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Improving International Ocean Governance – Two years of progress

{SWD(2019) 104 final}

HEALTHY OCEANS — AN ESSENTIAL ALLY AND A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

In November 2016, the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union adopted a Joint Communication entitled *International Ocean Governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans*¹. This agenda marks a deepening of the EU's international oceans policy. The EU moved and continues to move from a sector-based approach to an integrated approach. The EU has consistently kept to an overall objective to ensure that the oceans are safe, secure, clean, healthy and sustainably managed.

The EU's ocean agenda is an integral part of the EU's response to the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 dedicated to conserving and sustainably using our oceans, seas and marine resources. It reflects the EU's preference for strong partnerships, multilateral dialogue and international cooperation as a way to raise the urgent need for action to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans.

Healthy oceans are essential for human life, wellbeing and sustainable development. Oceans absorb 25% of all carbon emissions we produce and redistribute heat around the globe. The ocean is home to millions of species and the health of the oceans is strongly dependent upon this marine biodiversity. Fish and shellfish are an important source of protein and essential micronutrients, contributing to global food security and human health. Moreover, the “blue” ocean economy offers significant opportunities for sustainable, innovative growth and decent jobs.

With this oceans agenda, the EU is pursuing an action-oriented approach that addresses the biggest challenges to ocean governance today.

This is the first progress report by the European Commission and the High Representative on the EU's international ocean governance agenda since its adoption. It takes stock of the achievements in delivering the agenda so far, showcases further accomplishments which contribute to the overall objectives of the agenda, and gives an overview of the EU's continuing commitment to strengthen international ocean governance.

It is accompanied by Staff Working Document *SWD(2019) 104*, which provides an in-depth analysis of the progress made towards the 50 specific points as set out in the EU's ocean governance agenda.

TWO YEARS IN — CONCRETE RESULTS

Since the EU adopted its ocean governance agenda in 2016, its activity on oceans has intensified. Its 50 actions are all successfully being implemented: some of them have already been delivered, while the work on a number of them will continue beyond 2019. The agenda has triggered international cooperation across all continents and under all three pillars of the ocean governance agenda, strengthening the EU's role as:

- a reliable partner in building an international governance framework, with the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea at its core;
- a top donor to projects that build capacity and spur local, regional and global action;
- a strong supporter of and service provider for ocean research, monitoring and surveillance.
- a coherent 'blue' economy business partner with an inclusive and sustainable outlook.

¹ JOIN(2016) 49 final.

EUR 590 million have been engaged under EU development policy to promote better ocean governance with third partners² and over EUR 500 million on marine research under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme.

- **PILLAR 1: IMPROVING THE INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK**

Since 2016, the EU has further used its presence in international and regional fora and its bilateral relations with key partners to make sure that existing rules are properly implemented and to fill any regulatory gaps.

At international level, the EU has continued to work in particular within the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the overarching 'constitution' governing all activities at sea. Within this framework, the EU has been instrumental in the progress made towards a legally binding instrument to protect biodiversity in the high seas. The negotiations are ongoing and the EU and its Member States will continue to drive the process forward. Within the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), the EU is actively promoting the establishment of ecological or biological scientific marine areas (EBSAs) to ensure their protection. The EU has also financially supported the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, thereby helping exporting countries to ensure that trade in marine wildlife is legal and sustainable³.

In addition, the EU has contributed to more sustainable oceans, notably in terms of conservation and fisheries management at **regional level** through Regional Seas Conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), with a view to improving science-based governance. In this respect, the EU provided EUR 17 million in 2017-2018 for improving governance, science and capacity building and for strengthening compliance in the 18 RFMOs and tuna RFMOs in which the EU participates. This EU action for sustainability has paid off: at the end of 2017, 16 of the world's 18 emblematic tuna stocks were at sustainable levels, according to scientific advice.

The signature in October 2018 of the Agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean was a landmark achievement. It will fill a significant gap in the Arctic Ocean governance framework and safeguard fragile marine ecosystems for future generations.

Under the Central Arctic Fisheries Agreement, the EU and nine other signatories have agreed to ban commercial fishing in the high seas portion of the Central Arctic Ocean, an area roughly the size of the Mediterranean Sea, for an initial period of 16 years. During this time, they will work to improve understanding of the Arctic ecosystems and the possibilities for sustainable fisheries given the decline of the ice cover.

The EU has engaged with key ocean players to build **bilateral partnerships**. The EU signed a first ocean partnership — with China — in July 2018 and is expecting to sign a partnership with Canada in 2019.

Launched at the Our Ocean conference in Malta in 2017, the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme aims to support sustainable management and development of fisheries for food security and economic growth among 15 States in the Pacific region. PEUMP follows a comprehensive and integrated approach, mainstreaming climate change, environment and gender across all activities.

The EU has bolstered **the capacity** of partner countries and organisations to monitor the oceans, conserve marine biodiversity and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. For

example, it committed EUR 35 million for Pacific States under the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership Programme, EUR 15 million for Western Africa under the PESCAO programme, and EUR 28 million for the Indian Ocean region under the ECOFISH programme and EUR 87 million to its cooperation with Cambodia under the new CAPFISH-Capture Fisheries programme.

Good international ocean governance also means making sure that those operating at sea can do so in a **secure environment**. In line with its Global Strategy and specific regional policies, e.g. for the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, the EU plays a key role as a global maritime security provider. It has mobilised resources to protect against maritime threats such as piracy and human trafficking, reduce maritime accidents and prevent environmental disasters. Satellite data from the EU's Copernicus programme have been used by EU bodies such as the European Maritime Safety Agency and for international search and rescue operations at the request of the UN.

PILLAR 2: REDUCING PRESSURE ON OCEANS AND SEAS AND CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE 'BLUE' ECONOMY

Healthy oceans are a prerequisite for sustainable economic development. If we want tomorrow's 'blue' economy to generate more value from 'blue' sectors and support coastal communities, we must work to ensure healthy oceans today.

Oceans regulate our climate but they are also extremely vulnerable to the impacts of **climate change**. The EU is promoting and developing ocean-related action to implement the Paris Agreement such as nature-based solutions and ocean-based renewable energy. These elements were reiterated in the new strategic vision for achieving a climate-neutral Europe by 2050 adopted by the Commission in November 2018⁴. The vision highlights the conservation, use and management of marine ecosystems and resources as one of the priorities for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Since 2017, the EU has dedicated specific funding to restore marine and coastal ecosystems in different regions around the world, including the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, and the ACP countries for a total of more than EUR 90 million. Furthermore, the EU is promoting offshore wind and ocean energy for providing clean energy to islands and coastlines in the EU and across the world. For instance, the EU is mobilising technical expertise to help India launch the tender of its first offshore wind farm this year.

In addition, the EU is playing an active role in encouraging strong global action to tackle shipping emissions, in line with the International Maritime Organization's strategy to halve such emissions by 2050.

The EU signed a Joint Statement with South Korea on efforts to combat IUU fishing following the good results of the EU-Republic of Korea Working Group established after the lifting of the IUU yellow card in April 2015.

As a frontrunner in the fight against **IUU fishing**, since adopting the IUU Regulation in 2008, the EU has entered into dialogues on IUU fishing matters with more than 50 countries in all the major fishing regions. Thanks to these dialogues, 14 countries have successfully reformed their control and management systems in line with their

⁴[COM\(2018\) 773 final](#)

international obligations as flag, coastal, port and market states responsibilities⁵. The EU's substantial network of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) was also used to support EUs IUU policy. By November 2018, 10 SFPAs were in place with an overall budget of EUR 135 million per year. Three additional SFPAs have been negotiated and should enter into force in the near future. Furthermore, the EU has adopted new rules to ensure sustainable fishing by EU fleets beyond EU waters⁶. The EU has also continued to support the fight against IUU fishing in various RFMOs. With the support of the EU, a plan on IUU fishing in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea was adopted and stringent listing procedures were proposed for IUU vessels in the Indian and Southern Oceans. Furthermore, a pilot project to assist and increase IUU deterrence worldwide is being implemented by the European Fisheries Control Agency, supported by the European Maritime Safety Agency.

In addition, at the World Trade Organisation the EU proposed in October 2016 prohibiting certain forms of fisheries subsidies, which contribute to overcapacity, overfishing and IUU fishing. The EU remains actively engaged in reaching an agreement by 2020 at the latest in line with target 6 under SDG14.

The EU has engaged in shaping the international response to the increasingly pressing problem of **marine litter**. It has done so by building on the EU Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy⁷. The EU is actively supporting the follow-up of the resolution on marine litter and microplastics adopted at the third UN Environment Assembly in December 2017. In 2018, the EU has supported the focus of Canada's Presidency of the G7 on marine litter and plastic pollution. The EU is also providing targeted support to improving waste management in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia, which faces massive challenges in tackling plastic pollution.

The EU Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy consists of a comprehensive approach to eliminating plastic waste and microplastic leakage, in particular to the marine environment and was followed by a proposal on banning the top 10 single-use plastic products found on beaches and at sea, as well as introducing new rules on lost and abandoned fishing gear. The package is complemented by a proposal for a new Directive on Port Reception Facilities to address the problem of marine litter from ships, including fishing vessels and recreational craft.

The Transatlantic MPA Network has brought together MPA managers around the Atlantic rim from North and South America, Africa and Europe. The twinning project has allowed them to network and share best management practices. They are now looking to continue their cooperation based on a common strategy.

The EU has already designated more than 10% of its marine and coastal areas as **marine protected areas** (MPAs) – two years before the 2020 deadline of the international CBD target – and is taking action to ensure their effective management. It is now helping others to achieve this target, by promoting new and well-managed MPAs worldwide. More than EUR 23 million have been invested in developing guidelines, carrying out scientific research and studies, and setting up twinning projects to encourage mutual learning and cooperation.

⁵https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/illegal-fishing-overview-of-existing-procedures-third-countries_en.pdf

⁶ (EU) 2017/2403

⁷ COM(2018) 28 final.

- **PILLAR 3: STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL OCEAN RESEARCH AND DATA**

A strong oceans policy depends on a sound understanding of our oceans, of how they react to the cumulative impacts of human activity, and of how we can wisely use what they have to offer.

The EU has continued to promote ocean research, data and science with the aim of developing comprehensive, reliable, comparable and accessible ocean knowledge to improve policy-making, drive innovation and facilitate a sustainable 'blue' economy. To this end, the Commission has started publishing the Copernicus Ocean State Report annually⁸. The Commission is particularly keen to

In 2018, the Commission published the second ocean state report. Based on comprehensive, state-of-the-art data from the EU's Copernicus Marine Service, the report assesses the current state, natural variations, and changes in the global ocean and European regional seas.

improve data collection, access and compatibility. Through EMODnet, the European Marine Observation and Data Network, the Commission is linking global and national databases to create an international **marine data network** providing open access to ocean data and products from Europe and beyond. In 2018, for example, the EU earmarked EUR 3.5 million for better ocean data cooperation with China. Furthermore, through the Horizon Research and Innovation Programme, the EU is funding projects to make ocean observations in the Atlantic and the seas around Europe fit for the future.

With a view to strengthening investment in **'blue' science and innovation**, the Commission has been boosting the development of cloud-based services and research infrastructure through the Horizon 2020 programme. Cooperating with partners beyond the EU gives us a better understanding of ocean dynamics and trends. It also drives innovation and reduces costs. The 2013 Galway Statement on Atlantic Ocean Cooperation has already deepened the EU's **marine research cooperation** with the United States and Canada. Building on this successful experience, the EU signed the Belém Statement on Atlantic Research and Innovation Cooperation with Brazil and South Africa in 2017, expanding its cooperation to the South Atlantic. The Commission concluded administrative arrangements on marine research and innovation cooperation with Argentina and Cape Verde in 2018. The resulting All Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance spans the Atlantic Ocean from the Arctic to Antarctica.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Complementing the international ocean governance agenda, the EU has taken action and launched initiatives since its adoption that help to strengthen international ocean governance further.

- As a custodian of the Our Ocean initiative, the EU called for determined global action and generated ambitious commitments to improve ocean governance at the conferences hosted in Malta in 2017 and in Bali in 2018.
- As a proponent of the 'blue' economy, the Commission initiated the partnership on voluntary Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles and has proposed to create a taxonomy for classifying economic activities that are considered environmentally

⁸ <http://marine.copernicus.eu/science-learning/ocean-state-report/>

sustainable which includes activities for the sustainable use and protection of marine resources.

- In addition to EU investment in marine research, EUR 46 million were dedicated in the last 2 years to the Copernicus Marine Service for global observation, forecasting and analysis of the state of the oceans, including climate change effects.
- The Commission has proposed dedicated funding for international ocean governance under the **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund** for 2021-2027⁹. This would allow targeted EU action, for example to make headway in the fight against IUU fishing and to develop international maritime security further.
- The Commission has made its proposals for the post-2020 EU research and innovation programme “**Horizon Europe**” (2021-2027)¹⁰. International ocean governance is also one of the priority areas in the proposed post-2020 **External Funding Instruments**.¹¹
- The development of a common maritime agenda for the Black Sea was set in motion with the Ministerial Declaration *Towards a Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea* endorsed at the 2018 European Maritime Day in Burgas, Bulgaria.
- Lastly, the EU is contributing to the second UN World Ocean Assessment currently prepared and has also begun to prepare its contribution to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Since adopting its international ocean governance agenda, the EU can look back on a number of successes. Major advances have been made across all three priority areas and beyond.

But challenges remain. Ocean systems are complex, and ocean governance is therefore multifaceted. The strain of climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, offshore extraction and overfishing continue to burden our ocean. Taken together, they pose multiple threats to marine life. They pose a formidable challenge — one too big and complex to be tackled by any one country or region alone. Keeping the world’s oceans healthy requires a broad coalition of actors acting together under international rules. With a world population set to reach 9-10 billion by 2050, the pressures are only set to grow.

As a reliable international leader for further ocean action, the EU remains committed to change, particularly on the 4 of the 10 targets under SDG14 that are due for delivery in 2020. Anticipating the forthcoming report on oceans and the cryosphere by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the EU is also stepping up its action to ensure adaptation to climate change effects on oceans and ocean uses.

As of 2019, the European Commission and the High Representative are setting up an EU **International Ocean Governance Stakeholder Forum** bringing together experts, civil society representatives, academics and decision-makers dedicated to oceans and seas worldwide. This Forum will follow up on the EU’s established priorities, discuss current and future challenges of international ocean governance, and recommend future actions.

⁹ COM/2018/390 final

¹⁰ COM/2018/435 final & COM/2018/436 final - 2018/0225 (COD)

¹¹ 2018/0243 (COD); 2018/0244 (CNS); 2018/0247 (COD)