

NWWAC Statement to the High Level Group on the EU Oceans Pact

21 February 2025

The North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the High-level roundtable “Fisheries and Oceans Dialogue - helping design the European Ocean Pact”.

Key messages

1. The Oceans Pact should move beyond fragmented, sector-specific management approaches and **embrace an integrated and inclusive multispecies, multisectoral governance model**.
2. The Oceans Pact should **promote an effective EBM approach** that considers all pressures on marine environments, including land-based activities and climate change impacts. The Pact should encourage **adaptive management strategies** based on evolving scientific evidence to ensure balanced conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.
3. The Oceans Pact must ensure that the blue economy develops sustainably, recognising the **fishing sector’s role in European food security**. Policies should facilitate innovation and investment in low-impact, low-carbon and high-efficient fishing practices. European seafood products should be valorised and the high standards of the European fishing fleet recognised through the Oceans Pact.
4. The Oceans Pact should **support enhanced data collection, sharing, and coordination** among Member States to improve informed policymaking and industry innovation. Funding for scientific research, ensuring adequate resources for both projects and human capital should be prioritised.
5. The Oceans Pact must reinforce policy frameworks that **ensure socio-economic resilience** by recognising the cultural and economic significance of fisheries. Support mechanisms, including financial aid and training programmes, should be expanded to help fishers and coastal businesses adapt to environmental and market changes.

The key challenges facing the EU's ocean governance model, and the priorities for addressing these challenges

The Oceans Pact should move beyond fragmented, sector-specific management approaches and embrace an integrated and inclusive multispecies, multisectoral governance model. Collaborative decision-making should be reinforced to ensure cohesive policymaking that

accounts for the interdependencies of marine sectors. Several EU policies and initiatives should increase coherence and interconnection such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy, the EU Nature Restoration Law and the Marine Action Plan. In that perspective, conservation objectives enshrined in these policies/initiatives must incorporate human needs to promote resilience in both ecosystems and communities. Furthermore, alignment between the EU's broader ocean governance frameworks, and international commitments, including the Global Biodiversity Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), should be strengthened via the Ocean Pact. At the same time the Oceans Pact must be inclusive to make sure that no sector is left behind.

The Oceans Pact aims for a holistic and coherent approach to ocean policies, with a view, among other things, to boosting competitiveness. In line with this ambition, it seems important that European initiatives ensuring a framework of fair competition between the different categories of seafood products are well integrated into this approach. Consequently, the NWWAC supports a global approach that preserves the environment and coastal communities. Insofar as the EU promotes sustainability in international forums and has strong environmental ambitions for its fishers, it must therefore use all available tools, including those ensuring a framework of fair competition between European and imported products.

The key measures needed to protect biodiversity and promote ecosystem-based management (EBM) of the ocean, to sustain its climate function, health and productivity

The Oceans Pact should promote an effective EBM approach that considers all pressures on marine environments, including land-based activities and climate change impacts. The Pact should encourage adaptive management strategies based on evolving scientific evidence to ensure balanced conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

The interconnection between the Oceans Pact and the CFP should be clarified by the Commission. It must ensure that the CFP evolves in response to scientific evidence and socio-economic realities, ensuring sustainable fisheries while maintaining the competitiveness of EU fleets. Flexibility should be built into the CFP to accommodate emerging challenges such as climate-induced stock shifts and technological advancements. A balanced approach is needed to align conservation objectives with the socio-economic well-being of fisheries-dependent regions and food security.

The Oceans Pact will build on the foundations laid by the “Fisheries and Oceans” package of measures. This designation refers to the EC communications of February 2023, and in particular to the action plan for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems in support of sustainable and resilient fisheries. The NWWAC provided detailed advice on the action plan in December 2021 ([link](#)) and in August 2023 ([link](#)), specifically highlighting:

- A lack of consistency between the EU food policy ambitions and its conservation objectives, leaving the key role of fisheries in terms of food security and socio-economic benefits in the background.

- The need to ensure the application of a holistic approach to marine ecosystems management, taking into consideration all sources of disturbance to the environment and/or species.
- Prioritisation of a tailored sea basin management strategies and development with the participation of local stakeholders to ensure that the proposed measures are useful and efficient.
- Lack of clear funding possibilities and provision of very large financial resources, which are especially required to ensure a just transition for the fisheries sector

The opportunities for sustainable growth and job creation in the EU's blue economy, and the role that the European Oceans Pact can play in promoting these opportunities

The Oceans Pact must ensure that the blue economy develops sustainably, recognising the fishing sector's role in European food security. It is essential to maintain the level of existing jobs in order to preserve and maintain the know-how of European fishers. Policies should facilitate innovation and investment in low-impact, low-carbon and high-efficient fishing practices. European seafood products should be valorised and the high standards of the European fishing fleet recognised through the Oceans Pact. Raising awareness about seafoods' benefits is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to hunger, nutrition, and sustainable livelihoods. Indeed, seafood provides vital nutrients, supports millions of livelihoods, and contributes to ecosystem health, offering a pathway to food security and environmental sustainability.

The NWWAC would like to recall that a sustainable European fishing sector produces a low carbon, high-value protein for consumers, compared to other animal protein producing sectors, and highlight the importance of promoting seafood as part of sustainable, climate-neutral food consumption.

An effective marine knowledge value chain that supports EU competitiveness in ocean technologies and solutions, translated into market innovation

The Oceans Pact should support enhanced data collection, sharing, and coordination among Member States to improve informed policymaking and industry innovation. The Commission should invest in initiatives that improve real-time data availability for fisheries management, environmental monitoring, and climate resilience. To build trust in management decisions, the NWWAC recommends that data collection is enhanced through improved mechanisms for collecting and utilizing data from vessels. This could bridge gaps between scientific advice and on-the-ground realities. Moreover, expanding science-industry initiatives can foster collaboration and promote mutual understanding.

The Oceans Pact should prioritise funding for scientific research, ensuring adequate resources for both projects and human capital. Greater investment is required in marine science disciplines to address critical knowledge gaps, including fisheries stock assessments, ecosystem dynamics, and climate change adaptation. The EU should facilitate cross-border

research collaborations and data-sharing agreements to maximise the effectiveness of scientific investments.

Data collection and data quality should be addressed as a priority, as they pose great challenges to the establishment of effective management measures. Fully documented fisheries are lacking in some cases, and this affects management decisions on métiers, species and habitats that are most in need of consideration regarding biodiversity and focused action. Having a sound scientific basis is crucial to achieve balanced objectives across all three pillars of sustainability, allowing for both the better protection of threatened ecosystems and a thriving and competitive European fishing sector.

ACs have played a crucial role in shaping EU fisheries policy through stakeholder-driven advice and consensus-building processes for the past 20 years. The Commission should further integrate ACs' expertise into decision-making structures, reinforcing their role in bridging science, policy, industry and civil society interests. The NWWAC encourages continued support for ACs to ensure their capacity to contribute effectively to the future of EU fisheries governance.

The priorities for supporting the resilience and sustainability of coastal communities in the various sea basins of the EU

The Oceans Pact must reinforce policy frameworks that ensure socio-economic resilience by recognising the cultural and economic significance of fisheries. Support mechanisms, including financial aid and training programmes, should be expanded to help fishers and coastal businesses adapt to environmental and market changes.

Many communities are linked to, or even tied to, restricted fishing zones, but due to various factors (climate change, displacement of fleets for economic reasons, etc.), coastal communities, and even the very fabric of the local economy, are no longer able to survive. Coastal communities and even the socio-economic fabric of certain territories are disappearing to the benefit of purely economic policies on the part of individual companies and under cover of the CFP and their rights.