

BLUE MISSION BANOS

Supporting the Mission Ocean
Lighthouse in the Baltic and North
Sea Basins

Optimizing Governance for Effective Mission Implementation in the BANOS Region



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The EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” aims to address major environmental and governance challenges effecting Europe’s seas and waters. Given its complexity, effective governance with clear roles and responsibilities is essential. Through the BlueMissionBANOS project, a foresight exercise was carried out to anticipate governance needs and co-develop pathways for implementation. This policy summarises the main insights and offers guidance for the Mission’s next phase to 2030.

Background

Europe’s marine ecosystems face ongoing challenges related to pollution, biodiversity loss, and fragmented governance. The BANOS Mission Lighthouse seeks to **align regional actors and governance systems** toward Mission Ocean goals. According to the Mission Implementation Plan, the lighthouse governance for the Baltic and North Sea Region (BANOS) builds on existing structures. To make this operational, the foresight exercise **identifies governance needs, anticipates future challenges, and co-develop actionable policy pathways** to

support the long-term Mission Ocean implementation using scenarios at the local, national, and supranational levels. It provides decision-makers with structured options for coordinated action by drawing on **stakeholder mapping** and a **gap analysis** and engages the project’s Governance Reference Group and other key actors through three iterative workshops implementation. Key action points included **improved transparency, harmonized regulatory approaches, and the integration of a science-to-policy interface** at the regional and local levels.





Iterative Foresight Process in Blue Mission BANOS

1. **Problem Identification** - Mapping key challenges and needs with stakeholders
2. **Solution Exploration** - Developing potential solutions collaboratively
3. **Progress Check-In** - Evaluating and refining strategies with the consortium
4. **Scenario Development** - Creating best-case governance pathways at different levels

What is needed to successfully implement the Mission Ocean in the BANOS Region?

The foresight process in BlueMissionBANOS builds on a conceptual mapping approach with **predefined drivers** and a **governance gap analysis**. Despite many ambitious initiatives, governance structures across sectors often struggle to achieve the coherence and continuity needed for long term transformation. There is a clear need to make regional and national alignment with Mission objectives **more explicit and traceable**. Beyond individual funding calls or policy

statements, what remains missing is a **commitment to strategic coherence and accountability across governance levels**. Civil society engagement and blue innovation continue to grow organically, but their integration into the Mission is still uneven.

The following priority actions are identified for attention before the next phase of Mission Ocean implementation in 2026:



Pathways and scenarios for effective Mission Ocean governance

In the ongoing foresight process, paths and scenarios for a practicable implementation of Mission Ocean & Waters are developed and refined together with the stakeholders. The focus is on the following three regional scales:

- **Local-Level Collaborative Ocean Governance**, where place-based leadership from coastal communities and municipalities fosters integrated and adaptive management of marine resources
- **National-Level Ocean Governance for Policy Integration**, where coherent legal frameworks and institutional mandates align sectoral priorities (e.g., energy, fisheries, biodiversity)
- **Supranational / Global-Level Integrated Ocean Governance**, where the EU, regional sea conventions, and global instruments (such as the UN Ocean Decade and the BBNJ Agreement) converge to support transboundary governance and knowledge sharing

Local best practice scenario - Empowering coastal communities

PRIORITIES

- Strengthen dialogue between local actors and higher governance levels
- Integrate local and traditional knowledge into research and policy
- Build capacity through education, training, and participatory budgeting

POLICY PATHWAYS

- Formalize co-management structures for marine resources
- Embed local perspectives in spatial planning and Mission Hubs
- Ensure equitable benefit-sharing from blue economy initiatives



National best practice scenario - Breaking administrative silos



POLICY PATHWAYS

- Create National Mission Hubs for coordination, support 'blue pioneers' through targeted funding, and institutionalize science-policy advisory groups
- Optimizing Governance for Effective Mission Implementation in the BANOS region

PRIORITIES

- Establish cross-ministerial task forces for blue economy integration
- Align marine, energy, and biodiversity policies
- Develop success metrics beyond GDP

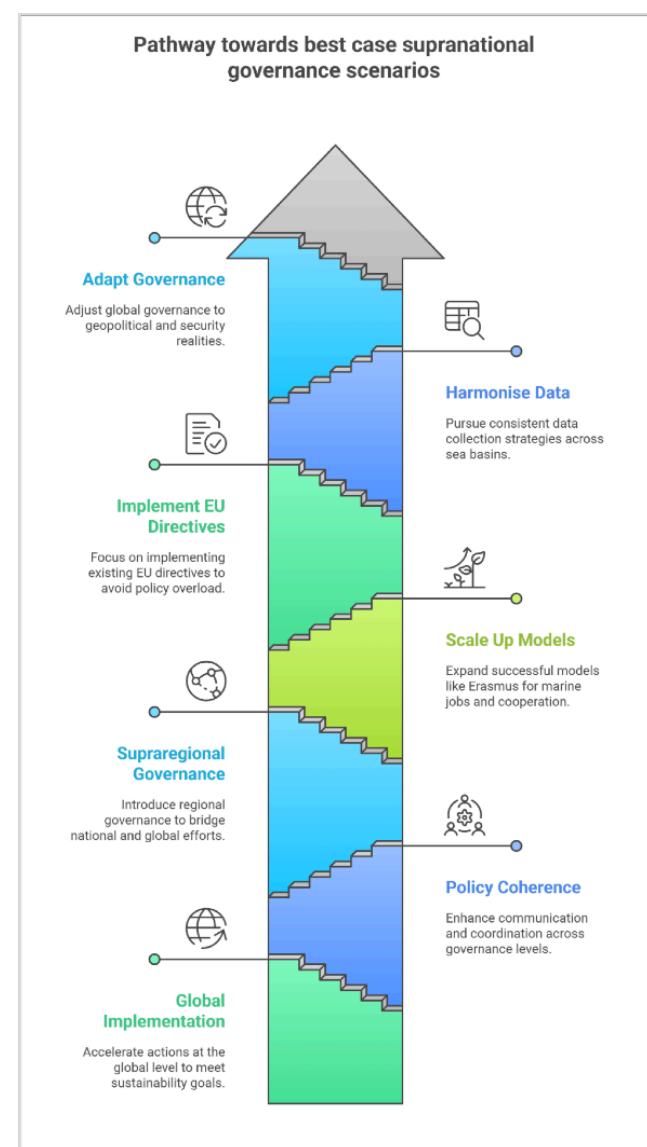
Supranational best practice scenario - Aligning directives and data

PRIORITIES

- Improve policy coherence among EU directives
- Harmonize data collection
- Foster cross-border governance learning

POLICY PATHWAYS

- Establish intermediate cooperation structures
- Integrate the Mission Ocean with the European Ocean Pact
- Develop interoperable digital platforms for evidence-based decision-making



Strategic recommendations

- **Build Multi-Level Coherence:** Establish formal mechanisms linking local implementation with national strategies and EU directives
- **Institutionalize the Mission Ocean Framework:** Embed Mission objectives within existing governance structures and funding programs
- **Strengthen the Science-Policy Interface:** Support transdisciplinary platforms for knowledge exchange
- **Promote Citizen and Stakeholder Engagement:** Empower communities through participatory governance
- **Leverage the European Ocean Pact:** Use it to harmonize efforts across sea basins

Outlook & Call for Action

Moving forward, the results of the foresight process provide a coherent direction of next steps for the Mission Ocean. Stakeholders are not asking for more ideas, but for **pathways to act on what is already known**. With the Ocean Pact and the foresight-based governance scenarios as foundations, the priority must now shift toward **embedding these insights into policy and program planning**. This includes clearer mandates for cross-sector task forces, funding support for digital and participatory infrastructures, and continued alignment between research, market mechanisms, and regulation. As new agenda items arise, whether through the evolving Mission Ocean framework or adjacent EU policy developments, these findings provide both **an evidence base and a compass for next steps**.

Conclusion

Achieving a carbon-neutral, circular blue economy in the BANOS region requires **adaptive, participatory, and multilevel governance**. By connecting local knowledge, national leadership, and EU coordination, BlueMissionBANOS provides a **replicable model** for Mission Ocean implementation across Europe.

References

EU Mission Ocean & Waters: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters_en

BlueMissionBANOS: <https://bluemissionbanos.eu/>

Napkin AI: All figures in this Policy Brief were created with Napkin AI to clearly illustrate the complex content and results of the foresight process.