The European Ocean Pact

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EU publishes its Ocean Pact: A roadmap for an Ocean Union

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The European Ocean Pact

Update

The European Union (EU) has published its Ocean Pact, which sets out a comprehensive strategy and roadmap to better protect the ocean, promote a thriving blue economy, and support the wellbeing of people living in coastal areas. It announces the preparation of an Ocean Act (expected in 2027) that builds on the existing Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the revision of the Common Fisheries Policy and other related legislation. New initiatives include a Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture, expected in 2026.

Impacted products

Fish and fishery products

What is changing?

Ocean Pact

Adopted by the European Commission on 5 June 2025, the Ocean Pact introduces a comprehensive EU ocean strategy for the first time. It offers a single framework for implementing existing legislation, going beyond the directly relevant legislation – the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive. The Ocean Pact will simplify reporting obligations and streamline coordination to achieve policy goals more coherently across sectors. The Pact lays the groundwork for an Ocean Act by 2027, building on a revision of the existing Maritime Spatial Planning Directive. It also aims to reinforce cooperation in international initiatives by:

- protecting and restoring ocean health
- boosting the competitiveness of the EU sustainable blue economy
- supporting coastal and island communities, and outermost regions

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- advancing ocean research, knowledge, skills, and innovation
- enhancing maritime security and defence
- strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international ocean governance.

Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture

Complementing the EU's Vision for Agriculture and Food, the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture will aim to improve the competitiveness and resilience of these sectors, including processing, and ensure a stable supply for the European market.

To boost the sustainable economic growth of ocean resources, the European Commission is exploring how to improve the sustainability of imported fisheries and aquaculture products under the autonomous tariff quota regime.

The EU is planning to amend Regulation 1026/2012, which aims to tackle non-sustainable fishing practices and encourage cooperation in the management of shared stocks with non-EU countries, while leveraging its market power to promote sustainable fisheries.

As regards fisheries, the Commission will:

- aim to ratify and implement international instruments such as the World Trade Organization Fisheries Subsidies Agreement (WTO 2022) on prohibiting harmful subsidies, the International Labour Organization Conventions relating to seafarers and fishers, and the fishing vessel safety Standards established under the International Maritime Organization
- address the challenge of flags of convenience, ensuring transparency in fishing vessel ownership structures and to hold accountable those responsible for illegal practices
- propose a new generation of sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) aligning with the EU's wider regional strategies and priorities, particularly in Africa and the Indo-Pacific
- evaluate and possibly revise the Common Fisheries Policy, including the EU's common organisation of markets in fishery and aquaculture products
- publish a Communication on its new strategic approach to EU fisheries external action by 2026 (also see EU external fisheries policy explained).

The EU will aim to ratify and implement the Agreement on Port State Measures and to promote global implementation of its updated fisheries control rules (see Revised EU rules and digitalisation of fisheries control). It will continue to implement the EU fisheries control system which aims to safeguard the EU market from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishery products. The EU's online platform for digital submission and management of catch certificates (IT CATCH) supports the fight against IUU fishing, and will become mandatory for EU Member States and importers from January 2026 (see European Commission webinar series).

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Why?

Ocean Pact

Environmental challenges, including the cumulative impacts of climate change, pollution, and overexploitation of marine resources, are impacting ocean health. This is compounded by growing geopolitical tensions that challenge cooperative governance and pose a threat to security. To address these challenges, the EU has set both binding and aspirational targets on ocean preservation and sustainable management. Their effective implementation and enforcement requires aligning actions globally at multiple levels.

Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture

Seventy per cent of aquatic food consumed in the EU today is imported. The EU aims to strengthen the sustainability of imports while ensuring a level playing field that will support both EU fisheries and global sustainability.

Timeline

- The digital EU catch certification scheme (CATCH) will become mandatory for EU Member States and importers from January 2026.
- A Communication on a new strategic approach to EU fisheries external action is expected in 2026.
- The Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture is expected in 2026.
- An Ocean Act is expected in 2027.

Recommended Actions

The EU will hold public consultations on many of the initiatives foreseen in the Ocean Pact. Non-EU stakeholders are encouraged to participate in such consultations, which are open to stakeholders in non-EU countries.

Organisations wishing to respond must be registered. First Create an EU login account, then register your organisation on the Transparency Register.

Resources

European Commission (nd) Use of CATCH by EU Importers. Webinar series.

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WTO (2022) Implementing the WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies: Challenges and opportunities for developing and least-developed country members. World Trade Organization.

Regulation (EU) No 1026/2012 on certain measures for the purpose of the conservation of fish stocks in relation to countries allowing non-sustainable fishing

Sources

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