The EU's blue economy strategy explained

Published by AGRINFO on 30 Jan 2023

Overview of the primary objectives of the EU's blue economy for a sustainable future

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU: Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future

Update

This Communication sets out the European Commission's detailed agenda for a blue economy that will play a major role in achieving the European Green Deal's objectives.

Background

This new Communication emphasises the shift in focus from "blue growth" to a sustainable blue economy. It complements other current Commission initiatives, and outlines policies on decarbonisation, conservation of our natural capital, the circular economy, and responsible food production. It announces some new initiatives, and describes some of the tools and enablers to achieve the transition.

Key initiatives include:

- a legislative proposal for modern, sustainable marketing standards for seafood (in 2022)
- an initiative to support the development of the EU's algae industry (European Commission 2020a)
- supporting the digital transition of fisheries control
- assessment of the potential and research and investment needs regarding cell-based seafood.

The blue economy is a broad, fast-moving segment of the EU economy. Over the past 15 years, the EU has laid a solid foundation for an integrated maritime policy in Europe by involving its Member States, regions' local stakeholders and land-based green economy. It has also taken significant steps to modernise and diversify.

The blue economy encompasses all industries and sectors related to oceans, seas and coasts, whether they are based in the marine environment or on land. It provides 4.5 million direct jobs,

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many in regions where there are few alternatives. Alongside traditional sectors, innovative sectors are evolving and growing, such as ocean renewable energy, the blue bio-economy, biotechnology and desalination, providing new prospects and creating jobs. Blue biotechnologies also offer innovative solutions in the production of materials, enzymes, food supplements and pharmaceuticals.

Responsible food systems

The blue economy can help alleviate pressure on our climate and on natural resources for food production by using marine resources better and by choosing alternative sources of food and feed. This includes:

- responsible fishing to bring stocks to sustainable levels
- sustainable aquaculture to complement the natural limits of wild captures
- production of algae as an alternative to agriculture.

Low-impact aquaculture (such as low-trophic, multi-trophic and organic aquaculture), and environmental services from aquaculture, have the potential to contribute greatly to the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork strategy and a sustainable blue economy. The new Strategic Guidelines for EU aquaculture set out the vision and operational path to achieve this transformation. The action plan for development of the organic food sector explicitly aims at boosting organic aquaculture production in the EU (European Commission 2020b).

The EU considers that new algae-based food and feed products offer opportunities for the development of a sustainable food sector. The Farm to Fork Strategy highlights the role of algae as an important source of alternative protein for sustainable global food security. Investing in micro-algae as a new source of animal feed can help reduce catches of wild fish for animal feed. The introduction of new algae-based foods into the EU market may be subject to the Regulation on Novel Foods.

International cooperation

In line with the International Ocean Governance Agenda (DG MARE 2016), and within the legal framework established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the European Commission supports sustainable maritime development within the EU's partnerships and agreements, and promotes sustainable fishing in regional fisheries management organisations. The Commission will continue to fight illegal fishing and combat fraud in seafood products under EU Regulations. Through its Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, it will continue to support improved fisheries governance in partner countries and help develop local economies.

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What are the major implications for exporting countries?

In order to embed the sustainable blue economy approach in global cooperation on ocean governance, the European Commission supports non-EU countries to advance and diversify their sustainable, inclusive and equitable blue economies. This support is provided through diverse EU funds including the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI); the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA); and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs). In particular, the Commission is considering setting up an EU–Africa Blue Task Force.

Resources

European Commission (2020a) Blue bioeconomy – Towards a strong and sustainable EU algae sector.

European Commission (2020b) Organic farming – Action plan for the development of EU organic production.

DG MARE (2016) International Ocean Governance: An Agenda for the Future of our Oceans

Sources

Communications from the European Commission:

- Towards a Strong and Sustainable EU Algae Sector
- Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future
- Strategic Guidelines for a More Sustainable and Competitive EU Aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030
- The EU Budget Powering the Recovery Plan for Europe
- A Farm to Fork Strategy for a Fair, Healthy and Environmentally-friendly Food System
- Strategic Guidelines for the Sustainable Development of EU Aquaculture

Regulation (EU) 2015/2283 on Novel Foods

Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy

Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products

Proposal regarding Fisheries Control

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