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THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

International ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans

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1. OCEANS AS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE AND PRIORITY

For the European Union and many nations around the world, the oceans hold a key to the future. They offer great potential for boosting growth, jobs and innovation. The output of the global ocean economy is estimated at EUR 1.3 trillion and this could more than double by 2030.¹

The oceans play a key role in regulating the climate system. They produce half our oxygen and have absorbed most of the world's extra heat and around 25 % of CO₂ emissions.² Many island (including Small Island Developing States) and coastal countries are dependent on marine resources and vulnerable to the potential impacts of human activities on conservation and sustainable use. How we deal with the oceans is crucial. Some of the most pressing global challenges – including climate change, poverty, safe, nutritious and sufficient food for a population projected to reach nine billion by 2050 – can be addressed effectively only if the oceans are safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed.

Our oceans are under threat from over-exploitation, climate change, acidification, pollution and declining biodiversity. Marine and coastal economies are developing across the globe, but their success depends on improved sustainability. Access to maritime routes is sometimes impaired by illegal behaviour, increasing levels of piracy, armed robbery and other forms of maritime crime at sea. Attempts to assert territorial or maritime claims outside the frame established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), through intimidation, coercion or force may affect not only regional stability, but also the global economy. Awareness of illegal activities within the maritime domain is a crucial enabling factor for sustainable, rules-based governance.

Accurate and timely information on the state of marine resources and ecosystems remains a challenge. The technological advances needed for the sustainable development of marine activities depend on improved research.

All of these challenges have been recognised at global level. At the Rio+20 Summit, heads of state and government undertook to protect and restore oceans and marine ecosystems, and to manage ocean resources sustainably, in accordance with international law, to deliver on all three dimensions of sustainable development. The EU is committed to this integrated approach.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identified conservation and sustainable use of oceans as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 14) and as part of a highly inter-connected agenda. For the first time, the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans are addressed with the world's other most pressing sustainability challenges in an overarching global policy agenda, and reflected as such across several SDGs and targets.³ The global community must now turn these commitments into action. The EU is fully committed to this goal and its implementation. The actions set out in this Joint Communication are an integral part of the EU's response

¹ *The ocean economy in 2030*, OECD Publishing, Paris (2016)

² *Climate change 2014 – Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability*, IPCC Fifth Assessment Report WGII, Chap. 6

³ Oceans and coasts link to a number of SDGs, in addition to SDG14 (oceans), including poverty eradication (SDG 1), food security and sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), modern energy (SDG 7), growth and employment (SDG 8), climate (SDG13), ecosystems and biodiversity (SDG 15) and partnerships (SDG 17).

to the 2030 Agenda. This is also a priority in the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy.⁴

1.1. THE NEED FOR BETTER OCEAN GOVERNANCE

UNCLOS governs the use of the oceans and their resources. It is supported by a framework of regional and international institutions and fora responsible for further regulating the sectoral activities that take place at sea.⁵ This framework provides a broad set of rules and principles. However, it is somewhat heterogeneous and uncoordinated. A global consensus is emerging that the marine environment and maritime human activities, including land-based activities with an impact on the oceans, must be managed more effectively to address the increasing pressures on the oceans.

The Commission's consultation⁶ in 2015 confirmed that the current framework does not ensure the sustainable management of the oceans:

- The framework is incomplete and needs further development. Significant legal gaps remain, especially with respect to conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). The International Seabed Authority (ISA) has not yet completed its mining code establishing the necessary rules and procedures related to seabed mining;
- Agreed rules and arrangements are often not implemented effectively or enforced uniformly. We are a long way from achieving global objectives such as achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield for fisheries by 2015, or conserving 10 % of coastal and marine areas, in particular through marine protected areas (MPAs) by 2020.⁷ The lack of timely ratification compromises the entry into force of important maritime conventions such as the Work in Fishing Convention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO);
- There is too little coordination between international organisations responsible for oceans. Although maritime activities are inter-connected, they are mostly regulated sector by sector. Coordination between international bodies that cover the various sectors is often *ad hoc* or non-existent.⁸ Organisations and mechanisms that could play a crucial role in strengthening the overall framework, such as UN-Oceans or the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), often have weak mandates;
- Illegal and criminal activities have significant impacts on economic operators, the marine environment and people working in the maritime sector. The EU has

⁴ *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (28 June 2016)

⁵ These include the IMO for shipping, the ISA for seabed-mining, the FAO and RFMOs for fisheries, UNEP, multilateral environment agreements, RSCs and other MEAs for conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment and the IOC of UNESCO for marine scientific research. UNCLOS also provides jurisdictional mechanism for the compulsory peaceful settlement of disputes concerning its interpretation or application: the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/consultations/ocean-governance/doc/ocean-governance-summary_en.pdf

⁷ *The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, SDG target 14.5 and *the Strategic Plan 2011-2020*, Aichi Biodiversity target 11.

⁸ e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity/International Maritime Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation/Regional Fisheries Management Organisations/Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora/ Convention on Biological Diversity.

improved its own security framework and promoted international and regional security cooperation, but more has to be done to eliminate unlawful acts at sea. The lack of decent work in some ocean-related activities remains a source of concern. Working conditions on vessels engaged in illegal activities are sometimes far below international standards or even illegal, directly affecting not only the workers concerned, but also the sector's ability to act sustainably;

- More coordination is needed between the EU's internal and external policies, such as the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Black Sea Synergy, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, the Union for the Mediterranean and the Northern Dimension;
- Stakeholders (including business, researchers, and civil society organisations) should be better involved in preparing and implementing the international regulatory framework. This would result in higher level of compliance and facilitate the emergence of complementary governance arrangements, e.g. voluntary commitments and sharing best practice. Ocean management should be based on sound scientific research and knowledge.

1.2. THE ROLE OF THE EU

A coherent cross sectoral, rules-based international approach is needed to ensure that seas are safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed. Such an approach will also contribute to delivering results for EU citizens on priorities such as jobs, growth, competitiveness, sustainability, climate resilience, and peace and security. Promoting rules-based good governance at sea will help to enhance human rights, freedom and democracy, create a level playing field for business and improve working conditions worldwide. This is consistent with the EU's role as a strong global actor.

The EU is well placed to shape international ocean governance on the basis of its experience in developing a sustainable approach to ocean management, notably through its environment policy (in particular its Marine Strategy Framework Directive), integrated maritime policy (in particular its Maritime Spatial Planning Directive), reformed common fisheries policy, action against illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and its maritime transport policy.

The EU has also developed a set of security tools to address the links between the internal and external security dimensions. Its Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy confirms the need for a more 'joined-up' approach – between the internal and external aspects of policies, across external policies and between Member States and EU institutions. Synergies should be developed with other policies (e.g. on cyber security, cyber defence and the circular economy) and strategies (e.g. the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS)⁹ and related regional strategies¹⁰). In this way, the EU's contribution to strengthening ocean governance will support the objective of global maritime growth and security.

The EU developed the EUMSS to address maritime safety and security challenges effectively and comprehensively using relevant international, EU and national

⁹ *European Union Maritime Security Strategy*, 11205/14, adopted by the General Affairs Council on 24 June 2014.

¹⁰ *European Union Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea*, adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 17 March 2014; *European Union Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa*, adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 14 November 2011

instruments. It should be applied in consistency with this Communication to facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and enhance growth potential. The EU remains an active contributor to global maritime security, building on its experience of fighting piracy in the western Indian Ocean and smuggling and trafficking in the Mediterranean, Black and Baltic Seas, and exploring possibilities in the Gulf of Guinea,¹¹ the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca.

The EU cooperates on ocean governance with bilateral, regional and multilateral partners across the globe and its main legal driver is UNCLOS. It has strategic partnerships and agreements with key international players and partners. It is deeply engaged with various emerging powers. It is a party to many agreements and conventions. Together, the EU and its Member States are the world's biggest donor of aid.

The EU should build on existing arrangements to improve ocean governance and strengthen coordination with international and regional fora. The EU has actively sought to develop cooperation with its neighbours on maritime policy and the ocean economy, including based on the European Neighbourhood Policy, both in its Eastern and Southern dimensions. It also makes a key contribution to the global governance of labour in maritime transport and to the global fight against forced labour and trafficking in human beings.

Action by the EU and its Member States needs to be more 'joined-up' across external and internal policies. Their combined weight will significantly increase the potential for positive change. The EU should ensure coherent action between its internal and external policies in accordance with its commitment to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development. The EU should promote synergies with other EU policies, including development policy and strategies such as the EUMSS.

Moreover, the EU counts nine outermost regions. These regions, due to their contribution to the EU maritime dimension and to their position in the Atlantic and Indian oceans, are important actors that can actively contribute to improved ocean governance.

To ensure safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed oceans, the Commission and the High Representative propose 14 sets of actions in three priority areas:

- improving the international ocean governance framework;
- reducing pressure on oceans and seas and creating the conditions for a sustainable blue economy; and
- strengthening international ocean research and data.

2. IMPROVING THE INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Building on the international consensus that the ocean governance framework needs to be strengthened, the Commission and the High Representative will pursue the following actions:

¹¹ In the Gulf of Guinea (from Senegal to Angola), the EU has developed a Strategy in 2014 and an Action Plan in 2015, following the "comprehensive approach " to support the African-led initiative of the Yaoundé process, decided by Heads of States of Western and Central Africa in June 2013.

Action 1: Filling the gaps in the international ocean governance framework

The Commission and the High Representative will continue to work with Member States and international partners to promote the implementation of multilateral instruments that have been agreed but have not entered into force. The Commission and the High Representative will step up their efforts to promote the signing, ratification, transposition and effective implementation of key global ocean governance instruments such as UNCLOS and its existing implementing agreements.

The Commission will continue to be actively involved in the development of a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). It will continue to support international efforts to protect marine biodiversity in other relevant international fora, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

The Commission and the High Representative will explore with the Member States and all other parties, including international partners, industry and civil society organisations, what voluntary, non-legislative and complementary steps can be taken to support ocean governance.

- *The Commission and the High Representative will work with Member States and international partners to ensure the adoption, ratification and implementation of key global ocean governance instruments, such as the planned UNCLOS Implementing Agreement on BBNJ, and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention.*
- *The Commission and the High Representative will support international efforts for the protection of marine biodiversity in all relevant international institutions.*
- *By 2018, the Commission will produce guidance on the exploration and exploitation of natural resources on the seabed in areas under national jurisdiction, to assist coastal Member States respect their duty under UNCLOS to protect and preserve the marine environment.*
- *The Commission and the High Representative will pursue their regional initiatives outside the EU relating to the sustainable development of sea basins, in cooperation with all the relevant regional and international organisations, and strategies, such as those for the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, which recognise marine and maritime cooperation as a tool to safeguard security and provide for sustainable development.*

Action 2: Promoting regional fisheries management and cooperation in key ocean areas to fill regional governance gaps

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) are the key international organisations for the conservation and sustainable use of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. Improving and regularly reviewing their performance (e.g. on science, compliance transparency and decision-making) is central to the EU's action in these fora.

Most of the central Arctic Ocean, one of the most fragile sea regions on the planet, is not covered by international conservation or management regimes. In line with its recently

proposed integrated Arctic policy,¹² the EU should seek to ensure sustainable development in and around the region on the basis of international cooperation. In particular, it will support the creation of an Arctic RFMO/Arrangement and promote biodiversity protection through the establishment of MPAs.

Other EU regional strategies (e.g. in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa) should be instrumental in improving the conservation and management of fish stocks and provide a framework to address IUU fishing.

- *The Commission will work with its international partners to create RFMOs or arrangements, for species and areas not yet covered. In particular, the EU will support a multilateral agreement that prevents unregulated high seas fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean until an RFMO/A is in place.*
- *The Commission will support the upgrading by 2020 of the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic and the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission. It will also support regional fisheries bodies and initiatives in improving cooperation between countries on issues such as IUU fishing.*
- *The Commission will promote improvements to the functioning of existing regional fisheries management bodies, notably by supporting regular performance reviews.*

Action 3: Improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations and launching Ocean Partnerships for ocean management

The EU should contribute to improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations with a mandate relating to the oceans. This could be done through memoranda of understanding and cooperation agreements to enhance coordination between bodies that have the same or complementary objectives. The Commission will consider reviving the so-called Kobe process for tuna RFMOs and extending it to all RFMOs. The EU will also support the role of multilateral cooperation mechanisms, such as UN-Oceans – in particular in the context of the review of its mandate in 2017 – the IOC, the ISA and continental and regional organisations that have developed strategies to protect and value the seas.

The Commission is engaged in bilateral dialogues on maritime affairs and fisheries with key ocean players including Australia, Canada, China, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. It intends gradually to upgrade these into ‘ocean partnerships’ over the next five years. This will strengthen cooperation in key areas of ocean governance, such as the implementation of ocean-relevant SDGs, capacity building, promoting conservation and sustainable ‘blue growth’, maritime research, international fisheries management, decent working conditions, the fight against IUU fishing and maritime security.

- *The Commission and the High Representative will support better cooperation and coordination between global and regional organisations with a mandate related to the oceans, including through new or existing frameworks.*

¹² Joint Communication on *An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic*, JOIN(2016) 21 final.

- *The Commission will support better coordination between RFMOs and regional seas conventions (RSCs) and cooperation with global organisations.*¹³
- *The Commission will support global efforts for the protection of marine biodiversity in all relevant international institutions such as the priority actions adopted by the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD on marine and coastal biodiversity¹⁴ and other decisions related to the identification of the Ecologically and Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs).*
- *The Commission will ensure the effective implementation of decisions taken for the protection of marine species at the 16th and 17th Conferences of the Parties of CITES.*¹⁵
- *The Commission and the High Representative will support multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as UN-Oceans, in the context of the upcoming review of its mandate and with the aim to strengthen its coordinating role.*
- *The Commission will propose to develop ocean partnerships with key ocean players.*

Action 4: Capacity building

The Commission and the High Representative will use the external policy framework, including development cooperation, to promote and build capacity for better ocean governance, conservation and restoration of biodiversity, and sustainable blue economies with its partners, including with international organisations.

Marine and coastal development needs to be environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. Interactions and trade-offs between sectors and investments need to be clearly defined and articulated.

The EU has a wide range of bilateral cooperation, partnership and trade agreements, including Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, under which it can strengthen cooperation on maritime issues such as blue growth, marine and coastal management, labour rights and qualifications,¹⁶ impacts of climate change on oceans and support for the implementation of international commitments.

Strengthening capacity-building opportunities in focus areas, such as the Gulf of Guinea, the South Atlantic, South-East Asia and Small Islands Developing States will also be part of this approach.

The Commission and the High Representative will mobilise resources to support better planning for a sustainable blue economy, particularly in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Barcelona Convention. They will promote regional dialogue through the UfM Forum on the Blue Economy, and will support the actions agreed within this framework, including improved cooperation on marine research and innovation through the BlueMED Initiative.

¹³ e.g. International Seabed Authority; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, UN Environment Programme, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and World Trade Organisation.

¹⁴ *CBD COP XII/23*;
<https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/default.shtml?id=13386>

¹⁵ <https://cites.org/eng/res/index.php>

¹⁶ Inter alia through IMO International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessels Personnel, 1995 (STCW-F)

- *The Commission and the High Representative will use the external policy framework, including the development cooperation framework, to promote and build capacity for better ocean governance and sustainable blue economies with key partners – in particular in the Pacific ocean, in the Indian Ocean and in Western Africa.*
- *Building on existing EU development cooperation, the Commission and the High Representative will engage in maritime security capacity-building with other countries and regional organisations – notably in the Gulf of Guinea and in the Indian Ocean.*
- *In 2017, the Commission and the High Representative will support the development of a robust, evidence-based Blue Economy Development Framework.*
- *The Commission and the High Representative will identify ways to improve ocean governance through the implementation of the SDGs. This will include, for example, strengthening capacity building opportunities in focus areas, such as the Gulf of Guinea and South-East Asia.*
- *The Commission will include technical cooperation in collaboration with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) aimed at bolstering implementation and enforcement of IMO instruments.*
- *The Commission will mobilise resources to support progress on capacity building related to the development of a sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean, in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean and other organisations, including the Barcelona Convention.*

Action 5: Ensuring the safety and security of seas and oceans

The EUMSS identifies security challenges, such as piracy, trafficking and the smuggling of human beings, arms and narcotics, and stresses the need to facilitate cooperation and information-sharing between civilian and military authorities. A wider international debate in fora such as the UN, the G7 and the G20, and tailor-made partnerships involving other countries and regional bodies (e.g. the African Union and ASEAN) are required in the search for global solutions.

In cooperation with the Member States, the Commission and the High Representative will work bilaterally and multilaterally with non-EU countries and regional organisations to reduce and eliminate maritime security threats and risks, in the framework of the EUMSS and regional strategies (e.g. Gulf of Guinea, Horn of Africa), by stepping up work in priority areas.¹⁷

The new European Border and Coastguard Regulation¹⁸ and the amended European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA)

¹⁷ This includes: working on a coordinated approach on maritime security issues in international fora (e.g. UN, G7 and G20) and through high-level dialogues; strengthening and supporting EU regional responses in the maritime domain (e.g. the Atalanta anti-piracy operation in the Indian Ocean and EUNAVFOR MED Sophia operation in the Mediterranean to counter smuggling and trafficking networks); and maritime security capacity-building with non-EU countries and regional organisations.

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 and repealing Regulation (EC) 863/2007, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC

Regulations provide a basis for greater cooperation between EU agencies supporting Member State authorities that carry out coastguard functions and with non-EU countries around European sea basins. This work will focus also on better cooperation between national coast guards to undertake multipurpose campaigns including, for example, the detection of illegal discharges under MARPOL.¹⁹ As part of this cooperation, Frontex, EMSA and EFCA are undertaking multipurpose operations, amongst others, for fisheries, border and migration control in the Central Mediterranean Sea. To complement these activities, EU military forces are also engaged in combatting human smuggling activities, protection of vessels, counter piracy and monitoring of fishing activities through operation SOPHIA and ATALANTA, cooperating also with NATO to fulfil their duties.

- *In cooperation with Member States, the Commission and the High Representative will build on the EUMSS to work with other countries to reduce and eliminate maritime security threats and risks.*
- *The Commission and the High Representative will work to enhance the exchange of cross-sectoral maritime surveillance information between Member States, involving also EMSA, and inter alia supporting the implementation of its common information sharing environment (CISE), and with non EU countries, thus facilitating international intervention.*
- *The Commission will assess how to facilitate the interoperability of maritime surveillance environments, such as the CISE.*
- *On the basis of technological developments in satellite communications and data analysis, and existing systems for monitoring maritime activities, the Commission, in association with the High Representative, will launch a pilot project to monitor illegal fishing worldwide, working to broaden maritime situational awareness, and explore the possibilities for expanding monitoring to other sectors.*

3. REDUCING PRESSURE ON OCEANS AND SEAS AND CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

To secure healthy oceans as a life-support system and as a resource, ocean governance must become more effective. EU action should focus on climate change, and its impact, marine pollution and eutrophication, the preservation, conservation and restoration of marine ecosystems and biodiversity, and the sustainable use of marine resources.

Action 6: Implementing the COP21 Agreement and mitigating the harmful impact of climate change on oceans, coastlines and ecosystems

The Commission will work to protect the role of marine and coastal ecosystems in reducing the impacts of climate change. In association with the High Representative, it will aim to achieve broad political consensus on the need to preserve the oceans' natural 'blue carbon' function through working with EU and international political actors, in the context of climate change negotiations and relevant environmental international conventions.

¹⁹ International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ship; MARPOL 73/78

The Commission will work to strengthen ocean-related action at EU level to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change – e.g. reduction of shipping emissions, future development of renewables. In association with the High Representative, it will work with Member States and international partners to promote the inclusion of such action in national follow-up to the commitments under the Paris agreement. In addition, the Commission will promote an internationally accepted plan of action to deal with the consequences, inter alia, of ocean warming, sea-level rise and acidification. This work will build on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's fifth assessment report and its future special report on climate change and oceans and the cryosphere.

- *The Commission will step up work with international partners to agree on joint action to protect and restore marine and coastal ecosystems.*
- *By 2020, the Commission will launch international public-private partnerships aimed at restoring, adapting or developing 'green blue infrastructure'.*
- *In association with the High Representative, the Commission will work with Member States and international partners to promote the inclusion of ocean-related action in national follow-up to the commitments under the Paris Agreement. A state of play could be presented in the global stocktake exercise as laid down in the Paris Agreement.*
- *The Commission will propose international action to follow up on the consequences inter alia of ocean warming, sea-level rise and acidification. The Green Diplomacy Network will be used to liaise with international partners.*

Action 7: Fighting illegal fishing and strengthening the sustainable management of ocean food resources globally

Combating IUU fishing worldwide is a priority for the EU. At least 15 % of fish catches worldwide, worth EUR 8-19 billion a year, are illegal. The EU cooperates with other countries to initiate structural reforms of their fisheries management systems. The objective is to strengthen this action over the next 5 years. In particular, the Commission is seeking to strengthen multilateral action on curbing IUU fishing by strengthening the instruments that allow to track and identify vessels and nationals engaging in illegal practices, and increasing the role of key international agencies such as Interpol.

The EU will work with international partners, provide support to the building up of the technical and administrative capacity to deal with IUU fishing, promote inter-agencies cooperation and assess the negative social consequences of these practices.

- *The Commission will strengthen action on IUU fishing by improving current systems and supporting Member States in ensuring efficient controls through the development of electronic tools.*
- *In association with the High Representative, the Commission will cooperate with third countries, inter alia on capacity-building and partnership with the European Fisheries Control Agency, including for the implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement.*
- *The Commission and the High Representative will use available EU development funding to support action that will contribute to the fight against IUU fishing.*

- *The Commission will cooperate with non-EU countries through bilateral dialogues and formal processes (pre-identification, identification and listing) under the IUU Regulation.*
- *In bilateral dialogues and in regional and international fora, the Commission and the High Representative will address IUU fishing-related challenges such as forced labour and other forms of work that violate human rights.*
- *The EU will promote multilateral action, including*
 - *the creation of a global fleet register;*
 - *the allocation of a unique vessel identifier (IMO number) to commercial fishing vessels;*
 - *the adoption of guidelines to develop and implement catch documentation schemes (global catch certificate); and*
 - *strengthening the role of Interpol in the fight against IUU fishing.*
- *The Commission will strengthen supervision of the EU's external fishing fleet wherever it operates, in line with the proposed regulation on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets.²⁰*

Action 8: Banning harmful fisheries subsidies

Fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing, overcapacity and IUU fishing have long been a cause of international concern. The 2002 and 2012 World Summits on Sustainable Development called for them to be brought to an end. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has now set a deadline (2020) for ending such subsidies.

International efforts will be promoted to curb overcapacity in, and overfishing by, the world's fishing fleets and ban harmful subsidies. This will support WTO negotiations to ban subsidies that contribute to overcapacity, overfishing and IUU fishing.

- *The EU will actively engage in multilateral negotiations in the WTO to ban, by 2020, subsidies that contribute to overcapacity, overfishing and IUU fishing.*

Action 9: Fighting marine litter and the 'sea of plastic'

Marine litter is a major threat to our oceans. The Commission has already taken action to address it at source and it will strengthen this action significantly.

The Commission will propose measures to minimise the creation of litter in the product cycle, from material choice, product design, production, consumption and recycling to disposal.

Under the Circular Economy Action Plan, the EU will propose by 2017 a strategy on plastics, addressing issues such as recyclability, biodegradability, the presence of hazardous substances in certain plastics, and marine litter, with a clear international component against leakage of plastic to the environment. This will contribute to reducing

²⁰ COM(2015) 636 final

the litter found on beaches and lost fishing gear by at least 30 % by 2020. It will also contribute to cutting the volume of microplastics introduced into the marine environment, including where necessary, by restricting their use in products.

In turn, this will contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Strategy will also acknowledge the global character of the problem and the need for collective action, including in the context of multilateral environment agreements. It will consider possibilities to streamline the fight against marine litter in EU external action and development aid, so as to stem the flow of plastic waste in world's oceans, and, wherever environmentally justified and technically feasible, participate to well-coordinated removal actions.

- *As a part of its Circular Economy strategy, the Commission will propose in 2017 a strategy on plastics, addressing marine litter in addition to issues such as recyclability and biodegradability.*
- *The Commission will address sea-based sources of marine litter, including from shipping and fishing activities, through the revision of the Port Reception Facilities Directive²¹ and, if necessary, additional action relating to fishing activities and aquaculture.*
- *The Commission will contribute to the assessment of the effectiveness of international, regional and sub-regional governance strategies and approaches to combating marine plastic litter and microplastics, as requested by the UN Environment Assembly.*
- *The Commission will provide financial support, notably from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, to improve capacity to collect marine litter and the availability of data on litter concentrations in seas around the EU.*
- *The Commission will propose to strengthen the institutional framework to address marine litter, e.g. through better coordination of international efforts, the G7 plan to combat marine litter, and the global partnership on marine litter.*
- *The Commission will follow up on global and regional commitments by promoting marine litter action plans focusing on RSCs around Europe.*

Action 10: Promoting maritime spatial planning (MSP) at global level

The sustainable use of the oceans and their biodiversity, including the achievement of relevant SDGs, depends on the appropriate planning and management of human uses, both within and beyond areas of national jurisdiction. MSP can ensure the effective organisation of marine uses within a maritime area, including the designation, management and networking of MPAs.²² The take-up of MSP is increasing worldwide and a significant body of experience and best practice has been developed over the last decade.

In 2017, the Commission will start working with all relevant actors to develop proposals for internationally accepted guidelines in order to promote the use of MSP and related processes by partner countries and at international level, in particular in the UN.

²¹ Directive 2000/59/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2000 on port reception facilities for ship-generated waste and cargo residues

²² The EU's 2014 MSP Directive, the 2008 Communication on an EU approach to MSP and the UNESCO guidelines on MSP set out a number of elements that support the development of MSP.

- *In 2017, the Commission will launch work towards proposals for international guidelines on MSP.*

Action 11: Achieving the global target of conserving 10% of marine and coastal areas and promoting the effective management of MPAs

Marine biodiversity is currently in an alarming state. Tropical reefs have lost more than half of their reef-building corals over the last 30 years. Currently, only 3.4% of seas and oceans are covered by marine protected areas (MPAs), which is significantly below the globally agreed 10% conservation target for 2020. The restoration and protection of marine ecosystems would yield both environmental and economic benefits. Increasing the coverage of MPAs to 30% could generate up to USD 920 billion between 2015 and 2050.²³

Various organisations and fora are working on different types area-based management tools according to their respective remits.²⁴ However, MPAs are effective only if they are well managed and form an ecologically coherent network. Their management requires adequate planning, as well as human and financial resources.

The Commission will contribute to the effectiveness of MPAs worldwide by promoting the exchange of best practices and by supporting the efforts towards coherent networks. The Commission will also encourage regional and international cooperation to develop long-term, sustainable financing mechanisms for MPAs.²⁵

A new implementing agreement under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of BBNJ would help to achieve the global 10% conservation target and to significantly increase the coverage of MPAs in the high seas.

- *The Commission will contribute to the effectiveness and expansion of MPAs worldwide by promoting the exchange of best practices and by supporting the efforts towards coherent networks.*
- *The Commission will also encourage regional and international cooperation to develop long-term, sustainable financing mechanisms for MPAs.*
- *The Commission will complete a MPA twinning project facilitating the exchange of best practices among and capacity building in Atlantic MPAs from Europe, Africa, North and South America.*
- *The Commission will provide funding opportunities under Horizon 2020 and LIFE programmes for marine research essential for the establishment of marine protected areas and liaise with international partners.*

4. STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL OCEAN RESEARCH AND DATA

Sound scientific knowledge of the oceans is crucial to tackling most of the above actions successfully and ensuring that resources are used sustainably. It requires considerable

²³ OECD. (2016), *The Ocean Economy in 2030*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

²⁴ RFMOs, RSCs (Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic – OSPAR Convention) on MPAs, the IMO on Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA); discussions on MPAs in ABNJs are part of the BBNJ negotiations.

²⁵ Including through EU-funded projects, such as the EP pilot on transatlantic MPA cooperation.

investment in assets and equipment. It provides maximum benefit to society if the knowledge and data are shared.

The EU and its Member States have a strong track record in funding marine and maritime research and improving data availability and interoperability. Cooperation with international partners, including the pooling of resources, is a necessary next step to ensure the knowledge base needed for the effective management of the oceans.

Action 12: A coherent EU strategy on ocean observation, data and marine accounting

The European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) allows researchers, public authorities, business and civil society to search for, view, download and use data and data products from over 100 marine research bodies on the bathymetry, geology, habitats, physics, chemistry and marine life of the seas around Europe.

Aligning the EU's work with that of its international partners would considerably strengthen the knowledge underpinning ocean governance, including by significantly strengthening the integrated system for natural capital and ecosystem services accounting that is being developed in cooperation with the European Environment Agency and international partners.

- *The Commission will build on EMODnet to propose a coherent ocean observation strategy in 2018 in line with the G7 Tsukuba Communiqué.²⁶ It will assess whether ocean observation networks are fit for purpose and analyse the economic, environmental and societal benefits of enhancing them.*
- *In the context of this report scheduled in 2018, the Commission will propose how EMODnet could be aligned with other national or regional marine data collection efforts, in order to create an international marine data network and ensure open access to these data.*

Action 13: Strengthening investment in 'blue' science and innovation

The EU and its Member States spend approximately EUR 2 billion a year on marine research. Over EUR 260 million comes from the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It is important to maintain this level of ambition. A specific 'blue growth' focus area targets cross-cutting marine and maritime research and supports ocean-related policies, including fisheries, offshore energy and maritime transport.

Member States are increasingly coordinating or integrating their research programmes to tackle common problems at EU level (for example, through the Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans joint programming initiative, the Black Sea Horizon and EMBLAS projects) and sea-basin level (for example, through the Baltic Sea BONUS and Mediterranean Sea BLUEMED initiatives).

²⁶ <http://www.japan.go.jp/g7/userdata/common/data/20160517communiqué.pdf>

- *In the framework of the European Science Cloud initiative,²⁷ the Commission will set up a 'blue-science cloud pilot' and continue to invest in marine research and innovation.*
- *The Commission will work with G7 partners to advance the new G7 'Future of the Oceans' initiative to improve research and observation of the oceans and seas.*

Action 14: International ocean research, innovation and science partnerships

EU-based ocean research and science can benefit considerably from cooperation with institutes outside the EU. The 2013 Galway Statement between the EU, US and Canada on Atlantic Ocean research cooperation was a decisive step forward. The Commission will continue to implement the Galway Statement

To boost the skills needed for innovation and competitiveness, the Commission will continue supporting an industry-led partnership on maritime technology in the context of the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills.

Following the OECD's recommendation to foster greater international cooperation in maritime science and technology, it will also explore possibilities for establishing international networks to exchange experience in promoting innovative maritime technologies that dovetail with existing tools.

- *The Commission will develop marine research and science partnerships with key partners under existing science and technology agreements, including ocean partnerships where appropriate and global alliances where it is a member, such as the Belmont Forum or the Group on Earth Observations.*
- *The Commission will strengthen its work on an All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance by fostering enhanced marine cooperation frameworks with key players in the southern Atlantic.*
- *The Commission will advance work to include southern Mediterranean countries in the BLUEMED initiative. It will also strengthen its science, research and innovation involvement in the Black Sea under the Black Sea Synergy.*

5. CONCLUSION

The EU has an important responsibility towards the oceans and seas. It plays an important role as a champion of sustainable development, a global actor in the ocean governance framework and a user of ocean resources. The EU should step up its efforts to ensure that the oceans are safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed, to the benefit of current and future generations.

The Commission and the High Representative are committed to improving ocean governance focusing on the priority areas outlined above. In doing so, they will promote synergies between EU policies and strategies which can support improved ocean

²⁷ Communication on *A digital single market strategy for Europe* (COM(2015) 192, 6.5.2015).

governance, for example, by enhancing maritime security and favouring sustainable development.

They will engage with Member States, international organisations and partners, regional organisations and stakeholders to advance the proposed actions and explore further ways and means of strengthening international ocean governance. In association with the High Representative, the Commission will set up an EU stakeholder forum dedicated to oceans and seas worldwide. It will support the follow-up to the present initiative and develop a regular dialogue on the EU's efforts to improve international ocean governance. A first meeting of the forum will be held in 2017.

The Commission and the High Representative will report on progress on the above actions at regular intervals and for the first time within two years of the adoption of this Communication.