



# **BLUE MISSION BANOS**

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

## **The EU Ocean Pact - What's in it for the BANOS region?**



Funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union under [Grant Agreement ID 101093845](#). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

With the European Oceans Pact, the EU Commission has set itself the ambitious goal of creating a framework that will take into account all marine-related concerns and activities that may affect Europe in the future. Among others, it is intended to counteract the fragmentation caused by harmonization efforts and close existing regulatory gaps. In this way, it can also make an important contribution to achieving the goals of the Mission Ocean & Waters and build on the results of the Mission to date. This policy brief aims to provide information on how the Ocean Pact can potentially close governance gaps that we have analyzed in the BlueMissionBANOS project. It also examines the extent to which the North Sea and Baltic Sea communities have been involved in the process of shaping the Ocean Pact and whether regional challenges have been taken into account.

## Executive Summary

Although the marine area in Europe is larger than the land area, European waters lack a holistic view when it comes to sustainable use. With the Oceans Pact, the EU Commission has launched an initiative to change this and break down the existing fragmentation and silos. The Ocean Pact stands for a **collaborative procedure** designed to strengthen and align actions across Europe for the **protection, sustainable use, and governance of the ocean**. It brings together governments, industries, research institutions, and civil society to support shared commitments.

With targets ranging from **ecosystem restoration and pollution reduction** to **acceleration of the blue economy**, the

Pact aims to unify EU ocean efforts under one umbrella. It reinforces the **need for participatory, adaptive, and inclusive governance frameworks** that are scalable and can grow in the complexity of Mission Ocean implementation.

With the initial question ***“The EU Ocean Pact - what's in it for the North Sea and Baltic Sea region?”***, the BlueMissionBANOS Consortium examined the extent to which ocean basin-related issues and challenges were addressed in the Ocean Pact and whether the document provides a good basis for tackling these challenges, including within the framework of Mission Ocean & Waters.



### European Oceans Pact Key Priorities

- **Protecting** and restoring ocean health
- **Boosting** the competitiveness of the EU sustainable blue economy
- **Supporting** coastal and island communities, and outermost regions
- **Advancing** ocean research, knowledge, skills and innovation
- **Enhancing** maritime security and defense
- **Strengthening** EU ocean diplomacy and international ocean governance

## EU Mission Ocean & Waters and BlueMission BANOS

The Mission Ocean & Waters was launched in 2021 with the aim of **restoring Europe's waters by 2030 and protecting them sustainably for the future**. Based on the European sea basins, the Mission objectives are pursued **at regional level** in four so-called **lighthouse areas**. The BlueMissionBANOS project is the coordinating project for the Baltic and North Sea Lighthouse. It aims to facilitate the development of a **sustainable, carbon-neutral, and circular blue economy** by connecting national, regional, and

transnational actors from politics, industry, and science. The groundwork in the Mission Ocean & Waters projects has provided an important basis for the Ocean Pact. For example, Mission governance has strengthened networking across the European sea basins and promoted inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation between the relevant stakeholders. **Cooperation at the sea basin level will become even more important** in the coming years, as stated in the Ocean Pact:

“*Through the upcoming proposal for an “Ocean Act”, Member States will be encouraged to move from a national approach to a sea basin level approach. In this respect, they will be encouraged to cooperate with neighbouring countries, across existing regional cooperation bodies, through EU macro-regional strategies, as well as to build on the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters” basin-scale lighthouses.*”

## Gaps in governance structures and how the Ocean Pact can close them

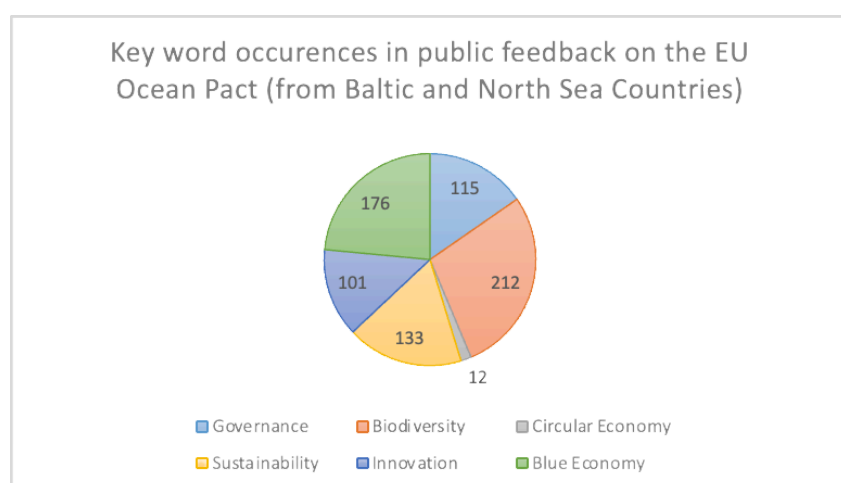
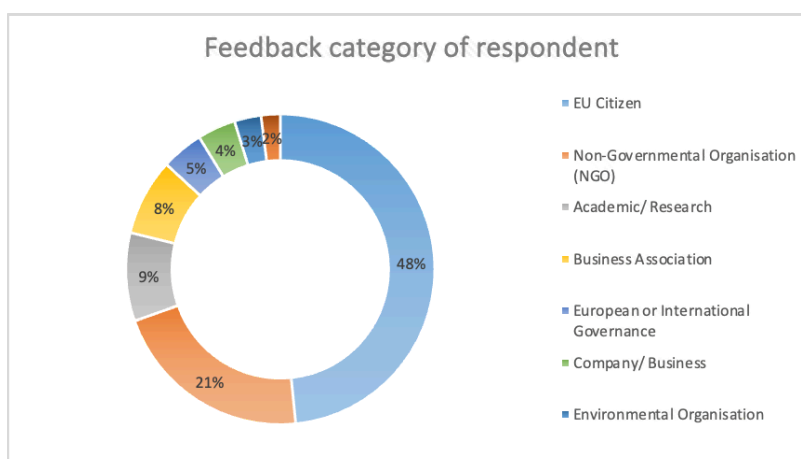
There is a significant number of governance gaps to be addressed to achieve a successful implementation of a Carbon Neutral Circular Blue Economy. A BlueMissionBANOS literature review revealed that the top hindrances towards this implementation are:

- **Undefined political strategies:** Strategies are not coherent across government levels or industries and cannot keep up with innovations
- **Lack of financial support:** It is difficult to secure funding for sustainable development projects
- **Lack of incentives for new developing markets:** Infrastructure is lacking to build out new industries, hindering demand in markets
- **Knowledge gaps:** Trade-offs between ecology and industry are not well known, although we are nearing climate and biodiversity tipping points

Although the Pact was published during a very late stage of the BlueMissionBANOS project, its emergence has become of significant interest for stakeholders and researchers aligned with the Mission's objectives. Given the project's ambition to strengthen multi-level ocean governance and foster a circular blue economy through national, regional, and transnational collaboration, its alignment with the goals of the European Ocean Pact is both timely and strategically relevant. During the EC's call for evidence from January 20 to February 17, 2025, nearly 1,000 individuals and organisations provided input, showing a strong public demand for policies that safeguard marine biodiversity and ecosystem health while promoting coordinated action among key actors. Preliminary findings from the Baltic and North Sea region analysis of this feedback show a growing consensus around the need for integrated ocean policies. As such, the European Ocean Pact presents an opportunity for the project to contribute to broader EU policy developments in ocean conservation and the advancement of a sustainable blue economy.

## Ocean Pact Feedback

Here are some key results about the category of respondents and the keyword occurrences in public feedback regarding the Ocean Pact.



## Outlook and call for action

For the BlueMissionBANOS project, the Pact offers both validation and opportunity. Its emergence during the project's foresight process confirmed many of the governance challenges raised, especially around **institutional silos, feedback mechanisms, and scale mismatches**. Moving forward, the Ocean Pact will likely provide the **umbrella framework** under which Mission Ocean implementation can be embedded and scaled. As such, the Pact features not just as a policy context, but as a **target for alignment**. The EU will continue the Mission Ocean & Waters with its regional approach until 2030, enabling the results of the Mission to contribute directly to the objectives of the Ocean Pact with concrete actions. Effective monitoring of the mission's implementation will **help to drive policy alignment**.



**Find here the full  
report feedback on  
the Ocean Pact**

With its **Call for Evidence on the Ocean Pact**, the European Commission has initiated a **co-creative and participatory process** that enables a broad range of stakeholders to be involved in important ocean governance decisions. Such a consultation process is also necessary for the ‘Ocean Act’ that is now to be developed, and the participation of as many actors as possible is essential in order to develop a sound sustainable concept for European seas. Maritime spatial planning (MSP) should play a central role here as the most important strategic instrument for integrating and coordinating various maritime activities with environmental protection and conservation using an ecosystem-based approach.

## References

**Ocean Pact official website:** <https://oceans-and-waters.ec.europa.eu/eu-ocean-pact>

**Oceans Pact Call for Evidence:** [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14474-The-European-Oceans-Pact/feedback\\_en?p\\_id=33348412](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14474-The-European-Oceans-Pact/feedback_en?p_id=33348412)

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

**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](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)

**EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR):** <https://eusbsr.eu/>

**Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI):** <https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2024/11/25/greater-north-sea-basin-initiative---antwerp-ministerial-declaration>

**Baseline study for the BANOS region:** <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/44028232-922a-11ed-b508-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>