



Summary of the results of the targeted consultation on International Ocean Governance



February 2021

The International Ocean Governance (IOG) Agenda for the future of our oceans¹ has contributed since 2016 to a concerted and rules-based approach to improve the governance framework, reduce pressures, facilitate a more sustainable blue economy worldwide, and strengthen international research and data. The progress report published in 2019² demonstrated the EU's strong commitment to ocean governance with many of the Agenda's deliverables completed or nearing completion. In addition, it is recognised as one of the "key examples" of EU policies creating multilateralism in the report on *"The European Union's Global Strategy: Three years on, moving forward"*.

Despite progress by the EU and the global community to improve ocean governance, further action is necessary in light of the scientific evidence on the worrying status of the ocean and its resources. Action can build on multilateral dialogue, international cooperation and on strong partnerships to deliver on global sustainability commitments pertaining to the ocean.

The Council Conclusions on Oceans and Seas adopted in 2019³ support the development of the IOG Agenda. The European Parliament's resolution on the European Green Deal in 2020⁴ highlights the importance of fostering the role of the EU as a global leader in ocean governance and urges the Commission to give the Green Deal a "blue" dimension. Likewise, NGOs are urging further action for improving international ocean governance for "Life below Water" and call for achieving a healthy ocean by 2030.

As part of the response, the Commission is already working on a new Communication on sustainable blue economy that will be adopted in Spring 2021.

President von der Leyen mandated Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Ocean and Fisheries to make Europe a leader on international ocean governance in the UN, as well as in other regional and international forums.

Against this background, the European Commission and the European External Action Service launched a targeted consultation to assess development needs and options for the EU's IOG Agenda. The

consultation aimed to identify relevant actions in light of today's challenges and opportunities to deliver global sustainability objectives for the ocean, in particular, the Sustainable Development Goal on the ocean (SDG14) under the 2030 Agenda, in support of the European Green Deal. The consultation complements the International Ocean Governance (IOG) Forum that the European Commission launched in association with the European External Action Service with a virtual event on 22-24 April 2020. The IOG Forum brings stakeholder and experts together to support the development of the EU's IOG Agenda. The results of this consultation feed the work of the forum notably the discussions on draft recommendations for action at its second virtual meeting on 14-16 December 2020. Final recommendations will be presented at the 3rd virtual meeting of the IOG Forum on 20 April 2021.

The consultation gathered input from a wide array of stakeholders, notably governments, international organisations, NGOs, financial institutions, academic, scientific, social and economic partners, within and beyond Europe.

This report presents a summary of the contributions received in the consultation. Views summarised in this document are stakeholder views. They do not represent the views of the European Commission or the European External Action Service.

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1 [JOIN \(2016\) 49 final](#)
2 [JOIN \(2019\) 4](#)
3 [14249/19](#)
4 [P9 TA-PROV\(2020\)0005](#)

NUMBER AND PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

123 contributions were received, 121 through the online questionnaire and 2 sent individually. Different types of stakeholders have answered to the consultation: governments, international organisations, business representatives, associations, NGOs, and academia.

The graphic below illustrates that most responses come from the environmental sector (45%), followed by the fisheries sector (20%), governance (16%) and shipping (5%).

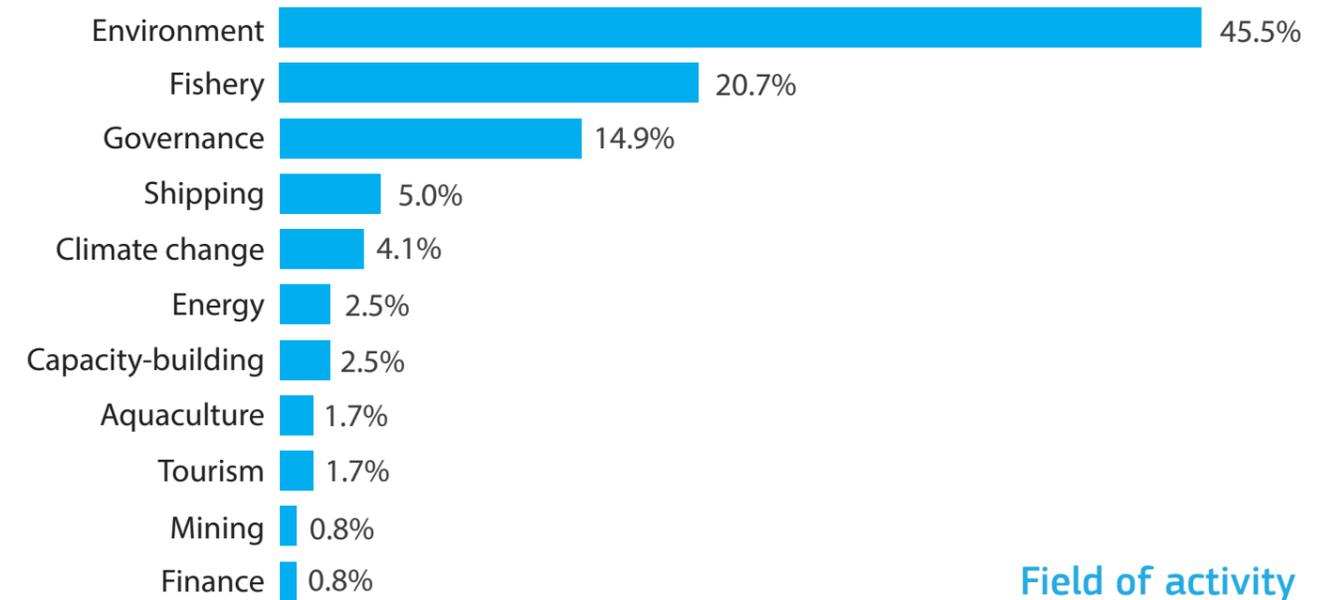


Figure 1: Percentage of responses per field of activity

The second graphic shows the number of responses from a geographical perspective: 79% come from the EU including international organisations based in the EU and 21% are Non-EU.

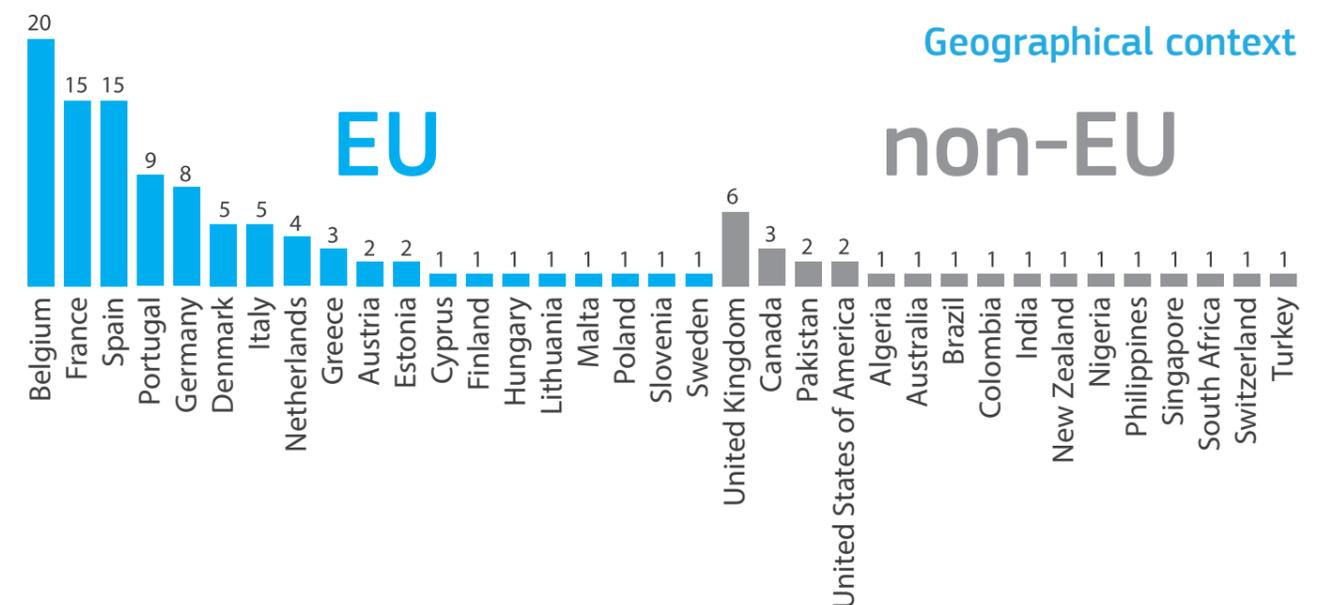


Figure 2: Number of responses per country

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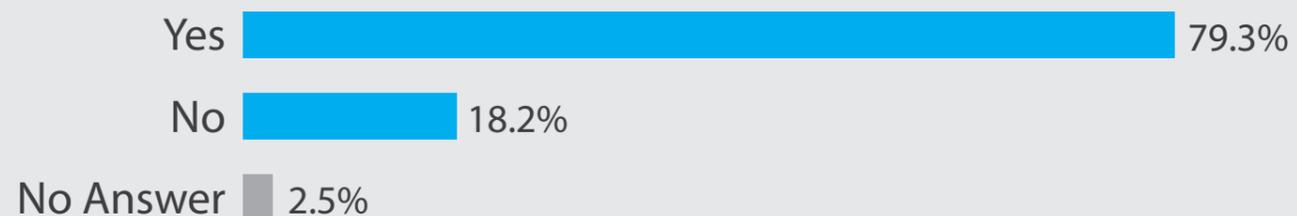
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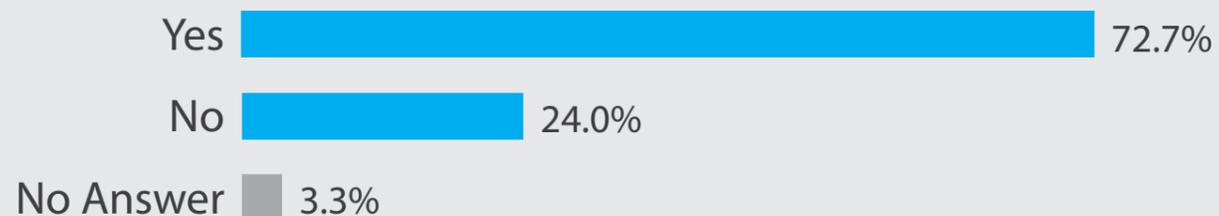
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

The following charts illustrate the responses on the three main questions of the consultation.

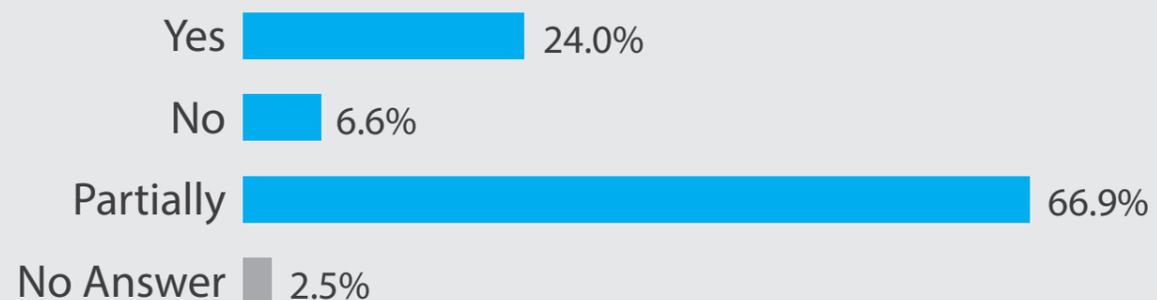
Is the current objective of the EU's International Governance Agenda "to ensure safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed oceans through a coherent, cross-sectoral and rules-based international approach" still relevant and coherent with global sustainability objectives pertaining to the ocean?



Keeping in mind the scope of EU competences and the challenges to deliver global sustainability objectives pertaining to the ocean, are the three policy pillars of the International Ocean Governance Agenda (JOIN(2016) 49 final) still relevant and concrete enough?



Does the EU lead by example in the delivery of global sustainability objectives relevant to the ocean in particular SDG14 through its marine, maritime and fisheries policies?



Scope, objective and policy priorities

Globally, 79% of all contributors welcome the objectives of the EU's International Ocean Governance Agenda to ensure clean, healthy, safe, secure and sustainably used oceans. They consider it still relevant and coherent with global sustainability objectives pertaining to the ocean, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular the sustainable development goal on the ocean (SDG14). In addition 18% argue that objectives should be reviewed and call for adding or strengthening elements such as "resilience" (to put more emphasis on restoration and protection, tackling cumulative impacts and addressing climate change) or "fair" (to put more emphasis on the social dimension). Others suggest distinguishing between objectives for the ocean (conservation and restoration) and for the maritime and fisheries sector (sustainable use).

73% of the respondents find the current three priorities still relevant and concrete for the achievement of the set goals. 23% suggest

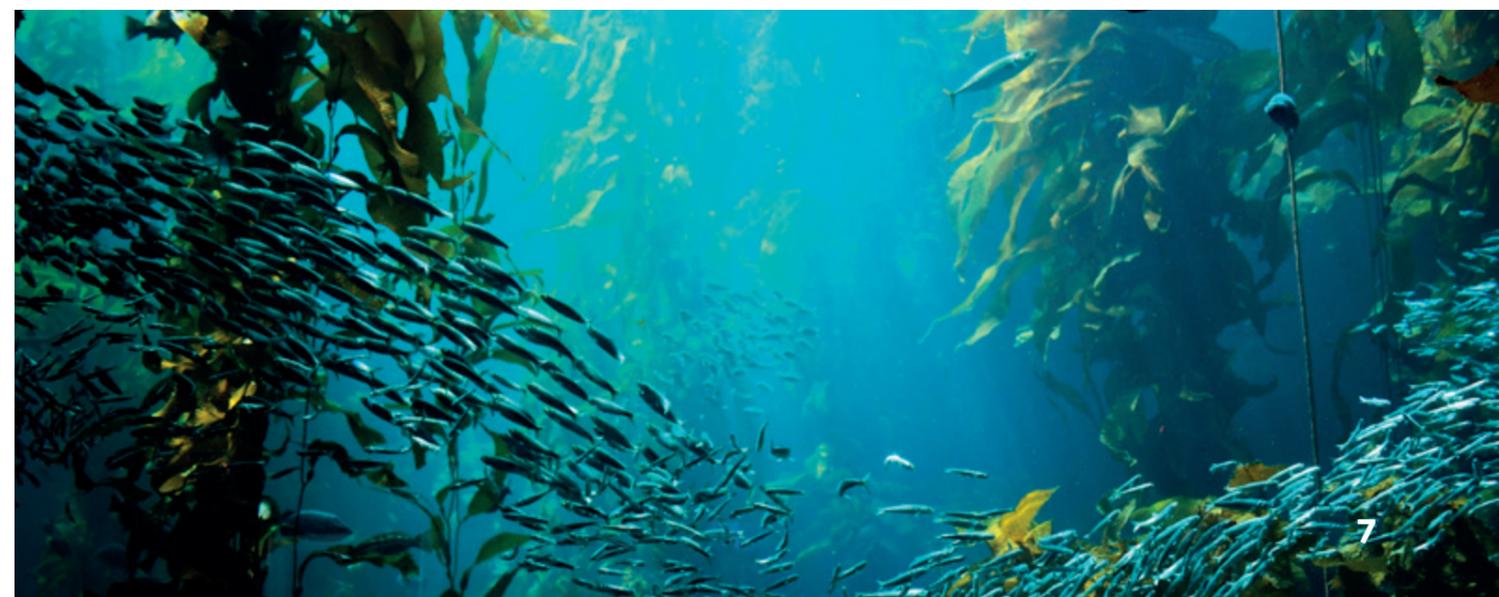


further actions or priorities. Issues most raised, are restoration and protection of marine ecosystems, cumulative impacts on ocean health, climate change, equitable, social and economic distribution of benefits, ocean resilience, finance, and adequate participation of local communities in the decision-making processes.

EU's role in delivering global sustainability objectives for the oceans

Overall, 24% of the contributors confirm the EU as a leader in achieving sustainability objectives while 67% consider that the EU leads only partially on the delivery of global sustainability goals. Many respondents argue that there is a need for the EU to enhance its efforts by addressing some issues more effectively, notably better implementation and enforcement of the EU's marine, maritime and fisheries policies. Examples raised include challenges

in meeting the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) target in the Common Fisheries Policy and achieving good environment status for all the relevant descriptors by 2020 under the Marine Strategy Directive (MSFD). Securing effective and harmonised implementation, monitoring and enforcement of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and EU polices on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in Member States



are also highlighted. Further efforts to improve the EU's own internal governance of maritime issues (e.g. better coherence between policy and funding) are needed to ensure full implementation of existing regulations and policies, thus contributing better to a strong and concerted voice in international forums. To effectively deliver on SDG 14 (and hence also on other SDGs), the EU should promote policy coherence between environmental, maritime and fisheries policy as well as policies related to social sustainability, health, labour, trade and development cooperation.

Almost 40% of the respondents highlight the need to integrate climate-related policies and biodiversity-focused measures in the IOG Agenda. Ocean resilience and ecosystem restoration following an ecosystem-based approach and the precautionary principle are highly supported. In addition, according to a great number of contributors, the EU should strengthen its efforts towards international development, external partnerships and collaboration with non-EU countries on maritime issues, and include additional stakeholders in policy-making (e.g. local communities and indigenous people, scientists, businesses etc.).

Several respondents (35%) point out the need for better coordination among existing institutions dealing with ocean governance. This is due, inter

alia, to the prevalence of a sectoral approach over a more integrated one or due to the lack of inter-institutional cooperation. Yet, maritime activities are inter-linked and one decision in a certain region can affect many other areas. To be more efficient, this coordination has to be both horizontal (i.e. between UN organisations, agencies and programmes, and between and among regional organisations) and vertical (i.e. between the global, regional and national levels).

The majority of the contributors argue that there is no need to establish new instruments/frameworks/bodies to achieve the set objectives but rather to use the existing structures in a more effective way (e.g. expand their mandates, increase inter-institutional cooperation etc.).

Additionally, better inter-institutional coordination prerequisites the identification of the institutional gaps, principally from a sectoral and a regional approach, taking into account the principle of subsidiarity and regional specificities (as those of regions surrounded by the ocean and with vast maritime zones such as the EU outermost regions). Moreover, 40% of the respondents underline that covering the legal gaps, mainly for activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction, should become a priority for the EU.

Proposed EU actions to improve ocean governance

Despite the fact that most respondents believe that the EU's International Ocean Governance (IOG) Agenda is still relevant and coherent, several contributions suggest that more issues need to be addressed and further initiatives taken. Proposed actions in the survey received broad support, with a majority being identified as most important or important. Further actions and objectives were proposed with the following policy areas receiving most attention:

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY

Climate change and biodiversity loss are highlighted repeatedly as interlinked challenges, simultaneously affecting marine environmental health, resilience, and economic sectors that rely on it. According to several respondents, the climate dimension should be better reflected in ocean governance priorities, possibly through a dedicated pillar. Similar suggestions are made in relation to conservation and restoration. To this end, some contributors highlight the need to adapt the priorities – mainly pillars 1 and 2 – to better address these issues. Almost 40% of all contributors stress the need to integrate climate-related measures into EU's maritime policies and focus on adopting adaptation and mitigation measures. Emphasis on climate policies within the maritime affairs framework should contribute to decarbonise the maritime sector, improve climate resilience of the ocean and coastal communities, and ensure policies and management schemes are climate-change proof. The identification and development of synergies with relevant stakeholders and organisations would be an important tool to draw the attention to climate-focused policies and measures, and to shed more light on the ocean-biodiversity-climate nexus. Nature-based solutions are underlined as nexus solutions contributing to climate-change mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity conservation.

Similar to climate change adaptation and mitigation, the protection and conservation of biodiversity should be among the guidelines for policy-making on maritime affairs and should be included in the IOG Agenda. In addition, a number of respondents stress out that the EU should strengthen its efforts to protect biodiversity both within and outside of national jurisdiction. This is also important in order to meet the 2030 Agenda goals and the post-2020

biodiversity ambitions. The EU should ensure the protection and sustainable use of ocean, seas and marine resources with cross-sectoral conservation measures for all maritime economic activities and the sustainable use with sector-specific measures integrating relevant environmental concerns in close cooperation with the organisations mandated with marine environment protection and conservation. Lastly, the development and application of the Implementing Agreement on the protection and conservation of biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) will be an important step to fill a key gap in ocean governance.

As part of the call for further efforts on ecosystem conservation and protection, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) capture the interest of the majority of contributors (53%). The EU should maximise its efforts to build a coherent, well-managed and ecologically-representative network of protected areas in view of achieving the protection of 30% of the oceans by 2030. To this end, better coordination and cooperation among key actors as well as cross-sectoral collaboration is necessary. Finally, the EU should promote a holistic approach to ocean conservation and integrated ocean management at the international level, which takes into consideration ambitious climate goals and the 2030 agenda objectives.

POLLUTION

Almost half of the contributors argue that addressing marine pollution is another pressing matter that needs further attention both in terms of regulation – mainly mainstreaming in non-ocean related but relevant policies like agriculture – and in terms of ensuring full implementation of existing legislation and policies. According to 55% of the respondents, marine pollution should be tackled at its source, while making sure that countries comply with the adopted policies and enforce the relevant measures. This issue concerns a large spectrum of policies to fight all types of marine pollution (e.g. noise, nutrient, chemical and plastic pollution) coming from different sources at sea (e.g. shipping waste) or land (e.g. agriculture run-off). Further research is needed to identify pollution sources, while monitoring and control are important tools towards effective implementation. Apart from prevention, additional efforts are needed to clean



the oceans from existing polluting substances.

Further efforts are also needed to strengthen Regional Seas Organisations and Action Plans in their work on conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment, that includes addressing pollution at its sources.

BLUE ECONOMY

The EU should develop ambitious legislation to ensure that the highest environmental and social sustainability standards apply to all products consumed in EU markets deriving from ocean exploitation (including imports). This could include incentives for sustainable fisheries via premium access and prices to EU markets based on defined objectives e.g. gear bans, monitoring levels, etc. The EU should also support third countries to achieve the necessary changes for meeting these standards.

EU external partnerships (e.g. trade, fishing, energy, transport) with countries or regional organisations should incorporate the same social and environmental standards applicable in the EU to ensure a level-playing field.

European shipping companies control 40% of the world fleet, yet only 17% sail under an EU flag during operational life. At end-of-life, less than 10% sail under an EU flag. Measures are needed to tackle the problems of substandard shipping throughout the full ship life cycle from building low impact (emission/noise/container loss) ships to a revision of the tonnage tax regime to include environmental performance criteria until sustainable vessel scrapping (Waste Shipment Regulation). More fairness in maritime social law at a European level is expected, in particular for the maritime transport and fisheries sectors. The development of new

qualifications relating to emerging blue economy sectors should be supported.

Further efforts are needed to address the absence of flag State control often linked to flags of convenience. Several respondents have called for increased control from all flag States concerning the implementation of rules on shipping and anti-IUU measures, as well as preventing and addressing pollution so as to avoid circumvention of the adopted measures by using weaker flag States parties (i.e. flags of convenience).

While, the EU is recognised as a front-runner in fighting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, stepping-up engagement with other major States (to advance transparency) is considered necessary. Some contributors also argue that the EU should maximise its efforts on ensuring full transparency and traceability within seafood supply chains and markets.

Additional efforts on strengthening regional fisheries management should include further promotion of evidence-based decision-making and consistency between different regulatory frameworks in the different Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). Where institutional gaps exist, establishment of new RFMOs should be promoted. In order to ensure biodiversity conservation and fish stock restoration, supporting closer collaboration of RFMOs with Regional Seas Convention is also encouraged.

Some contributions also call for phasing out of oil and gas exploration and a moratorium on deep-sea mining either per se or until a set of conditions around science, governance, social license, and circular economy is met.

Finally, additional actions should be taken to ensure transparent and inclusive decision-making, to efficiently regulate different blue economy activities including marine and coastal tourism for example through Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP).

MARITIME SPATIAL MANAGEMENT

The majority of respondents (57%) argue that Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is essential for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, while some of them claim that an ecosystem-based approach would best serve the marine conservation efforts and MSP purposes. In addition, MSP and ICZM, as applicable, should take into account cumulative impacts of ocean stressors at a consistent standard globally and include provisions for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and/or Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs). Such actions should become an integral part of the ocean governance framework at an international and EU level to avoid negative environmental and climate externalities, while improving socio-economic benefits including for communities. Special emphasis should be given to economic and social considerations, as well as to scientific guidelines, when adopting MSP measures. The inclusion of different users in MSP and an efficient monitoring and enforcement scheme are also among the most common suggestions from the respondents.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS (SFPA) AND NON-EU FISHERIES

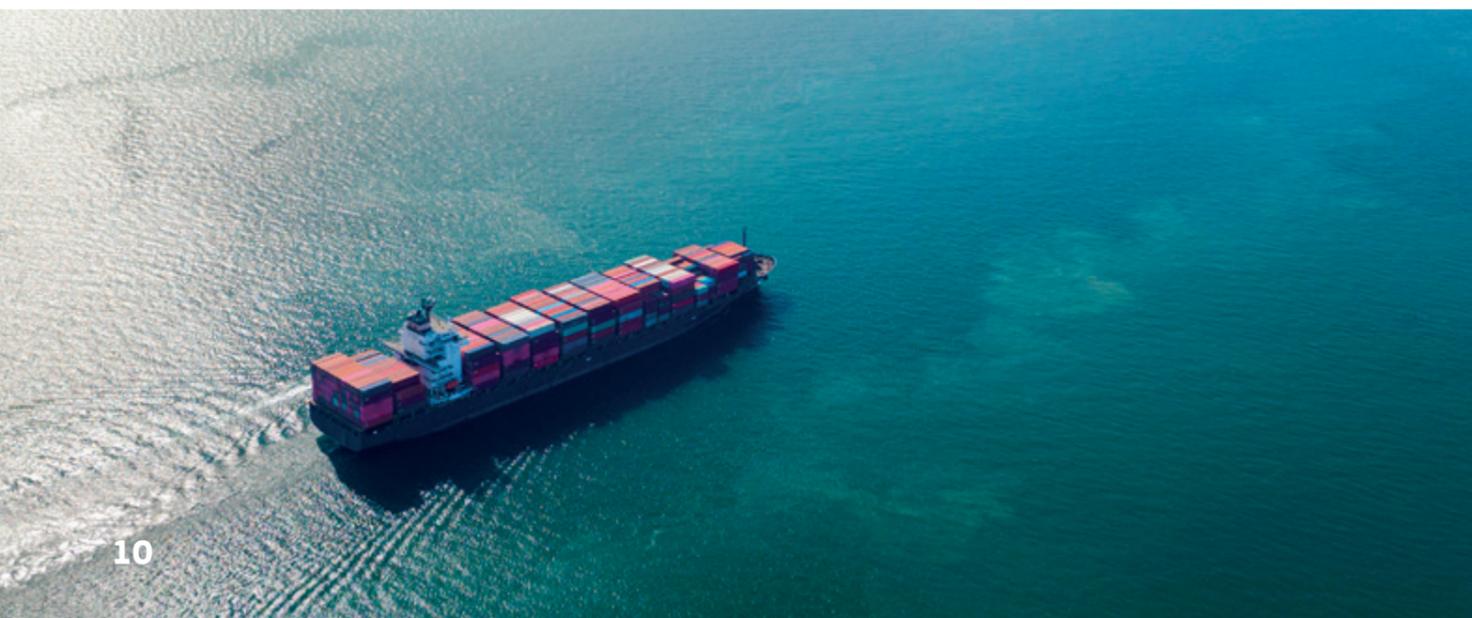
Many respondents advocate the conclusion of SFPAs with third countries as a means towards sustainable ocean governance framework. SFPAs should be developed and act as a model for transparent access to fisheries upholding accountability standards and promoting social sustainability objectives. Apart from sustainable resource management, these agreements should integrate a social component, which would offer local communities, women, and regional stakeholders a strengthened position in the fisheries sector and market. Transparency and trade must also be a focal point of these agreements. On the technical aspect, monitoring instruments should be used to ensure proper implementation, while capacity-building assistance should be given to the partner States to achieve the SFPA's goals. Data collection and increased inspections on EU fishing vessels outside the EU should be safeguarded.

Several contributors argue that SFPAs should primarily aim at promoting sustainable management measures at a regional and global level with the contribution of the EU. Using such agreements as building blocks for developing coherent regional strategies is equally significant. All relevant EU regulatory obligations should be equally included in every SFPA protocol and greater coherence and synergies between uses of EU sectoral support and other funding means be ensured, with an emphasis on supporting sustainable local fishing communities and the participation and role of women.

OCEAN KNOWLEDGE, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

The majority of respondents (52%) argue that ocean science and research should play a greater role in EU's policy-making. Identifying ocean knowledge gaps and strengthening the science-policy interface must be placed at the top of EU's ocean agenda. Hence, the EU will be able to address effectively ocean challenges by adopting targeted measures and by engaging in evidence-based policy-making. To this end, science and research infrastructures need to be better coordinated and developed in a less fragmented system, while funding research projects remains of high importance.

Moreover, several contributors underline that the EU should increase its efforts to implement a science-based and integrated approach towards the protection and conservation of the oceans. Such an approach should be based on ocean observation, modelling, and data collection at an international level. Simultaneously, the EU should utilise its position to promote science diplomacy in relation to ocean research and policy-making, and develop external partnerships. These partnerships should lead to an operational service of general interest



for ocean analysis and forecasting.

Additionally, many respondents highlight that ocean literacy, public awareness and education is extremely valuable for tackling ocean challenges. Raising public awareness through research programmes, campaigns, projects, trainings etc. for a variety of issues (e.g. pollution, fisheries, climate change impacts etc.) gathers great attention from the respondents. The EU should focus more on public education initiatives to familiarise people with the current challenges and solutions as well as possible ways of self-involvement and behavioural change. Finally, public awareness campaigns should target not only the citizens and youth but also stakeholders and professionals.

FINANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The issue of funding is raised by more than half of the contributors (57%). The respondents primarily focus on funding opportunities with regard to research programmes, environmental assessments, and control. The International Ocean Governance Agenda should be mainstreamed through the various funding instruments (including the Official Development Assistance (ODA)) to fully engage with partners in Africa and globally. In parallel, monitoring, control, assessments, and transparency are key areas, where the EU should invest while deciding the allocation of funds. Emphasis should be given to the global South (enhancing South to South cooperation, promoting ocean literacy, supporting young scientists etc.), whilst harmful subsidies must be eliminated immediately.

In terms of capacity building, the EU should enhance its efforts to offer technical assistance and assist in technology transfer to its Member States and partners, strengthen local communities, and contribute to management measures in relation to fisheries and SFPAs. The EU should also strengthen capacity building coordination across regions and ocean basins to increase funding efficiency and raise visibility. Lastly, capacity building should support synergies among countries in light of limited resources for, among others, evidence-based regional strategies to reduce pressures.



Conclusion

The European Commission would like to thank all participants for their contributions.

The replies confirm that the EU should play an important role in strengthening international ocean governance through its International Ocean Governance Agenda, while highlighting the need for further action at home and abroad. Many contributions underline the importance of updating the Agenda to ensure EU's leadership and support towards achieving global sustainability objectives pertaining to the ocean. This leadership should build on external partnerships and targeted initiatives backed by solid delivery within the EU.

Whilst perceptions vary on how this can be achieved, the majority of contributors make a clear call for the EU to:

- Lead by example through effective and timely delivery of its maritime, marine conservation and sustainable resource use policies, including fisheries policy;
- Give a clear priority to ecosystem conservation and restoration for improving the overall status of the marine environment through reinforcing action for climate change resilience, reversing biodiversity loss and halting and removing pollution;
- Drive a sustainable blue economy by paying equal regulatory attention to all sectors, promoting transparent and inclusive decision-making, ensuring a level-playing field and strengthening social sustainability considerations;
- Facilitate, support and promote cooperation among and within sectoral policies to ensure policy coherence at and across all levels, notably at regional scale;
- Foster the effective use of spatial management tools and instruments for ensuring sustainable and ecosystem-based balance between different uses, which should be sustainable and the conservation prerequisites;
- Ensure evidence-based policy making by strengthening ocean research and scientific advice in response to policy-needs backed by sustainable funding, coordinated infrastructures, the development of operational integrated ocean services and data collection, facilitated through tailor-made science-policy interfaces, digital innovative infrastructures and existing space programs;
- Promote and upscale the coordinated and coherent use of critical enablers such as financial support and investment, capacity building and ocean literacy to empower and mobilise today's and tomorrow's actors and stakeholders on the transition to sustainability.



