



POSITION NOTE

“European Sea Basins as key drivers for autonomy, sustainability and competitiveness”

Position note drawn up by Blue Cluster outlining key recommendations for the European Ocean Act

Summary

LEGISLATION AS A STRATEGIC ENABLER: THE EUROPEAN OCEAN ACT

With the adoption of the European Ocean Pact, European seas are now central to our future prosperity, sustainability and security. The European Ocean Act must now translate this vision into a concrete, enabling framework to unlock this full potential.

Europe's strength will come from actively enabling the next generation of sustainable ocean industries.

The Ocean Act must therefore be designed as a strategic enabler of deployment, innovation and scale, not a control instrument.

CLUSTERS AS INNOVATION DRIVERS: BLUE CLUSTER

As an independent and neutral organisation, Blue Cluster connects companies, knowledge institutions and governments and accelerates sustainable economic activity at sea. The cluster represents a vital ecosystem of innovative blue businesses that are delivering solutions in offshore energy, maritime security, digital systems, nature restoration, aquaculture and smart infrastructure.s.

CALL FOR EVIDENCE:

ADVISE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON THE OCEAN ACT

Before elaborating on different topics, we introduce this paper with a specific call on the European Commission, Parliament and Member States to make the Ocean Act an effective framework to stimulate the European blue economy.

Call for Action

PLAN SEA BASINS STRATEGICALLY AND AT EUROPEAN SCALE

The Act should strengthen the MSP Directive by introducing sea-basin-level plans. They should be coordinated by the EC. Those plans will as such complement national MSPs and ensure cross-border coherence for energy, nature, food, security, digitisation and transport.

INCLUDE SECURITY, ROBUSTNESS AND REDUNDANCY BY DESIGN

The Act should align with the EU Maritime Security Strategy, NIS2 Directive, and Critical Entities Resilience Directive by legally requiring built-in redundancy, cyber-resilience and physical security.

STRENGTHEN COOPERATION WITH INNOVATION CLUSTERS

The Act can recognise innovation clusters as strategic implementation partners, similar to the role of industrial alliances under the Net-Zero Industry Act, giving them a consultative role in policy design, MSP updates and implementation roadmaps.

PRIORITISE INNOVATION OVER TRADITIONAL PRACTICES (EG. FISHERIES)

The Act should rebalance objectives in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and introduce an explicit legal objective to promote blue innovation (e.g. offshore energy, aquaculture tech, monitoring systems). The act should ensure that fisheries protection is balanced with innovation and diversification of maritime activities.

MAINSTREAM NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND NATURE-INCLUSIVE DESIGN

The Act should embed Nature-Inclusive Design (NID) and/or Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) into permitting under the Habitats Directive and Nature Restoration Law. This makes a nature based approach a standard condition for offshore infrastructure permits.

MAKE MULTI-USE AND MARIPARKS THE DEFAULT SPATIAL MODEL

The Act should amend the MSP Directive and require that multi-use and innovative zonation (e.g. Mariparks) are assessed and designated by default in maritime plans. Multi-use should be a basic principle and as a consequence, Member states should justify single-use zoning.

CREATE FASTER, CLEARER PERMITTING AND INVESTMENT FRAMEWORKS

The Act should harmonise procedures for offshore (multi-use) permits and set binding deadlines. Regulation should be supported by one-stop-shop authorities (SBE department) providing access to EU and other funding.

ACCELERATE AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS

The Act should align with RED III and the Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy by legally recognising autonomous and AI-driven offshore energy systems. They should be prioritised in permitting and grid-connection procedures.

A new ambition: European sea basins as strategic drivers

European sea basins are strategic assets. They offer abundant renewable energy potential, space for new food systems and circular industries. They carry capacity for ecological restoration, critical infrastructure, and strategic leverage for security and autonomy.

If developed strategically, they will serve as a major driver of competitiveness, positioning Europe to become climate-neutral, energy-independent, economically leading, and geopolitically secure at the same time.

The Ocean Act should explicitly develop sea basins as assets of strategic European interest, comparable to energy, food, transport and digital networks on land.

1. ENERGY AUTONOMY AS THE CORNERSTONE

We need autonomous and large-scale energy production at sea. Europe cannot achieve sovereignty, resilience or decarbonisation without a massive expansion of offshore renewables. Offshore wind will play a central role, but the real opportunity lies in combining multiple technologies and functions: offshore wind (fixed and floating), wave and tidal energy, floating solar, offshore storage and hydrogen production, smart ports and logistics as well as smart interconnectors between Member States.

Through efficient and sustainable use of space, European sea basins will supply a substantial share of our energy demand, reducing dependency on external suppliers while strengthening competitiveness and industrial value chains.

The Ocean Act should speed up permits and provide legal certainty, plan offshore energy at sea-basin level, ensure cross-border grid connections, and require nature-inclusive design from the start.

Speed and sustainability must go hand in hand.

2. SECURITY BY DESIGN

Europe's offshore infrastructure is critical. Energy production, data cables, ports, logistics hubs and digital systems form the backbone of our society. Therefore, they must be designed for robustness, redundancy, cyber and physical security, and rapid recovery in crisis situations.

Security and resilience must be included from the start. Greater offshore development also creates opportunities: more presence, better monitoring, smarter sensor networks and improved situational awareness which contribute to safer and more secure seas.

The Ocean Act should therefore integrate security-by-design, smart surveillance and resilient infrastructure standards into maritime planning.

3. MULTI-USE AS A BASIC PRINCIPLE, SINGLE-USE ON DEMAND

The future offshore system is an integrated ecosystem where energy and food production, nature restoration, data management and security reinforce each other.

Blue Cluster promotes the concept of "Mariparks": areas where economic activity is optimised by sharing infrastructure and services (data, security, safety, ..). They maximise economic value and aim for a net positive impact on marine life. Ports will play undoubtedly an important role in the accessibility and governance of a Maripark.

The Ocean Act should make multi-use default, with integrated permits and coordinated planning. Single-use should only exist as an exception.

4. NATURE AS INFRASTRUCTURE

Sustainability must serve as a guiding design principle. NBS and NID should become the default approach in all (offshore) developments. Infrastructure must go beyond minimising impact and instead actively restore habitats through artificial reefs and smart substrate design, reinforce coastal resilience, enhance carbon sequestration, and improve ecosystem services.

The Ocean Act should embed a simple rule: through nature-positive actions, sustainable and economically scalable activities can be developed at sea.

Climate, biodiversity and industrial goals can reinforce each other and should not be considered as competing objectives.

5. CLUSTERS AS KEY DRIVERS

Europe already stands for world-class education, research and industrial capacity. What is missing is scale and deployment. It is clear that innovation clusters such as Blue Cluster on a national scale and EIT Waters on a European scale connect blue companies, researchers and governments, and boost offshore innovation while reducing risks.

The Ocean Act should explicitly leverage such ecosystems through facilitating public-private partnerships, demonstration zones, coordinated sea-basin planning based on multi-use, simplified funding access and faster regulatory pathways.

Europe must shift from pilots to industrial roll-out.

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