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Civil society's recommendations towards a European Oceans Pact

DRAFT OPINION

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment

**Civil society's recommendations towards a European Oceans Pact
(exploratory opinion at the request of the European Commission)**

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For the attention of the section members

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC welcomes the fact that President Ursula von der Leyen has included the European Oceans Pact among the Commission's priorities for its new term of office. In the EESC's view, the pact should focus on unlocking the potential of the blue economy, ensuring a competitive, efficient and innovative business environment with a simplified regulatory framework and fostering cooperation with global partners while remaining within the planetary boundaries. The EESC calls for a comprehensive approach that combines economic prosperity and competitiveness with environmental regeneration and the promotion of social equity.
- 1.2 The EESC recommends that the pact be closely aligned with the EU's blue economy strategy, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Green Deal. It should focus on both maritime and land-based industries and be aligned with other EU policies, in particular the Clean Industrial Deal and the maritime industrial strategy, to ensure coherence and make sure that it has a significant impact. The EESC also believes it essential to improve the EU Maritime Security Strategy and evaluate existing policies such as the common fisheries policy. The pact should help the EU achieve competitiveness, strategic autonomy and its sustainability objectives as soon as possible.
- 1.3 The pact should strengthen and improve the EU maritime governance framework by more efficiently coordinating existing policies and bodies, avoiding fragmentation and duplication of efforts. The EESC also considers it key to strengthen international agreements, improve diplomatic efforts and foster cooperation networks between coastal communities, productive sectors and scientists. The EESC therefore recommends setting up specific working groups in all EU institutions with the central topic of seas and oceans.
- 1.4 The EESC urges the European Commission to establish a cooperation mechanism between European agencies competent in ocean matters, with a view to optimising data and knowledge collection, fostering the exchange of best practices and promoting an overarching approach. One example of best practice in this connection is enhanced cooperation between Frontex, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) with regard to coastguard duties.
- 1.5 The EESC recommends revising maritime spatial planning (MSP) to facilitate synergies and balance conflicting interests arising from the expansion of new maritime industries such as offshore energy, and requiring this sector to reinvest part of its revenues in local communities. An approach of positive coexistence should be promoted, encouraging the use of marine areas for multiple purposes where possible. An ecosystem-based approach should also be taken to safeguard marine biodiversity and habitats. It is crucial to ensure that the most vulnerable sectors, such as fishing, actively take part in decision-making in order to protect traditional fishing grounds and ensure that maritime areas are used sustainably.
- 1.6 The EESC calls for the creation of an 'Industrial Alliance for Blue Economy Value Chains' bringing together all relevant stakeholders (businesses, social partners, research organisations, policymakers, investors, etc.). This forum will serve to promote cooperation and create networks, with the aim of developing sustainable ships and digitalised maritime technologies, ensuring

supply chain resilience and fostering innovation, sustainability and competitiveness. Furthermore, the EESC urges the Commission to develop an EU action plan for ‘blue food’ by 2026.

- 1.7 The EESC calls for funding to be mobilised for ocean action in support of SDG 14. In this regard, it is essential to mobilise public and private funding for marine restoration, marine conservation, innovation and development projects and for the decarbonisation of the blue economy. The EESC recommends establishing specific budget lines for oceans in horizontal funds such as Horizon and the European Social Fund and bolstering sectoral funds such as the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF).
- 1.8 Science is key to efficient ocean management. The EESC recommends boosting international scientific cooperation, promoting technological innovation in the maritime sector and allocating more resources to research institutes. Furthermore, it is essential to translate scientific knowledge into effective policies for protection and sustainable use.
- 1.9 The EESC urges the Commission to incorporate a social dimension into the pact, ensuring a just and digital transition in the maritime sector, with comprehensive support for workers. This makes it necessary to address labour shortages, foster generational renewal through initiatives aimed at attracting young people, improve labour protection and facilitate vocational reskilling and upskilling. It is essential to ensure that stakeholders and social partners are fully involved in this process. Moreover, maritime cultural heritage should be preserved and targeted support provided for workers who cannot be retrained.
- 1.10 To safeguard a flourishing and lasting maritime industry in Europe, it is essential to ensure a level playing field and establish a strong maritime cluster with clear decarbonisation objectives. There is a need for urgent investment in e-fuels, technological innovation and offshore renewable energy, in particular tidal energy, and these solutions must be produced locally.
- 1.11 The EESC, as a representative of civil society, recommends setting up a comprehensive mechanism for periodically evaluating and monitoring the pact’s progress. The mechanism should be based on the models established for the SDGs and should include the appointment of a panel of permanent EESC members, thereby ensuring continuity, transparency and representativeness in the monitoring process.

2. **General comments**

- 2.1 The European Oceans Pact aims to promote a comprehensive and consistent approach to all ocean-related policies. This means building on marine research, safeguarding marine ecosystems, promoting innovation, building up knowledge and boosting the blue economy. Coastal communities are at the heart of the pact, and understanding their needs and concerns is essential for developing effective policies.
- 2.2 The EESC recognises that coastal communities face many economic, social and environmental challenges. The pact could be a key tool to help address them. In this regard, the pact should lay a solid foundation for the creation of quality jobs, sustainable growth and social cohesion, while respecting the planetary boundaries. It should aim to support healthy and productive oceans and

seek a just and digital transition. Moreover, in view of the growth of new marine industries, the pact should explore ocean governance models that the EU can promote both in its own waters and in other parts of the world. The pact should also focus on making coastal communities more resilient to natural disasters, promoting nature-based solutions.

3. **Specific recommendations in support of healthy and productive oceans**

3.1 The EESC recommends that the pact address the following elements to promote **resilient and productive oceans**:

3.1.1 **Support for the competitiveness and sustainable growth of the blue economy:** Through investment and innovation in climate-neutrality technologies, ecosystem health and a just transition. The EESC believes there is a need for an urgent process of legislative simplification and reduction in red tape of at least 25% for businesses and 35% for SMEs. The EU must strive for resilient, local and short value chains that prioritise the comprehensive development of our maritime sectors, well-being, ecosystem regeneration and coastal communities.

3.1.2 **Investment and innovation in maritime industries:** The EU should propose measures to attract private investment and boost the competitiveness and development of businesses. The EU should encourage the creation of blue economy innovation hubs, promoting cooperation between research institutions, businesses and policymakers. Public authorities should promote support for maritime start-ups through better access to funding and the marketing of advanced technologies. The EESC recommends stepping up investment in research through state budgets and calls on the EU to increase funding for ocean research.

3.1.3 **EU strategic autonomy in key areas such as food, energy and transport:** The EU should boost its capacity to produce its own resources and reduce dependency on external suppliers. Fostering local innovation in these areas is crucial to ensuring its independence and resilience to global challenges. It is also necessary to improve and protect internal infrastructure and adopt policies that consider food sovereignty as well as social and economic factors for businesses.

3.1.4 The EESC urges the Commission to develop an **EU action plan for ‘blue food’ by 2026** in order to incorporate ‘blue food’ into food and consumption policies and strategies. This plan should be considered a key component in the Vision for Agriculture and Food. This would in turn promote healthy diets with a low carbon footprint in the EU. The EU should implement policies and provide incentives for selective, low-impact fishing gear and reduced by-catch and discards and should prioritise fishing for human consumption and low-trophic aquaculture. Particular attention should also be paid to combating overfishing, where it exists, and, in particular, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Similarly, policies and controls on imports of unsustainable seafood should be strengthened, as these adversely affect fish stocks and undermine the level playing field for European fishers. The EESC advocates promoting sustainable aquaculture, especially low-trophic aquaculture. This aquaculture model includes molluscs, algae and certain crustaceans, does not require artificial feeding, improves water quality and contributes to carbon sequestration. The EESC also calls for a ‘sea farm to fork’ strategy.

- 3.1.5 Creation of an **‘Industrial Alliance for Blue Economy Value Chains’**: The EESC recommends that the European Commission establish an industrial alliance covering the entire blue economy value chain with a view to making the sector more competitive and adopting a comprehensive overview. To that end, it suggests giving the alliance operational funding and a secretariat responsible for coordinating initiatives, studies and scientific and technological developments. Given that the various links in the maritime value chain depend on each other when it comes to developing and implementing new technologies, this alliance will help them cooperate more effectively¹.
- 3.1.6 **Decarbonisation of the blue economy**: The EESC points out that all sectors of the maritime and blue economy depend on ships, advanced maritime technologies and resilient, local and short industrial supply chains. The same applies to underwater infrastructure (such as cables). In the EESC’s view, the EU should strengthen Europe’s maritime industrial capacities, communication networks and supply chains. The maritime sector should be seen as an essential part of any EU policy to support sustainable ocean management and unlock the full potential of the blue economy. The EU should also make it easier for established blue economy sectors to undergo a just transition towards practices with a lower ecological footprint, promoting circular economy business policies and programmes. The EESC also calls for continued support for sustainable and environmentally friendly coastal nautical tourism. These developments will create new business opportunities and contribute to the EU’s green transition².
- 3.1.7 The EESC welcomes the Energy Transition Partnership for fisheries and aquaculture launched by the European Commission in 2024. This provides a great opportunity for the chain to work together on a plan to renew and modernise the EU fishing fleet, based on a sustainable and efficient business model.
- 3.1.8 The EESC strongly advocates promoting and investing in cutting-edge technologies such as **tidal and wave energy**: these devices are smaller than wind turbines, reducing both the marine space needed and their ecological footprint, with the potential to generate up to 10% of the EU’s electricity. As they occupy small marine areas that are not usually used for other human activities because of how much water movement there is, they are more compatible with fishing. In this regard, it is crucial that they receive more political support and be prioritised by the Ocean Energy Task Force, with specific funding being provided and regulatory measures taken to facilitate their development.
- 3.1.9 The EESC underlines the role that emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things play in ocean monitoring and governance. The EESC proposes opening up research areas where investment in these systems could generate high environmental and economic returns.
- 3.1.10 **Access to funding**: The EESC calls for more grants and investments in infrastructure and technologies that promote innovation and entrepreneurship and empower coastal communities to

¹ [CCMI/193 – Maritime industrial strategy.](#)

² [NAT/895 – Decarbonisation of the fishing fleet.](#)

thrive. Following the European Oceans Pact, and as part of the next multiannual financial framework, the EU should explore ways to introduce ocean-oriented budget lines to ensure adequate funding for all topics covered by the pact, as well as boosting sectoral funds such as the EMFAF. The EESC regrets the EMFAF's EUR 105 million funding cut for 2025-2027 and calls for an increase in the next budgetary framework. The EESC also recommends assessing the use of funds for the blue economy under Horizon Europe. In this regard, it calls for the creation of a dedicated budget line for the blue economy in the successor programme to Horizon Europe. In addition, it encourages the use of public funding to reinforce private funding through initiatives such as Horizon Europe, the Innovation Fund, European Investment Bank financing and the Guarantee Fund. Finally, the EESC calls for EU emissions trading system revenues to be used for the energy transition, encouraging the development of innovative fuels and projects in the EU.

3.1.11 The EESC recommends that certain social conditionalities be laid down for public funding to ensure respect for workers' rights and environmental sustainability. In this regard, social standards and current legislation need to be implemented efficiently in the maritime and fisheries sectors and, where necessary, binding legislative initiatives must be undertaken.

3.1.12 The EESC highlights the importance of making processes for accessing funding more streamlined and more flexible, in particular to make access easier for SMEs and coastal fisheries and promote sustainable growth in the blue economy sector.

3.1.13 **Evaluation and possible reform of the common fisheries policy (CFP):** The EESC recognises that the current CFP has helped improve fish stock management. However, 70% of fish and shellfish come from non-EU countries, posing a challenge to food autonomy and the ability to ensure a sustainable and responsible supply. It is crucial to close this gap by facilitating rather than hampering sustainable food production, applying the same social and environmental standards to imports. To that end, it is essential to evaluate current fisheries policies in order to drive the transition to more efficient fisheries through balanced regulation and the use of economic incentives. More energy-efficient fisheries and aquaculture should be promoted, encouraging the use of renewable energy. The development of more accurate fishing technologies will allow for practices that are more sustainable, selective, efficient and less impactful on the environment. It is also essential to update fisheries policies in light of new challenges such as Brexit, the international situation and competitiveness. Furthermore, the EU should promote access to fishing quotas based on socio-economic and environmental criteria, in line with Article 17 of the CFP, and ensure that fish products can be traced from the sea to the table through a robust oversight and labelling system, focusing on imports.

3.1.14 **Education and training:** The EU should invest in the development of skills and competences specific to the blue economy and ensure that young people remain committed to their communities. Quality jobs and training of the workforce will help make blue economy industries prosperous, competitive, attractive and efficient. Beyond vocational reskilling and upskilling, retaining and recruiting maritime and fisheries professionals will be essential for the sectors now and in the future. The EESC calls on the European Commission to introduce blue budget lines in the future European Social Fund. Moreover, training and certification in the maritime, recreational and fisheries sectors should be harmonised, ensuring mutual recognition of certificates across the EU to facilitate labour mobility and make the sectors more competitive. Furthermore, the EESC

calls for ocean literacy to be improved to raise awareness in society, especially among children and young people, of the importance of oceans and the blue economy.

3.1.15 **Labour shortage:** To address demographic challenges, the EU needs to prioritise funds for upskilling and developing the blue economy workforce, ensuring long-term resilience and innovation. Authorities and private sectors should address labour shortages with specific training programmes for skills related to the blue economy. It is important to develop harmonised training programmes offering transferable skills to help workers move between Member States and between sectors of the blue economy. In addition, the EU should encourage public-private partnerships in order to implement tailored training programmes.

3.2 The EESC recommends that the European Oceans Pact address the following elements to **make our oceans healthier**:

3.2.1 **Blue economy hubs and ocean observatory:** The EESC recommends establishing hubs specialising in marine technology and sustainable innovation in coastal regions, which encourage research, development and knowledge transfer to boost the blue economy. The EESC proposes that the Commission explore the option of setting up an EU observatory dedicated to collecting, analysing and disseminating data on oceans. This body could also coordinate data produced by various agencies and scientific bodies, facilitating compatibility and decision-making based on scientific data.

3.2.2 **Research and monitoring:** The EESC advocates expanding and stepping up marine scientific initiatives – such as the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) – aimed at monitoring ecosystem health and informing sustainable policies. Improving ocean monitoring will help achieve environmental objectives such as those set out in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The EESC regrets that 70% of data come from projects with temporary funding. These data are largely financed by public funds. The EESC believes that the private sector should contribute more data and that more funds need to be allocated to modern technologies and science infrastructure.

3.2.3 **Restoration projects:** The EESC recommends creating incentives and pilot projects to implement environmental regulations fairly and efficiently. This is necessary to ensure compliance in Europe with international commitments on biodiversity, such as those set out in the Kunming-Montreal Agreement. Specifically, the 30x30 commitment should be transposed into EU legislation and implemented effectively, both by creating and managing protected marine areas and through other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in fishing areas. The EESC calls for the implementation of strict protection zones (no-take zones) derived from the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, where proposed by scientific recommendations. The EESC stresses that closures must be carried out on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specific circumstances of each region and striking a balance between conservation and economic activity. In this regard, the EESC points out that the Paris Agreement (Article 2) states that these objectives must be implemented in a way that does not threaten food production³.

³ [NAT/841 – Nature restoration targets under EU biodiversity strategy.](#)

- 3.2.4 **Green infrastructure and a sea-land strategy:** The EESC recommends developing sustainable infrastructure and taking an ecosystem-based approach to minimise the environmental impact on the interface between land and sea. This includes promoting carbon-neutral ports and clean ocean energy. Moreover, it recommends implementing strategies to find synergies and strengthen cooperation between maritime and land-based industries, such as shipyards and technology suppliers. It also recommends strengthening EU regulation to tackle land-based sources of marine pollution, such as industrial discharges and wastewater, which introduce organic, chemical and pharmaceutical pollutants into aquatic ecosystems, as well as microplastics and pellets.
- 3.2.5 **European Climate Adaptation Plan:** The EESC calls for this plan to be developed to make coastal communities more resilient, helping them plan and prepare for the effects of climate change.
- 3.2.6 **Fight against marine pollution and litter:** The EESC calls for the Commission to play a leading role and strengthen EU diplomacy, in order to ensure that the Plastics Treaty is adopted in 2025 and that a robust funding mechanism is established to support its implementation.
- 3.2.7 **Strengthening the EU's position in international negotiations related to the ocean:** In line with the objectives of SDG 14, the EESC calls on the Commission to step up its diplomatic action to conclude an agreement on fisheries subsidies in the World Trade Organization, accelerate the ratification and implementation of the Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) and promote the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)⁴. It also calls for a moratorium to be established for deep-sea mining until it can be done sustainably.

4. Coastal communities' economic, social and environmental challenges

- 4.1 Coastal communities in the EU are facing a number of interrelated economic, social and environmental challenges. Recent years have been marked by major shocks to our industries and markets, caused by events such as COVID-19, Brexit, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and extreme weather events triggered by climate change. This has led not only to increases in energy and commodity prices, but also to widespread inflation. Furthermore, it has disrupted maritime routes due to trade restrictions and has caused supply chain bottlenecks. These challenges have placed a strain on the blue economy. Despite these challenges, projections highlight the potential for economic stabilisation and recovery, driven by lower energy prices and lower inflation.
- 4.2 In this context, EU industry has faced not only global pandemics and geopolitical crises, but also a growing internal regulatory burden. Increasing restrictions and red tape have seriously affected companies' competitiveness and economic sustainability.
- 4.3 In terms of social challenges, many coastal areas are suffering from demographic problems, such as an ageing population and youth migration, often due to a lack of local opportunities. The EESC

⁴ [REX/570 – Water politics – Blue Diplomacy](#); [REX/558 – Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet, an update of the international ocean governance agenda](#).

expresses its concern about the loss of life at sea associated with the migration phenomenon. Moreover, coastal communities have to contend with a lack of skilled labour and generational renewal, conflicts over resource use and vulnerability to climate disasters. To address these challenges, social inclusion must be boosted and equity ensured in access to resources and services. The EESC advocates improving working conditions in the blue economy, with a view to making these sectors more attractive. The pact could draw inspiration from the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas in order to address some of these challenges⁵.

- 4.4 In terms of environmental challenges, it is of the utmost importance to keep seas productive and preserve natural resources such as fishing grounds and clean coasts to ensure economic prosperity and protect health, both now and for future generations. In addition, Europe's oceans are our best allies in the fight against climate change. The implementation and enforcement of existing legislation should be central to the European Oceans Pact. However, it is also essential that the EU assess the effectiveness of these policies and consider revising and updating them where necessary, thereby ensuring that they adapt to new realities and challenges.
- 4.5 In line with the Committee's work on the EU Blue Deal⁶, account should also be taken of the relationship between seawater and fresh water and how it affects coastal communities. Policies should foster coordination so that challenges can be addressed and opportunities seized.

5. **An ocean governance model for EU and international waters**

5.1 The EESC recommends promoting an inclusive and innovative ocean governance model through:

5.1.1 **Regional cooperation:** The EESC recommends stepping up maritime coordination and cooperation between Member States sharing sea basins such as the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the North Sea in key areas such as energy, the environment and fisheries. It also proposes bolstering policy programmes through longer terms going beyond EU electoral cycles and frameworks and improving interdepartmental coordination at EU and national level. Furthermore, it advocates reducing the regulatory burden, stimulating investment in the blue economy and making progress towards a full single market. In addition, it recommends that every presidency of the Council of the EU hold joint meetings on oceans involving key ministries (environment, climate, energy, fisheries and transport) and stakeholders. This approach could be extended to all European institutions, including the EESC.

5.1.2 **Recommendations tailored to regional particularities:** Notwithstanding the above, the EESC proposes developing specific recommendations for the EU's various coastal regions, taking into account their ecological, economic and social particularities. The EESC also underlines the importance of tailoring policies to local cultural and socio-economic factors to ensure their viability and effectiveness. For these reasons, the individual action taken by Member States and their regions is essential for adapting and implementing these policies in local areas.

⁵ [NAT/893 – The role of youth in rural development](#); [NAT/859 – The energy and digital transition of rural areas](#); [NAT/839 – Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#).

⁶ [EU Blue Deal](#).

- 5.1.3 **Knowledge and marine innovation:** The EESC considers it necessary to promote innovation and upskilling to bring high technology – particularly that made in the EU – to the EU market.
- 5.1.4 **Recognising the strategic importance of the ocean for the EU’s security and competitiveness:** The EESC suggests shoring up trade routes to ensure access to global markets and energy resources. It stresses the need to make sure that all maritime activities are carried out within the planetary boundaries and defend social and human rights at sea.
- 5.1.5 **Ensuring the security of Europe’s maritime domain:** The EESC calls on authorities to strengthen programmes for protecting maritime routes, ports and critical infrastructure from threats such as piracy, terrorism, human trafficking and maritime crime. This requires effective implementation of the **EU Maritime Security Strategy**. The focus should be on defence cooperation, including annual naval exercises and capacity building through common standards for maritime defence technologies. This strategy should be integrated into the pact to improve trade resilience, economic stability and the security of maritime supply chains. This also means protecting our social and environmental standards against, for example, illegal fishing and forced labour, and even against the practices of major players such as China.
- 5.1.6 The EESC urges the Commission to promote the issues of shipbuilding, naval technology and naval logistics in the pact. Many coastal communities and subsectors depend on these industries, such as fishing, recreational sailing, offshore energy and maritime transport. In this regard, it urges the Commission to include the announced Maritime Industrial Strategy as one of the pillars of the pact.
- 5.1.7 In the face of growing threats to maritime security, it is also in the EU’s interest to ensure the safety and security of maritime and fishing professionals, in line with the requirements of relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions such as the Maritime Labour Convention.
- 5.1.8 **Just transition:** The EESC stresses that environmental sustainability must go hand in hand with social sustainability to ensure that the transition to alternative fuels and new technologies is fair, equitable and comprehensive. It is crucial to put the human element at the heart of the green and digital transitions, improving working conditions, creating quality jobs and making the maritime and fishing professions more attractive and inclusive⁷.
- 5.1.9 **Stakeholder participation:** The EESC advocates involving local communities, social partners and industries more closely in the development of sea-related policies, supporting and promoting maritime clusters. The pact should recognise maritime clusters as key players and as platforms for ocean governance, as they bring together the voices and interests of various sectors. It is important to ensure not only that all blue economy stakeholders take part in public consultations, but also that they are actively involved in developing maritime policies. It is also crucial that the social benefits of sustainable development be shared out fairly and that projects have a long-term impact and help boost the blue economy’s resilience. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the

⁷ [NAT/849 – Protecting marine ecosystems.](#)

involvement of civil society, ensuring that its perspectives and needs are considered in the decision-making process.

- 5.1.10 Marine spatial planning (MSP):** Due to the worrying compression of maritime space and competition for it caused by the expansion of new industries, the EESC recommends reviewing the Directive establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning in order to balance competing interests (e.g. aquaculture, fisheries and energy generation). The EESC proposes taking a new approach of positive coexistence, which encourages the use of marine areas for multiple purposes where possible while also adopting an ecosystem-based approach. In this regard, the EESC recognises the work of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures to protect ecosystems. The EESC recognises that the European Blue Forum is an effective way for stakeholders to discuss and address shared challenges and priorities in the medium term. The main aim is to build consensus, generate synergies and find solutions that lead to a shared vision. It is also crucial to ensure that the most vulnerable sectors, such as fishing, are involved in decision-making, protecting traditional fishing grounds and ensuring that they can be accessed and used.
- 5.1.11 Social cohesion:** The EESC advocates strengthening ties between stakeholders (governments, coastal communities and local businesses) and reducing social disparities through inclusive policies, fair investment strategies and a social economy. The active participation of civil society in decision-making should be a priority to ensure that policies reflect their needs and aspirations. The EU should also pay particular attention to empowering women and young people in the blue economy.
- 5.1.12 Data-driven ocean governance:** Observing and monitoring oceans and efficiently managing data are essential for boosting the blue economy, protecting the environment, fostering innovation, ensuring maritime security and improving coastal resilience and competitiveness. The EESC calls for real-time monitoring systems and AI to be used for data-driven ocean management. To that end, it proposes a coherent EU framework integrating national and regional observation systems, fostering cooperation between researchers, authorities, the private sector, defence and local communities and boosting investment in modern infrastructure and advanced technologies such as big data, environmental DNA (eDNA) and AI.
- 5.1.13 Periodic monitoring:** The EESC recommends that the European Commission introduce mechanisms to periodically assess and report on the progress of the pact, similar to the mechanisms established under the SDGs.
- 5.1.14 Global leadership and diplomacy:** There can be no oceans pact without international agreements or partnerships. The EESC therefore advocates positioning the EU as a global leader in sustainable ocean governance by promoting best practices within and outside the bloc. One method for exporting these standards is to strengthen EU diplomacy to ensure that vital interests such as agriculture, forestry and fishing are taken into account when negotiating trade agreements. The EESC recommends establishing an international pillar in the pact based on existing cross-border cooperation, including as part of the Ocean Decade framework. In addition, the EESC recommends using the EU market to put pressure on international partners and improve environmental and social standards globally.

5.1.15 **Climate resilience:** The EESC advocates proposing measures for disaster preparedness and climate resilience.

5.1.16 **Aligning the EU's negotiating resources in international ocean-related forums with its stated goal of global leadership:** In particular, sufficient human and financial resources are essential for negotiating in these international forums, including bilateral and regional agreements. The EESC urges the Commission to increase budget lines for this purpose. Moreover, in regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), the Commission should seek to promote adoption of the EU's environmental and social standards in other regions and thereby ensure a level playing field.

5.2 In conclusion, this governance model should incorporate ecological sustainability, economic resilience and social inclusion, serving as an example for ocean management globally.
