission to ensure that fisheries and aquaculture are fully integrated into the Ocean Pact, addressing the challenges faced by these sectors and recognising the critical role of EU seafood production in strengthening the region's strategic autonomy. She also noted that a successful ocean governance framework cannot be achieved without the active participation of those directly working with the ocean, such as fisheries professionals and coastal regions. In the current geopolitical climate, with some international partners turning away from scientific approaches to ocean management, she stressed that the EU must step forward as a leader in ocean diplomacy, especially during the UNOC 3. Finally, she emphasised the need for determined ambition on the road to UNOC 3. She concluded by reinforcing that the goal is to ensure a healthy ocean for biodiversity, a profitable ocean for blue economies, and a safer ocean to protect European interests. She called the message clear—through the European Ocean Pact, Europe must take the helm in ensuring the sustainability of the ocean, leading international efforts in ocean protection and governance. She wished the event a fruitful discussion and expressed her eagerness to continue working collaboratively on these critical initiatives.

Panel 1: How to conciliate conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean to achieve SDG 14 through the Ocean Pact?

Presentation: The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, balancing conservation and sustainable development within planetary boundaries – A footprint for the Ocean Pact Dr. Mark Dickey Collas - Chair IUCN FEG

Mark Dickey Collas emphasised the significance of the upcoming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and its connection to the European Ocean Pact. He explained that the GBF aims to address biodiversity challenges in marine ecosystems in a way that is equitable and acknowledges the ongoing issues. He first referred to the three pillars of the Ocean Pact, which are healthy and resilient seas, a sustainable blue economy, and fostering knowledge and innovation. He linked these pillars to an ecosystem-based approach, emphasising the importance of protecting ecosystems to ensure that seas remain viable for future generations. He further noted that having a sustainable blue economy and resilient coastal communities is also crucial. Moreover, he pointed out that innovation and knowledge play a critical role in managing the marine environment effectively, whether for fisheries, renewable energy, maritime activities, or tourism. He highlighted the Ocean Pact's focus areas such as ocean governance, decarbonisation, coastal communities, and scientific data, which were also mentioned by Commissioner Kadis. He then shifted his focus to the GBF, which was signed in December 2022 by 196 parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. He clarified that unlike agreements such as the BBNJ treaty, the GBF does not require ratification but instead provides guidance through its various targets. One of the key targets of the GBF is the 30x30 goal, aiming to protect 30% of the seas and oceans by 2030. However, he stressed that the 30% target is not merely a numeric goal—it's about management, equity, and ensuring sustainable development within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures.



He emphasised that the GBF encompasses a wide range of targets beyond the 30x30 goal, focusing on reducing threats to biodiversity, such as pollution, invasive species, and climate change. He also highlighted the shift in approach in the GBF, which moves away from the previous targets that were largely ineffective. He emphasised that the new approach is about collaboration and positive transformation in biodiversity conservation, focusing on protecting biodiversity while ensuring benefits for people. He outlined key aspects such as protecting biodiversity, benefiting people, and understanding how biodiversity can enhance human well-being. He pointed out that the GBF targets the reduction of threats like pollution, climate change, and unsustainable practices, while also addressing the need to manage marine areas sustainably for fisheries and enhance the contribution of blue spaces to people's livelihoods. Dickey-Collas then linked the principles of the GBF to the EU's Ocean Pact, especially emphasising the role of ecosystem-based fisheries management.



He pointed out that the targets of the GBF align well with the Ocean Pact's objectives. He also shared his view that the current polarised debate about maritime industries and conservation is counterproductive. According to Dickey-Collas, it's vital to move away from a polarised approach, recognising that sectors and communities can be a part of the solution for maintaining resilient European seas. He expressed the need for industries and communities to be actively engaged in finding solutions. Dickey-Collas concluded by noting that while there may not always be "win-win" situations, the goal should be to move forward with sustainable use and conservation working hand in hand. He emphasised that a key part of the long-term success of policies will be the meaningful engagement of

communities and ocean users. The message he sought to send to the upcoming UNOC 3 is one of unity, good governance, and innovation, rather than polarisation.



He expressed his optimism about the progress that could be made through collaboration and highlighted that his experience working with various policies, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Common Fisheries Policy, has shown that cooperation leads to more successful outcomes.

Discussions – moderated by Alexandra Philippe (EBCD)

Question 1: Alexandra Philippe asked what “reconciling conservation and sustainable use” actually means in practice from the sector’s perspective

Rosalie Tukker - EU Policy Advisor Européche

Tukker emphasised that discussions about the ocean often focus on biodiversity, conservation, and protection, but they must also include strategic resources such as food, energy, trade, security, and innovation. She noted that these discussions can sometimes remain ideological, whereas what’s needed is a shift toward practical outcomes. In this context, she clarified that the goal is not to stop fishing in marine protected areas, but to ensure it is done sustainably highlighting that sustainable fisheries management is conservation in practice. She pointed out that the fishing sector has significantly reduced its footprint: fleet capacity is down by 30%, the number of full-time fishers has dropped by about 33%, and emissions have decreased by 52%. At the same time, more fish stocks are being fished at or within maximum sustainable yield. Her main point was that sustainability and use are not mutually exclusive, and that fisheries should be seen as solution-oriented and science-based contributors to ocean sustainability.

Christophe Tytgat – Secretary General of SEA Europe

Tytgat responded by agreeing with earlier remarks about the need to move beyond polarisation and ideological narratives, noting that this has often dominated ocean discussions. He welcomed the fact that sea users—and those who produce for them—are now included in the debate. Representing SEA Europe, which voices the interests of shipyards and maritime equipment manufacturers, he stressed the importance of their role in building vessels and platforms for all kinds of users—commercial, military, or otherwise—as well as the onboard systems needed to support transport and blue economy activities. He expressed appreciation that the role of industry, which had been absent from the original Ocean Pact text, is now being acknowledged, calling it a significant step forward. He highlighted SEA Europe’s proposal for an “Industrial Alliance” under the Ocean Pact, aimed at establishing a governance platform where stakeholders and policymakers can come together to align environmental

and industrial priorities. Tytgat concluded by suggesting that such collaboration could lead to win-win solutions.

Béatrice Gorez - Coordinator at Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)

Gorez shared that she works with small-scale fishing communities from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, many of whom are preparing for UNOC 3. These communities are busy coordinating a unified message, which emphasises that governments and decision-makers need to recognise fishers as guardians of the sea. Fishers are not opposed to conservation; instead, they are agents of conservation. This is particularly true in countries where fishing communities are involved in co-management initiatives, which have demonstrated results in terms of ecosystem conservation. The message is that co-management efforts should be counted as progress toward the 30x30 conservation goal, a message that has already been taken up by the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States. These governments have agreed on this approach, and Gorez hopes that the European Union and the European Ocean Pact will follow suit and support this kind of initiative. She also responded to a proposal by Javier Garat about creating an Ocean Observatory, which she thought was very important. She suggested that such an observatory should not only monitor the environmental impacts of human activities but also assess the social impacts, especially on fishing and coastal communities. This would include understanding the cumulative effects of all activities on biodiversity and food security. She emphasised that social impact assessments are particularly crucial in discussions with third countries. On the issue of polarisation, Gorez agreed that working together is essential, but she stressed that it's not enough to merely accept that there will be winners and losers. She proposed that maritime spatial planning (MSP) should allocate enough space for coastal communities and include conflict resolution mechanisms. In regions like Africa and Asia, there are ongoing conflicts between local coastal communities and industries such as maritime transport, aquaculture, and coastal tourism. These conflicts need to be addressed in a way that respects the rights of coastal communities. It's not enough to simply accept winners and losers; conflict resolution strategies need to be put in place, and coastal communities should be well-informed before consenting to any new use of the sea. Adequate funding is also necessary to ensure these processes are successful. Gorez concluded by stressing the need for action, calling for a shift from the European Ocean Pact to a European Ocean Act. She emphasised that all the elements for reconciling ocean conservation and sustainable use must be put into action, and concrete steps must be taken to make this a reality.

Luisa Puccio – Senior Director Shipping Policy & Communications at European Shipowners (ECSA)

Puccio explained that she represents European ship owners at the EU level, with 22 members across the EU and Norway, covering all segments of the shipping industry. She pointed out that shipping is a key part of the blue economy, but as a service sector, it's often not as visible as other sectors like ports or shipbuilding. However, the shipping sector plays a crucial role in meeting people's needs, transporting food, energy, and goods that Europeans use daily. She acknowledged the international competition the shipping sector faces, highlighting that it is essential for the sector to remain competitive while reconciling sustainability goals. She mentioned that the sector has made considerable progress in decarbonisation, with European legislation addressing emissions, and since 2024, shipping has been paying for emissions. Additionally, she noted that there was an agreement in principle at the international level to decarbonise global shipping, with a full agreement expected in October. Puccio agreed with Christophe that it's beneficial to be part of the conversation on blue economy and ocean conservation, as industrial sectors like shipbuilding and shipping have often been excluded. Recently, she's observed greater inclusion of these sectors. She emphasised that in order to improve performance in the shipping sector and contribute to the blue economy, it's important to align the environmental side, energy transition, and sustainability goals with the industrial capacity, particularly in the shipping sector.

Question 2: Alexandra Philippe asked what the Ocean Pact means for their sector and how it can play really a role in promoting cooperation innovation and accountability also across the different sectors.

Christophe Tytgat – Secretary General of SEA Europe

Tytgat emphasised the need for political and policy consistency — or what he called alignment. He noted that while discussions on the European Ocean Pact are ongoing, there are also upcoming talks with DG MOVE and DG GROW on the Industrial Maritime Strategy, an initiative connected to the mission of the Transport Commissioner. This strategy is still a political concept needing further development. He cautioned that these parallel processes must be aligned so that actions on one side (oceans policy) do not undermine outcomes on the other (industrial strategy), and vice versa. Second, he reiterated the call for cooperation and a dedicated platform, repeating his proposal for the creation of an Industrial Alliance that brings together stakeholders and policymakers within the context of the Oceans Pact. Third, he stressed the importance of competitiveness and maintaining an industrial base. He warned that although this may seem distant from ocean sustainability, it's crucial not to ignore. Europe still has a maritime industry, whereas the U.S. is trying to rebuild one that was lost. Europe's biggest competition comes from Asia, where companies often don't face the same environmental constraints. This competition is starting to affect European shipowners, and without a strong, competitive industry in Europe, others with lower environmental standards could take over. Finally, he addressed the issue of finance — both public and private. He acknowledged that decarbonising shipping and moving towards sustainable practices requires significant investment. While public money exists, it is not always used efficiently. He referenced the proposal for a European Blue Technology Fund, which would function alongside the MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework), since the maritime portion of that budget was underused. Christophe Tytgat also stressed that private investment is essential, but private banks often see maritime sectors as risky. Therefore, he advocated for de-risking investments to make them more attractive to commercial lenders.

Luisa Puccio – Senior Director Shipping Policy & Communications at European Shipowners (ECSA)

Puccio emphasised the importance of coherence and consistency between the European Ocean Pact and other key policy initiatives, such as the Maritime Industrial Strategy and the Clean Industrial Deal, which includes shipping as a sector requiring targeted investment under the Sustainable Transport Investment Plan. She echoed Tytgat's point that the industrial base, including both shipbuilders and shipowners, has traditionally been viewed as opposite to conservation. However, she argued that Europe still holds a competitive edge in clean technologies, which are crucial for the shipping sector to meet energy transition goals. Access to clean technologies and fuels is vital not only for competitiveness but also for ocean health and environmental sustainability. She highlighted the joint efforts between shipowners and C-EUROPE (the shipbuilding sector) in advocating for greater investment in clean maritime technologies. She noted a recent joint statement calling for these elements to be included in both the Clean Industrial and Maritime Industrial Strategies. She also stressed the importance of fuel suppliers as a critical — though sometimes overlooked — part of the maritime cluster. Meeting EU and international decarbonisation targets depends on the availability of clean fuels, which currently fall short. This represents both a challenge and an industrial opportunity to build domestic capacity in clean fuel production. On finance, Puccio acknowledged the sector's difficulty in accessing funding due to the long lifespan of maritime assets and the perceived risk associated with emerging clean technologies. This makes private financing particularly difficult to secure. Finally, she raised the issue of skills and labour shortages in the maritime sector. Europe will need to reskill or upskill around 250,000 seafarers by the mid-2030s — part of a global need to reskill 800,000 out of 1.8 million. She called for more focus in the Ocean Pact on ensuring the maritime workforce has the skills necessary to support the energy transition.

Béatrice Gorez - Coordinator at Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)

Gorez emphasised the need for policy coherence across sectors, rather than a fragmented, “siloed” approach. She stressed that competitiveness should not come at the expense of deregulation,

particularly when it comes to upholding strong environmental and social standards in the EU. These standards are crucial, she noted, especially if the EU wants to credibly require equivalent standards for imports, such as seafood. She acknowledged the tension between reducing the regulatory burden on industries and maintaining robust regulations, suggesting there may be legal gaps in the current policy framework that need to be addressed. A potential solution, she proposed, lies in taking decisions at the appropriate level — ideally closer to the communities and sectors affected, whether at a regional or local level. This devolution of decision-making could allow for tailored administrative solutions better suited to specific needs. Gorez also underlined the importance of inclusive maritime spatial planning, where all stakeholders — properly informed and resourced — can participate meaningfully. This would help ensure fair and consensual trade-offs, based on a shared understanding of what's at stake. Finally, she touched on skills and labour concerns, agreeing with others that upskilling is needed — but added that job attractiveness must also be improved. Sectors like fishing, she said, need to offer strong social conditions to draw in future workers.

Rosalie Tukker - EU Policy Advisor Européche

Tukker agreed with her fellow panellists and emphasised that, for Européche, it is essential to keep fisheries, coastal communities, and their economies at the heart of the EU's vision for the ocean and therefore at the core of the Ocean Pact. She described the initiative as timely and important for boosting a competitive, resilient, and decarbonised blue economy. Warning that the EU imports over 70% of its aquatic food, she argued that the Ocean Pact should help Europe defend its “own backyard,” especially given that the EU holds the largest exclusive economic zone in the world, including its overseas territories. To build ocean credibility, she stressed the need to protect European waters, heritage, fishers, and the socio-economic fabric of coastal communities. For her, the Pact must reflect the three pillars of sustainability—economic, social, and environmental—on equal footing and serve not only as an inspiration but also as a practical guide to improving the current governance framework. She called for a commitment to transparent, science-based fisheries management and for financial and technical support to help fisheries in transition. At the same time, she stressed the importance of recognising successful existing mechanisms such as regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) and fishery improvement projects (FIPs), while cautioning against one-size-fits-all policies that overlook the diversity of fisheries in the EU and globally. Ultimately, she concluded that the Pact must aim for realistic implementation, regulatory balance, and a true reconciliation between conservation and the livelihoods that depend on the ocean.

Christophe Tytgat – Secretary General of SEA Europe

Tytgat added two points, first aligning with previous speakers on the issue of skills and attractiveness, noting that his sector faces the same skills challenge. More importantly, he clarified his comments on competitiveness. He emphasised that he was not advocating for deregulation; in fact, his sector viewed the Green Deal as a business opportunity and embraced it. His concern about competitiveness relates instead to the uneven playing field created by international conditions—particularly in Asia, where industries receive heavy subsidies, favourable financial terms, and various forms of government support. These factors create significant challenges for European companies trying to compete globally under different constraints. He rejected the idea that the solution lies in subsidies alone, acknowledging that Europe is unlikely to compete on price. Instead, he advocated for a European competitive edge based on innovation and quality—an approach he believes the Ocean Pact should reflect.

During the audience Q&A, Mihalfy Szilvia, from FEAP, raised a point strongly agreeing with the emphasis on innovation and quality as Europe's competitive strength, noting that price-based competition is unrealistic. She then broadened the discussion by highlighting the critical role of people's needs and behaviours. She suggested that citizens' consumption patterns have helped shape the current situation and must also be part of the solution. She argued that if we want to meet the ambitious policy goals being discussed at high levels, we need to do more to influence and guide public

behaviour. This involves better informing consumers and local communities about how their lifestyle choices impact the ocean, the blue economy, and broader sustainability goals. She concluded by stressing the need for these high-level initiatives to filter down to local levels, ensuring that people understand their role in driving change.

Rosalie Tukker - EU Policy Advisor Européche

Tukker responded to Mihalfy by acknowledging the shared responsibility among both consumers and people within the sectors themselves. She emphasised that beyond just consumer behaviour, it's vital to consider the people working in fisheries and the broader blue economy. She stressed the importance of creating conditions that make these sectors attractive and viable for new generations, noting an alarming trend of workforce decline—such as in Spain, where 18 people per week are leaving the fisheries and agriculture sectors. She gave an example from the Netherlands where a key fisheries school nearly shut down due to dwindling student numbers and financial difficulties, underscoring the need to prioritise generational renewal. She also called for harmonising training standards and mutual recognition of qualifications across EU Member States to make the sector more flexible and mobile for workers. On a global level, Rosalie highlighted that aquaculture and fisheries currently account for 18% of global protein production and must reach 30% by 2050 to meet growing food demands. Therefore, investing in skills, training, and the people behind these industries is not optional—it's essential.

Béatrice Gorez - Coordinator at Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)

Gorez added to the discussion by drawing a distinction between the needs of EU citizens and those of communities in other parts of the world, such as West Africa. Referring to a revealing study, she explained how consumers often claim to want sustainably sourced fish but ultimately buy the cheapest options due to price sensitivity and market pressures—highlighting the dissonance between expressed values and actual purchasing behaviour. She stressed the importance of involving the entire value chain, particularly supermarkets, in shaping more sustainable consumer choices and pricing. She then shifted focus to West Africa, where access to fish isn't about choice but survival. Local communities there depend on fish not just for protein, but for essential micronutrients. However, their food security is now at risk because local fish are increasingly processed into fish meal and exported—primarily for aquaculture use in Asia and Europe. She warned that this trade-off could spark food crises in regions already vulnerable and urged policymakers to confront these ethical and sustainability dilemmas head-on when designing future ocean and food strategies.

Gaelle Haut, from Surfrider Foundation Europe, asked a question about the ocean crisis, noting that it is severely impacting sectors due to pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. The question acknowledged that many of the speakers had pointed out the importance of a healthy ocean for the sectors they represent. She inquired about which environmental policy measures the speakers would welcome in the Ocean Pact and whether they would be willing to make additional efforts beyond decarbonisation within their respective sectors.

Rosalie Tukker - EU Policy Advisor Européche

Tukker agreed with the points made by her fellow panellists, emphasising the importance of maintaining fisheries and coastal communities at the heart of the EU's vision for the oceans, and consequently, the Ocean Pact. She noted that this initiative was timely and crucial for boosting a competitive, resilient, and decarbonised blue economy. She pointed out that the EU should not lose sight of its own resources, as it holds the largest exclusive economic zone in the world, including its overseas territories, which is even larger than those of the United States and Russia. She stressed that, to build credibility regarding the oceans, the EU must defend its waters, protect its heritage, and prioritise the socio-economic fabric of coastal communities, which depend on fisheries and other blue economies. She explained that the Ocean Pact should reflect the three pillars of sustainability equally, as outlined in the presentation, ensuring the framework is both realistic and inclusive. She further highlighted the importance of transparent, science-based fisheries management, and the need for

technical and financial support for fisheries in transition. She also emphasised that the Pact should recognise the actions already being implemented, such as the work of regional fisheries management organisations and initiatives like FIPs. She concluded by urging the pact to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and to ensure realistic implementation that balances conservation with the livelihoods of affected communities.

Luisa Puccio – Senior Director Shipping Policy & Communications at European Shipowners (ECSA)

Puccio agreed with Tukker's remarks, especially the idea that the Ocean Pact should serve as a guide. She pointed out that many of the necessary instruments are already in place, particularly in the shipping sector, which is focused on the energy transition due to the stringent targets it faces. She explained that while there are ongoing efforts to address pollution in Europe, there are also international guidelines that need to be followed. For example, she mentioned the IMO guidelines on biofouling management, which the sector closely monitors and engages with the European Commission to encourage the adoption of non-toxic coatings. These actions aim to protect both ocean health and sensitive areas from invasive species. Luisa also highlighted the significant work being done at the IMO to reduce underwater noise; an issue currently being discussed with the EU. However, she stressed that since shipping is an international industry, efforts to address such issues must begin at the international level, particularly through the International Maritime Organisation. Additionally, she brought up a related point, inspired by Tukker's comments on economic health. She mentioned the growing success of renewable energy sectors, such as offshore wind and emerging ocean energy, particularly in Europe. She noted that the vessels involved in these installations are largely European-owned and built, which contributes not only to the European economy but also to the reduction of pollution. While not directly related to ocean health, she emphasised that the shipping and shipbuilding sectors play a crucial role in both the economy and environmental sustainability, particularly by helping reduce pollution.

Béatrice Gorez - Coordinator at Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)

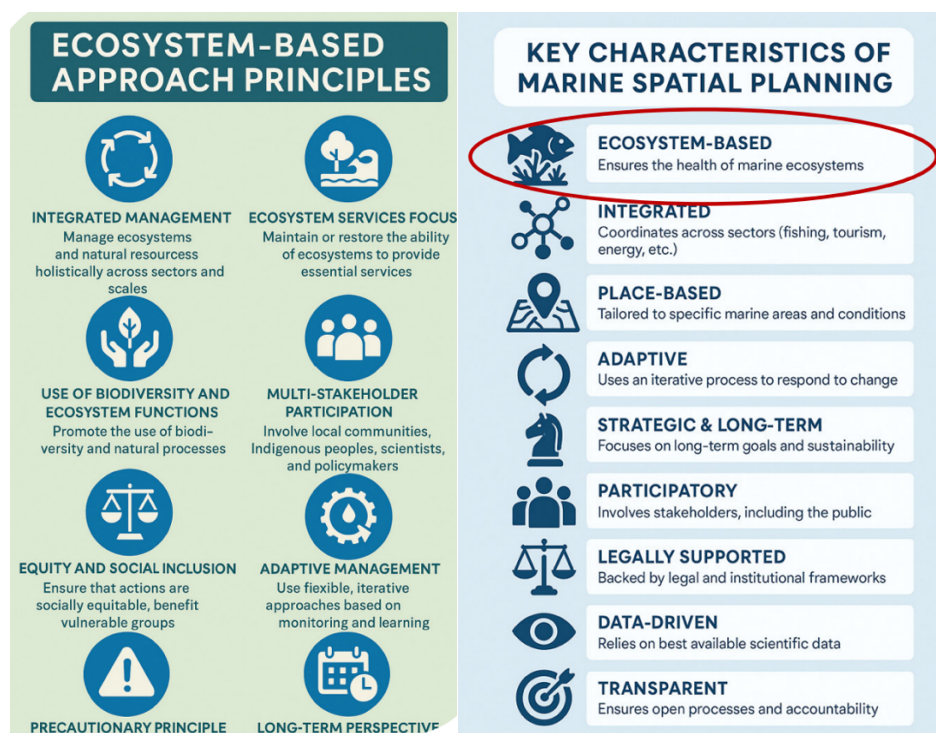
Gorez expressed the urgency of the crisis, emphasising that everyone must make as many efforts as possible to address it. She reiterated the proposal put forward by small-scale fisheries organisations, which advocate for the entire coastal area to be transformed into co-managed marine protected areas. These areas, she explained, should be co-managed with local communities and should be set aside as reserved zones, free from any industrial activity, including industrial fishing, oil and gas exploitation, and energy production. Gorez highlighted that while this is a strong proposal, it needs to be supported by governments and other stakeholders to be effective.

Christophe Tytgat – Secretary General of SEA Europe

Tytgat addressed the question by suggesting that it implied there might not be enough legislation in place yet. He argued that before pursuing additional legislation, it would be important to assess the existing framework and determine if there are any gaps that need to be addressed. He also highlighted a key point: when discussing oceans, the focus should not only be on Europe but on the entire planet. He emphasised the challenge that arises from other regions and powers that may not have the same environmental considerations as Europe. He explained that any gap analysis regarding missing legislation should be conducted in a way that leads to internationally agreed solutions. If this is not done, he cautioned, Europe could end up with the best solution, but no industry left to implement it, with others taking over the fishing industry, potentially without the same sustainable practices. While acknowledging the value of the question, Tytgat warned of the potential dangers of not carefully considering the broader international context.

Panel 2: The Ocean Pact - Breaking the silos and addressing the trade-offs – How to ensure that all ocean ecosystem services (food security, energy security, health, etc) are considered in UNOC 3?

Stelzenmüller began her presentation by introducing maritime spatial planning (MSP) and its potential to incorporate an ecosystem-based approach (EBA). She presented a definition of EBA as a strategy for integrated management that balances protection with sustainable use. This approach integrates societal needs with the goal of maintaining ecosystem health, while also considering economic sustainability. She outlined key EBA principles: integrated management, biodiversity focus, attention to ecosystem services, participatory methods, equity and inclusion, adaptive management, the precautionary principle, and a long-term vision.



Stelzenmüller then questioned whether MSP can serve as a tool to implement EBA principles. She described MSP as a public-led, step-wise process involving goal setting, planning, implementation, and adaptation. Outcomes depend heavily on legal context, institutional support, and available resources. She highlighted that, globally, MSP is being widely adopted, with Europe leading. However, approaches and results differ by country. In 2021, more than half of maritime spatial plans were advisory rather than regulatory, indicating variations in how binding these plans are. She described MSP as an integrated, place-based, adaptive, participatory, and data-driven process that requires transparency and legal backing. She noted that ecosystem-based characteristics are relatively new to MSP.

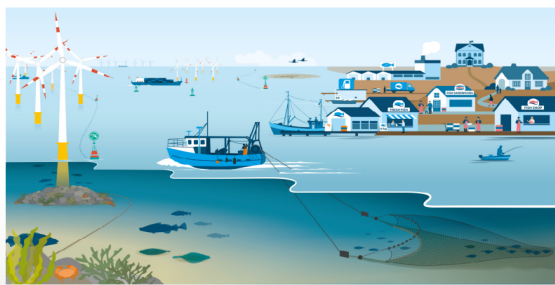
To evaluate whether EBA principles are truly being adopted, Stelzenmüller introduced a tool developed through the EU project *MarinePlan*. This framework connects EBA principles with all stages of the MSP process and includes 130 action points. It was tested across case studies and validated by stakeholders. It allows for benchmarking and comparison between planning sites, using indicators like confidence levels and knowledge bases. Results showed that while EBA principles are addressed, their application is inconsistent. She identified a major gap in accounting for ecosystem state and the use of future scenarios, despite MSP's future-oriented goals. Moreover, the cumulative effects of human activity are not well integrated into planning outcomes. Stelzenmüller stressed that early integration

of environmental objectives is critical for applying EBA principles effectively and that tools are emerging to support this.

Turning to practical examples, she used the Southern North Sea to illustrate the challenges of MSP at transboundary and ecosystem scales. She showed how fragmented national planning—particularly for offshore wind and conservation—has led to trade-offs, including a loss of fishing opportunities. She acknowledged that crises and reduced spatial access are major concerns for fisheries. However, she also noted potential benefits, such as new habitats and possible new fisheries resources emerging around offshore wind installations. These could help mitigate losses in the long term and support sustainable fisheries, although environmental responses vary by location and scale.

In conclusion, Stelzenmüller identified key challenges: institutional and legal fragmentation, data gaps, and ecological uncertainty. She called for more harmonised monitoring, better data sharing, and stronger regional coordination. She closed by affirming that MSP holds significant potential to adopt ecosystem-based approaches and contribute to both the protection and sustainable use of marine ecosystems.

Key challenges for the implementation of EB-MSP



- Legal and institutional fragmentation (conservation vs MSP processes)
- Data gaps and uncertainties to understand and address socio-ecological impacts of planning at different scales
- Need for harmonised monitoring and evaluation strategies
- More transboundary and regional coordination to address ecosystem relevant scales in planning

Discussions - moderated by Ilias Grampas (EBCD)

Question 1: Ilias Grampas asked how the Ocean Pact could ensure that a full spectrum of various ecosystem services is addressed in a fair and effective manner.

Szilvia Mihalffy - Project manager at FEAP

Mihalffy began by expressing her gratitude for the event and the opportunity to represent her organisation, FEAP, which includes 24 members, both EU and non-EU associations. She highlighted that these associations face diverse challenges, especially given the wide range of activities within the aquaculture sector. She pointed out that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, making the Ocean Pact particularly challenging for the sector. She emphasised that aquaculture and the broader blue food sector play a unique role in ocean ecosystems by supporting food security, economic resilience, and health. Specifically, she noted that aquaculture offers a relatively low-impact alternative to land-based animal protein. However, she explained that its full potential is still underutilised within the ocean governance frameworks. One of the key points she raised was the need for better integration of aquaculture into marine spatial planning. She argued that marine spatial planning must actively consider aquaculture's role in food security and blue economy objectives. Planning processes should

have clear frameworks for collocation and prioritisation, particularly in increasingly busy coastal zones. She also acknowledged the prejudices and misconceptions surrounding aquaculture, especially at the local community level. She shared that her organisation produced a leaflet that addresses these misconceptions and provides factual information about finfish aquaculture, which is available on their website. She underscored that one of the strongest messages her organisation wanted to convey was the connection between the Ocean Pact and food security. She pointed out that approximately 70% of aquatic food consumed in the EU is imported. This, she explained, presents an opportunity to increase domestic aquatic food production in the EU while maintaining high standards. Despite this potential, she noted that the EU is still consuming less aquatic food than recommended by nutritionists and dieticians. She linked this to the EU for Health initiative and other health-related initiatives addressing food security. She concluded by discussing the challenges posed by the diversity of legal and policy frameworks around aquaculture. She mentioned the difficulty of monitoring the legislation where aquaculture plays a role and noted that, while fisheries are under exclusive EU competence, aquaculture is a shared competence with the member states. This creates additional complexities in tackling issues related to aquaculture at the EU level.

Leonard Mizzi - Head of Unit Sustainable Agri-food systems and Fisheries at DG INTPA (European Commission)

Mizzi began by highlighting the importance of recognising the geopolitical context in which the Ocean Pact and its policies are being discussed. He emphasised that in today's global environment, it is crucial to be sensitive to external dynamics, particularly in relation to countries like the US, China, and Russia. He explained that even discussions on marine and ocean issues, like the Ocean Pact, must take into account the geopolitical sensitivity of the blue economy. He provided an example by discussing food security, which is central to his team's work. He acknowledged that Europe imports a significant amount of fish products and stated that while increasing local production is important, it's essential to balance that with an understanding of the role imports play. Mizzi stressed the need to ensure that imports are not unfairly criticised or excluded, as this could lead to the creation of a "fortress Europe," which would be harmful in both political and legislative terms. He also expressed support for the aquaculture sector, noting that it is important to engage with high biodiversity areas and reconcile different water uses, including tourism, in a smart and coordinated way. Mizzi then addressed the challenge of achieving fairness and effectiveness in ocean policy, particularly in relation to the role of the private sector. He pointed out that while there is a lot of support for private sector engagement, there is still a tendency to work in silos. To overcome this, he stressed the need for collaboration and the integration of various sectors, such as energy, food security, nutrition, and digital data. This kind of integration, while difficult, is necessary to streamline processes and simplify actions, particularly as global aid and official development assistance are at risk of being reduced. Mizzi went on to discuss the challenges of investing in the blue economy, particularly in aquaculture and fisheries, which he acknowledged is still a difficult area to attract investment. He emphasised the need to engage financial institutions to scale up investments in these sectors. He also suggested that carbon sequestration could be a viable solution that should be explored further, particularly with financial institutions like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the World Bank. He explained that the European Union has a number of initiatives, including Horizon Europe and the NDICI (Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument), which support projects related to the blue economy in various regions like the West Indian Ocean, Central Africa, and the Pacific. He also noted the importance of the EU's Global Gateway initiative, which aims to combine energy, digital, climate-smart approaches, and skills development. This initiative also focuses on internationalising European private sector operations to create win-win scenarios for both internal EU policies and external cooperation. Leonard mentioned specific projects in regions like Cabo Verde and Benin, where European investments could help scale up aquaculture and blue food production while benefiting local economies. He acknowledged the sensitivity surrounding small island developing states (SIDS) and stressed the importance of being both internally and externally sensitive when creating policies that are fair to all parties involved. Leonard emphasised that fairness, particularly in terms of the private sector's role,

involves addressing the risks faced by small operators and marginalised communities. He encouraged the creation of solutions that involve both European and local investments, which would be beneficial for the scalability of aquaculture and blue foods within the context of the Ocean Pact.

Mattia Cecchinato - Offshore Wind Manager at Wind Europe

Cecchinato linked his comments to earlier remarks about fairness and the need to address ecosystem services, noting that balancing diverse and sometimes conflicting interests across sectors remains a core challenge. These interests can result in both positive and negative impacts in terms of resource use and outcomes. He emphasised the need to balance environmental, social, and economic factors in decision-making processes. One area where he saw significant room for improvement was the scientific underpinning of these processes, particularly the quantification of ecosystem services. According to him, without robust quantification, it is difficult to integrate environmental concerns meaningfully alongside social and economic ones. He called for the Ocean Pact to include a strong push toward developing standardised protocols for assessing and quantifying ecosystem services, acknowledging that although experts have worked on this for decades, it remains a gap that must be addressed. He also drew parallels between the Ocean Pact and maritime spatial planning (MSP), which he described as a revolutionary tool that successfully integrated maritime policies into a unified spatial planning framework. He suggested that the Ocean Pact could do the same at the level of strategic planning. He highlighted that MSP has delivered both lessons and challenges, particularly in terms of balancing interests across borders and sectors—whether related to energy infrastructure, protected areas, or other marine activities. From an industry perspective, he stressed that MSP has proven to be an effective tool for de-risking projects. He explained that the process—starting with strategic environmental assessments and narrowing down to site-specific environmental impact assessments—has helped speed up project timelines while ensuring that all stakeholders are consulted and considered. He concluded by underscoring the importance of a unified strategic framework, as envisaged in the Ocean Pact, to help manage the inevitable trade-offs between growing sectoral demands and the need for marine conservation. He acknowledged that spatial conflicts at sea are bound to increase, and stressed that cross-border, integrated cooperation among Member States and stakeholders is essential. "We're not going anywhere alone," he noted in closing.

Jacob Armstrong - Manager on Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office

Armstrong emphasised several important points regarding the Ocean Pact. He began by discussing the significance of stakeholder engagement, particularly in relation to local communities. He explained that the Ocean Pact should ensure that local fishers and coastal communities are actively involved, especially at the local level, which he described as essential for the success of projects. Drawing from WWF's projects, he highlighted the importance of co-management at the local level to ensure the involvement of those most affected by ocean-related issues. He also discussed the importance of data, noting that scientific involvement is crucial. Armstrong pointed out that data is continually evolving and needs to be integrated into decision-making processes. He stressed that as data changes, it is essential to incorporate the latest scientific information into strategies and policies. On the topic of the Ocean Pact's role, he noted that one of the key aspects should be the implementation of existing legislation. He acknowledged that there are already strong frameworks in place, such as the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), along with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Jacob emphasised that the Ocean Pact should focus on turning these frameworks into a reality. He mentioned that the Pact could help by ensuring the necessary guidelines are in place to define terms like "protection" and "strict protection," and by addressing issues like marine pollution, litter, and underwater noise. He concluded by suggesting that the Ocean Pact should focus on making these existing frameworks actionable and practical, instead of creating new legislation. He emphasised the importance of turning the good work already done into real-world outcomes.

Pablo Cadarso - Data Intelligence and Market Analyst at Conxemar

Cadarso emphasised that in today's interconnected world, the European Union must think globally while maintaining local roots. He noted that the EU's integration into global supply chains brings resilience, innovation, and access to new markets, which is why they support open international trade. At the same time, Cadarso acknowledged the importance of building European strategic autonomy, particularly in light of the current complex geopolitical context. He argued that global competition drives efficiency and growth, and that international cooperation is vital for the value chain, especially within the context of global ocean governance and an ecosystem-based approach. Pablo outlined that in addition to ensuring competitive access to raw materials through the Ocean Pact, it is crucial for the EU to foster responsible fisheries management in international arenas, such as Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). He emphasised the need to protect human rights, promote fair labour conditions, and support the economic well-being of coastal communities. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of transparency and digital traceability in fisheries and aquaculture products, advocating that all products in the market, both domestic and imported, should be subject to the same traceability requirements. This, he explained, would ensure that citizens are provided with fully traceable seafood products and ensure a level playing field between different commercial operators. Regarding the Ocean Pact, he stressed the need for recognition of the strategic role of the processing industry, which should not be overlooked. He pointed out that the processing sector plays a key role in food security, job creation, and coastal community development. He suggested that the Ocean Pact could help highlight this role and integrate it into broader ocean policy, while promoting common standards on sustainability, traceability, and social responsibility. Additionally, he argued that the Pact could help prevent unfair competition by supporting operators who comply with the highest standards.

Question 2: Ilias Grampas asked whether the panellists saw trade-offs and actions in their sectors between conservation objectives and ocean use and how they thought they should be addressed.

Szilvia Mihalfy - Project manager at FEAP

Mihalfy explained that while she wouldn't necessarily call them tensions, some conflicts between ocean use and conservation are natural. However, she emphasised that most of these can be managed, especially given the current context where stakeholders seem to be more aligned than before. She reflected on how perspectives have shifted significantly since events such as the war and the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that there is now a stronger collective understanding of the need for collaboration among all actors. This, she noted, is crucial to improving EU competitiveness, as everyone has a role to play in achieving that goal. She remarked positively on the change in attitude and approach, noting that it was reflected in the Commission's priorities and echoed by Ursula von der Leyen's emphasis on better integrating farmers into decision-making processes. Farmers, she observed, are not yet accustomed to such inclusion and still tend to engage from a defensive or offensive stance. Nevertheless, she shared her impression that with the arrival of the new Commissioner, there is greater openness to hearing their suggestions, a trend she also perceives in discussions with NGOs. She advocated for a focus on best practices, highlighting the importance of showcasing and promoting the 'good students' within the system. She stressed the need to identify challenges not in order to marginalise certain actors, but to solve issues collaboratively through innovation. She acknowledged that conflicts around access to space do arise, but cited a presentation by DG Research about Greece, where aquaculture was found to occupy less than 1% of coastal space. This, she argued, suggests that space is not the core issue. Instead, she identified a lack of communication, knowledge, or information at the local level as the real sources of conflict. Better dialogue with local communities, she concluded, is essential to explain the value of such activities and to identify the most suitable areas for their development.

Leonard Mizzi - Head of Unit Sustainable Agri-food systems and Fisheries at DG INTPA (European Commission)

Mizzi shared that in his experience, mitigating trade-offs and tensions is most effectively achieved through a multistakeholder approach. He pointed to their work on cocoa and the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) as a clear example of how bringing together diverse actors across the value chain can lead to fairer and more transparent outcomes. He stressed that such an approach must span the entire value chain, including the sourcing phase, since global and regional supply chains are inherently transnational and cannot be addressed with a solely European-centric mindset. He emphasised the importance of including all relevant actors—from small operators in developing countries to traders, importers, and the processing industry—around what he described as a "very long table." He questioned whether the EU has sufficient resources, including human resources, to support such an inclusive and ongoing engagement. Nonetheless, he affirmed that multistakeholder approaches have demonstrated their value in creating transparency and trust, particularly when standard-setters and research institutions are involved. He explained that data and evidence are crucial components of this approach. While there is already a robust network of organisations producing data—such as the FAO and CGIAR centres like WorldFish—the challenge lies in compiling and identifying where data is still lacking. Mizzi argued that stakeholders themselves must help define the purpose of additional data and evidence by articulating what it is needed for. This, he noted, is true across different sectors, whether in forestry or oceans. Specifically for oceans, he highlighted the need for more data on carbon sequestration and for exploring innovative financing mechanisms. He also reflected on the broader geopolitical context, expressing concern that the ocean economy is not receiving the same global traction as sectors like energy or food and agriculture. He described it as a somewhat "forgotten area" that too often fluctuates on the political agenda. With so many competing global priorities—such as energy security, critical raw materials, and geopolitical stability—he stressed the need for clear prioritisation. Leadership, particularly from within EU Member States, is essential to ensure that oceans are treated as a strategic internal and external priority, rather than as an afterthought.

Mattia Cecchinato - Offshore Wind Manager at Wind Europe

Cecchinato provided several concrete examples of how trade-offs—particularly with regard to environmental protection—are being addressed in the offshore wind sector. He began by emphasising the importance of collaboration at the policy level, highlighting the work of the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature. This initiative brings together industry members, NGOs like WWF, and transmission system operators. While he acknowledged that there are often disagreements, he stressed the value of sitting at the same table, sharing perspectives, and building consensus. When consensus is reached, he noted, it becomes a powerful tool to influence policymaking by demonstrating that different sectors can find common ground and develop actionable solutions. He went on to explain that this collaboration has extended from policy into project implementation. As an example, he mentioned the partnership between WWF and Ørsted, a leading offshore wind developer in Denmark, who are working together on coral reef restoration projects within offshore wind farms. According to him, this is a promising illustration of how policy dialogue can lead to on-the-ground initiatives that advance both environmental restoration and scientific understanding. He also drew attention to an important governmental mechanism supporting these kinds of synergies: non-price award criteria in offshore wind tenders. He explained that this tool allows governments to award projects based not only on cost but also on added values such as environmental sustainability, system integration, or citizen engagement. He cited the ongoing tender in Belgium as an example of how this approach is being used to encourage innovative and socially responsible project proposals. He highlighted the *Ecowende* project in the Netherlands as a pioneering case—the first offshore wind project to be awarded purely on the basis of ecological innovation, with no price consideration. This, he said, demonstrates the potential for such criteria to drive conservation and restoration efforts within wind farms, while also fostering collaboration between developers, scientific institutions, NGOs, and local communities. Finally, he noted that these non-price criteria could be extended further, for example to support multi-use projects that combine offshore wind and aquaculture. While he acknowledged that issues such as permitting and business models still need to be resolved, he emphasised that embedding such criteria into tenders is a promising way to accelerate innovation and integrated ocean use.

Jacob Armstrong - Manager on Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office

Armstrong reflected on the earlier discussion and linked it to the presentation, noting that what might initially appear to be a tension between ocean uses—such as offshore wind development and marine conservation—can in fact produce unexpected synergies. He pointed out that in some cases, projects like these have resulted in restored fish stocks and thriving marine wildlife populations. While acknowledging that issues such as project dismantling still need to be addressed, he emphasised that these scenarios suggest the relationship is not always a trade-off. He highlighted the importance of investing in marine restoration efforts, noting that tools like no-take zones can yield broader benefits. For example, he explained that no-take zones often lead to improved fishing opportunities outside their boundaries, as fish populations recover in both size and quality. This, he said, reinforces the idea that conservation measures can be mutually beneficial for ecosystems and communities alike, and should not be seen as inherently in conflict with economic activities. He also underscored the significance of a temporal dimension in discussions about trade-offs and spatial planning. In particular, he stressed that maritime spatial planning must account for the evolving nature of the oceans in the context of climate change. Shifts in fish stock distribution and the viability of aquaculture due to changing ocean conditions are just some of the challenges that need to be considered over time. He concluded by reiterating the need for more and better data to support decision-making, acknowledging that while a strong foundation exists, further evidence is crucial for informed and adaptive planning.

Pablo Cadarso - Data Intelligence and Market Analyst at Conxemar

Regarding the tensions within the sector, Cadarso emphasised the need for a balanced approach in both the Ocean Act and the ongoing evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy. While affirming that a viable EU fisheries and aquaculture sector is essential, he also stressed the importance of better recognising the strategic role of EU processors and traders. These actors are crucial in ensuring a consistent supply of safe and healthy seafood to consumers across Europe. He noted that during the pandemic, processors and traders demonstrated their status as part of the EU's critical infrastructure, a role that must be fully acknowledged in future policy reforms. On the fishing side, he pointed to the underutilization of EU quotas and the constraints posed by overly strict environmental regulations as missed opportunities to make sustainable use of available resources. In 2023, for instance, EU fishing quota utilisation was only at 66%. He also highlighted existing tensions between EU processors and the catching sector, particularly because processors are increasingly forced to rely on global sourcing to meet market demand. He argued that while a profitable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable EU fisheries and aquaculture sector is crucial, the processing sector is equally vital. It supports local economies, creates employment, and bolsters the EU's competitiveness. According to Eurostat data, the EU seafood processing sector accounts for €34.6 billion in turnover and over 110,000 jobs. The fisheries, aquaculture, and processing sectors, he concluded, are fully interlinked and must be addressed together in policymaking.

Question 3: Ilias Grampas asked whether the panellist thought about the risks of continuing with a siloed approach and also what kind of integrated planning or cooperation frameworks they saw.

Leonard Mizzi - Head of Unit Sustainable Agri-food systems and Fisheries at DG INTPA (European Commission)

Mizzi expressed that in 2025, there is no room for a "business as usual" approach, noting that the world has changed radically in recent times. In this context, he emphasised the importance of observing how the Ocean Pact, still under inter-service consultation, will unfold and what outcomes will emerge. He acknowledged that the Ocean Pact will not be a game-changer on its own, particularly as he has witnessed the limitations of summits and conferences. The real transformation, he argued, will come from prioritisation, although the key question is: prioritising what and where? He cautioned against an "EU-centric" approach, where Europe focuses solely on strategic autonomy and looks inward while

leaving the rest of the world to follow its own course. Such a strategy, he believed, would not be effective. Instead, he called for building genuine bridges beyond idealistic statements, with an emphasis on forging alliances that are beneficial for both the private sector and other regions, particularly Africa and the Asia-Pacific. This, he argued, should be a win-win approach that fosters investment while considering the risks involved. He also raised concerns about the funding gap for private investment in European value chains, particularly in sectors like aquaculture, where he questioned the presence of a financial gap that requires de-risking strategies. Furthermore, he noted that the discussion had not yet addressed issues such as subsidies, trade distortions, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) challenges. He pointed out that trade wars have spillover effects, benefiting the largest players in the value chain while disadvantaging the smaller ones. As such, these factors must be incorporated into the Ocean Pact's strategy. Lastly, he underscored the need for careful prioritisation and sequencing within the Ocean Pact, particularly in how Europe engages in the geopolitical dynamics of ocean governance across different continents, starting with Africa.

Szilvia Mihalfy - Project manager at FEAP

Mihalfy explained that while the Ocean Pact cannot address all the concerns and potential risks, it has already provided a valuable platform to open discussions on how to be more inclusive and apply a so-called pre-competitive approach for the collective benefit. She acknowledged that the risks are evident if changes are not made, particularly when it comes to marine spatial planning. Without striving to be more efficient and integrating all necessary elements for better collaboration, such as improved and more coherent legislation, there is a risk of falling behind in the global competition. She pointed out that the lack of adaptive legislation, particularly in aquaculture, is already a risk. Turning to the financial side, she noted that while there is appropriate financing available, the primary issue lies in the legislation. The sector faces a significant administrative burden, and the lengthy licensing processes—sometimes taking years—are discouraging to potential investors. She highlighted these bureaucratic bottlenecks and the challenge of a siloed approach as the main risks to advancing in the sector.

Mattia Cecchinato - Offshore Wind Manager at Wind Europe

Cecchinato brought up another concrete example to emphasise why integrated planning is crucial. He explained that while the concept of marine spatial planning (MSP) is widely understood, it remains a challenging process, not just because private sectors may not always agree, but also because different countries often struggle to align their plans. This process takes time and requires a great deal of patience. However, he noted that MSP is helping countries to start understanding each other, particularly civil servants who are learning to collaborate, which then allows them to report back to higher decision-making levels and reach compromises on certain issues. A concrete example Cecchinato provided was the wake effect in offshore wind energy. He described how wind farms built in France may reduce the energy production of wind farms in Belgium, and similarly, Belgian wind farms may impact those in the Netherlands. This issue emerged because each country planned its energy system separately, without considering the potential consequences on neighbouring countries' plans. Now, as the interconnectedness of the energy system becomes clearer, Mattia emphasised the urgency of adopting a sea basin approach to energy planning, which requires cooperation between member states. He pointed out that, while this is an obvious necessity, sometimes urgency is needed to force member states to cooperate. For the offshore wind sector, he suggested that the wake effect could be a key issue that drives countries to collaborate more closely, particularly when it comes to planning wind farm areas and energy connections.

Question 4: Ilias Grampas asked the panellists about a concrete commitment or action that they would propose with regards to the Ocean Pact?

Leonard Mizzi - Head of Unit Sustainable Agri-food systems and Fisheries at DG INTPA (European Commission)

Mizzi stressed the importance of legislative simplification to ease the burden on stakeholders like Szilvia, highlighting the EU's current efforts under the new Commission to streamline, prioritise, and sequence policies more effectively. He underlined that global challenges cannot be addressed without a smarter and more structured approach.

Pablo Cadarso - Data Intelligence and Market Analyst at Conxemar

Cadarso emphasised the need to set aside tensions and move forward together in support of the European Ocean Pact.

Mattia Cecchinato - Offshore Wind Manager at Wind Europe

Cecchinato echoed earlier points, noting that the offshore wind industry seeks effective collaboration not only with governments but also with other sectors. He highlighted the importance of social acceptance and emphasised the need for support beyond the political level. For the industry, it is essential to have a process that allows for timely deployment at sea, carried out sustainably and with all necessary precautions in place.

Szilvia Mihalfy - Project manager at FEAP

Mihalfy called for better recognition and acknowledgment of their perspectives and emphasised the need to translate their visions into concrete actions.

Jacob Armstrong - Manager on Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office

Armstrong addressed the topic of simplification, noting that if the aim is to achieve policy coherence, then policies must be made coherent with each other. However, he stressed that this coherence should ultimately serve the existing overarching goals - sustainability. That includes ensuring sustainability for the environment, for local communities in socio-economic terms, and for future generations.

Closing remarks

Rosa Chapela, Executive Director of CETMAR

Rosa Chapela noted that many of the points she intended to raise had already been echoed during the event, reflecting a shared understanding of the challenges and priorities ahead. Speaking from Galicia's position as a maritime region with a strong dependence on fisheries, aquaculture, and the blue economy, she emphasised that these sectors are not only economic drivers but also integral to the cultural and social fabric of coastal communities. She stressed that the European Ocean Pact must not treat fisheries and aquaculture as peripheral concerns but instead recognise them as central pillars of ocean sustainability. Drawing on Galicia's experience with maritime spatial planning, fisheries policy, and its blue economy strategy, she advocated for reducing policy fragmentation and ensuring that governance is inclusive, integrated, and rooted in local realities. She underlined the importance of addressing both environmental protection and the needs of productive sectors, particularly in high-dependency regions. Her intervention outlined four key priorities: strengthening integrated governance; placing people—especially coastal communities and women—at the center of ocean policy; building sustainable, inclusive blue food systems; and increasing investment in science, innovation, and capacity building. Chapela also highlighted the need to support small-scale fisheries and ensure equitable access to EU funding and decision-making. She called on the EU to scale up proven models like Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) to bring the Ocean Pact from vision to practice through community-based implementation.

Ilias Grampas, Deputy Director of EBCD

Ilias Grampas delivered the closing reflections of the event, thanking all participants and, in particular, the European Economic and Social Committee for co-organising the meeting and hosting it once again at their premises. He expressed the intention to continue building on this valuable partnership in the future. He highlighted that a key outcome of the discussions was the shared understanding of the need to accelerate sustainability efforts and deliver on SDG 14. He underlined the potential of the European

Ocean Pact to position the EU as a global leader in this domain. A recurring theme throughout the panels, he noted, was the importance of policy coherence, inclusiveness, and scientific evidence as drivers of effective ocean governance. This was reflected in the decision to open the panel discussions with scientific presentations. He stressed that all sea users must be involved from the outset in co-creating solutions, not merely as observers. Grampas warned against the risks of polarisation and siloed approaches, calling for unity and inclusivity. Referring to earlier contributions, he emphasised that ocean solutions must simultaneously address environmental sustainability, human wellbeing, and socio-economic prosperity while staying within planetary boundaries. In his concluding message, he reiterated the significance of engaging coastal communities, improving access to funding, and enhancing cooperation across governance levels. He expressed hope that the outcomes of the event would contribute meaningfully to the EU's preparations for the UN Ocean Conference in Nice and affirmed EBCD's commitment to facilitating a diverse and inclusive dialogue to shape a successful European Ocean Pact.

Alexandra Philippe, Marine Policy Manager at EBCD

Alexandra Philippe closed the event by thanking participants and emphasising the importance of engaging a wide range of stakeholders—users of the sea, NGOs, and policymakers—to foster meaningful dialogue. She noted that many sectors share similar challenges and opportunities under the European Ocean Pact and UNOC-3, making collaboration essential. While acknowledging the existence of trade-offs and sectoral tensions, she stressed the need for inclusive and coordinated action. She also highlighted the event's commitment to gender balance and the shared values with the EESC on ensuring broad representation. Reflecting on the past, she suggested that implementation gaps in ocean policy may be linked to the insufficient inclusion of all relevant actors, particularly those addressing human and social dimensions. She concluded by underlining that avoiding polarisation and working together is key to advancing effective and sustainable ocean governance.