

REPORT

Meeting: **European Maritime Day 2025**
Parties: **DG MARE, AC secretariats, stakeholders**
Date: **22-23 May 2025**
Location: **Cork, Ireland**
Chair: **Seamus Kearney**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

European Maritime Day (EMD) 2025 gathered around 1,285 participants and featured 24 workshops, 7 special sessions (including 3 Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues), around 80 exhibition stands, and an immersive art installation. The event focused strongly on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and regional basin strategies, with attention also given to the fisheries sector. For the second year in a row, Advisory Councils were given the opportunity to co-host a dedicated workshop. The session celebrated the 20th anniversary of their establishment and explored their potential contributions to the upcoming EU Ocean Pact.

Opening Statement by Commissioner Costas Kadis

Commissioner Costas Kadis opened the event by highlighting the ocean's role in shaping communities, cultural identity and livelihoods. He stressed the urgent need to address marine degradation and harness the ocean's potential for a competitive and sustainable EU.

He introduced the forthcoming **EU Ocean Pact**, which will set priorities for ocean health, promoting sustainable coastal economies, advancing marine research and knowledge, and enhancing maritime security and defence in light of current geopolitical developments. Strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international maritime governance will also be key objectives. Other key announcements included the launch of the [EU Blue Economy Report](#) and the continuation of the Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues, with special sessions held at the EMD.

Finally, the Commissioner emphasized the need to amplify the voices of youth, women, and marine innovators in shaping the future of ocean governance.

Fisheries & Ocean Dialogue on Policy Development

The session opened with remarks by Commissioner Costas Kadis and Director-General Charlina Vitcheva. The discussion focused on the upcoming EU Ocean Pact as a strategic, inclusive framework to guide sustainable ocean governance.

Commissioner Kadis highlighted the ocean’s dual nature as a source of both opportunity and vulnerability, crucial to both the plane and the economy. He emphasized the upcoming OP as a collective commitment and roadmap, not just a policy, to ensure long-term ocean health and coordinated action across sectors. The Pact, to be launched at the UN Ocean Conference in June 2025, will centre on people and coastal communities, streamline governance, and reduce administrative burdens.

Director-General Vitcheva underlined the need to bring ocean policy to the top of the EU political agenda. She highlighted the urgent need to address the triple planetary crisis, climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, amid accelerating human activity at sea. Current governance remains fragmented and sectoral and a holistic framework, that positions the ocean at the centre, is essential. With the EU holding the world’s largest cumulative Exclusive Economic Zone, four times the size of its landmass, and 40% of its population living near the coast, ocean health affects society as a whole. The OP will serve as a compass, guiding sustainable development, decarbonisation, and innovation. Vitcheva stressed the importance of ecosystem-based, science-driven policies and the role of offshore renewables in achieving climate goals. At the core of the Pact are people, especially those most affected by ocean changes. The OP will be inclusive, participatory, and cross-sectoral, empowering stakeholders from fishers to youth, and rooted in trust, shared responsibility, and local ownership.

Panel speakers included:

- **Timmy Dooley**, Minister of State, Department of Climate, Environment and Energy, Ireland
- **Christophe Clergeau**, MEP, Chair of the SEArca Intergroup
- **Isabelle Le Callennec**, MEP, Vice-President, SEArca Intergroup

Minister **Dooley** stressed the need for policy integration, interaction between anthropogenic activities at sea, early stakeholder involvement, and legislative clarity to support effective fisheries governance. He also emphasized aligning vision with funding tools like EMFAF.

MEP Le Callennec noted the recently adopted [EPP’s position paper](#), supporting the OP as a tool to boost the blue economy, ensure maritime security, protect marine ecosystems, and foster cooperation with coastal communities. She called for realistic, implementable goals and stronger and continuous inter-institutional collaboration.

MEP Clergeau reaffirmed SEArca’s support for the OP as a “pact to act” and boost effective implementation. He stressed the need for restoring ocean health, achieving GES, reforming ocean governance, including revisiting the MSPD and MSFD, and compiling feasible decarbonisation plan for the maritime sector.

Workshop: 20 Years of Advisory Councils Stakeholder Expertise of the Ocean Pact

A separate detailed report has been produced, which can be accessed [here](#).

Workshop: GNSBI engagement with other users of the North Sea

The workshop brought together stakeholders from fisheries, nature, MSP, energy, regional bodies, and the European Commission to explore how the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) can strengthen stakeholder engagement and position itself as a platform for cross-sectoral collaboration. The session was moderated by **Jana Caulier** (Belgian ministry) with panellists:

- **Kinnie De Beule** (Blue Cluster)
- **Elisabet Babic** (CPMR North Sea Commission)
- **Liz Gavin** (NuaFund)
- **Alexandra Philippe** (North Sea Advisory Council)

GNSBI was launched to promote strategic cross-border and cross-sectoral collaboration, with stakeholder engagement at its core. As a relatively young initiative, GNSBI aims to amplify not only governmental voices but also those with valuable on-the-ground experience across the Greater North Sea Basin.

Considering main challenges in stakeholder engagement and dealing with conflicts resolution (i.e., between commercial fishing and nature conservation), **Philippe** explained that the NSAC was established under the CFP to bring together stakeholders, primarily from the fisheries sector and other interest groups, and provide consensus-based advice to the Commission and Member States, influencing policy in a collaborative and informed way. She acknowledged that while differing views sometimes create friction, the AC does not avoid difficult topics but rather embraces them with the aim to foster constructive dialogue and avoid polarization. Consensus is built through mutual listening, use of scientific data, and inclusion of the latest knowledge. Often, disagreements arise from misinformation rather than true differences in goals, so transparency and evidence-based recommendations are essential. It is also important to recognize the regulatory context. While the Commission and national governments conduct consultations, not all input can be taken on board. What is often missing is a clear explanation back to stakeholders (why certain suggestions were accepted and others not). This feedback loop is essential. Communication is the thread that ties it all together, not just about science and best practices, but also legal frameworks and policy constraints. When people understand the reasons behind decisions, they're far more likely to stay engaged and constructive.

Regarding how an improved maritime spatial plan can benefit the European fisheries sector and what role NSAC could play in shaping such a plan, Philippe emphasized that MSP must fully include fisheries, not only due to its economic and cultural importance but also because of the unique knowledge that fishers hold. She warned against the marginalization of traditional activities in favour of emerging sectors like offshore wind. NSAC has actively contributed to this discussion. In 2023, a dedicated workshop was held focusing on maritime spatial planning and stakeholder engagement. The event brought together a wide range of

actors with the objective to deliver comprehensive, cross-sectoral advice. Recently, the NSAC has also provided advice on the mapping of important fishing grounds, developed through an iterative focus group involving external experts. This work supports the broader goal of ensuring that the interests of the fisheries sector are appropriately reflected in planning and policy processes. Offshore wind development represents a major area of activity and policy interest. While its expansion is a defined political objective, it presents challenges related to spatial competition and sectoral coexistence. Constructive cross-sectoral engagement needs to be promoted to deliver balanced outcomes that consider the needs and impacts on all affected sectors. As part of these efforts, NSAC will host a webinar on July 1st to continue advancing dialogue, with GNSBI invited to contribute.

On best practices in stakeholder engagement, the other panellists emphasised:

- Need for early involvement of all sectors to prevent conflict, foster collaboration and reduce late-stage opposition.
- Existing networks across sea basins are valuable and often underestimated.
- Continuous communication and clarity around decisions that are or are not included in policy outcomes are crucial.
- Multi-use of marine space to support both economic and ecological goals should be considered as a way forward. There is potential in combining infrastructures for efficiency and biodiversity outcomes.
- The industry is willing to innovate, provided there are incentives.

The next part of the workshop focused on GNSBI's draft approach to stakeholder engagement. An initial framework was presented for categorizing stakeholders into four main groups:

1. **Key Actors (existing fora):** High influence and actively involved in regional governance, policy and implementation across MSP, fisheries, environmental protection and offshore energy (i.e., OSPAR, ICES, NSEC, CMPR NSC).
2. **Regional Enablers:** Influence regional coordination, planning, and funding at the regional level, though not necessarily engaged in GNSBI day-to-day activities (i.e., CPMR, regional authorities, intermunicipal bodies, Atlantic and Baltic Sea Strategies)
3. **Implementation Partners:** Organizations with technical expertise, advocacy and local knowledge, that drives implementation and stakeholder buy-in. These include NSAC, industry clusters, NGOs, research institutes, and (EU) projects.
4. **Contextual Stakeholders:** Potentially interested actors who are not directly connected, their actions could still indirectly affect the initiative (i.e., media, interested public, broader NGO networks, westMED and Black sea).

This categorization is provisional and open to feedback.

Audience question: In situations where new research challenges established policies, such as evidence showing that wind turbines, especially in the Dogger Bank, act as biodiversity "stepping stones", how should this evidence be communicated to stakeholders, particularly when it contradicts existing laws or expectations?

Philippe noted that presenting new evidence can be disruptive. Some stakeholders may be too invested in current practices, and others may counter with conflicting studies. Still, it's crucial to share scientific findings transparently. Ultimately, decisions are political, and while science should guide the process, socio-economic and societal factors also play a key role. There is need to clearly communicate that science is essential, but it's only one part of the broader decision-making context.

Other panellists highlighted:

- Need for honesty when research challenges policy. Offering practical alternatives (e.g. reusing infrastructure for marine parks) can make difficult evidence more actionable.
- Transparency and timing are crucial, as policymakers need access to current data to make responsible choices and avoid decisions based on outdated information.
- Transformative decisions require courage and creative thinking; evidence should be shared, but in a way that supports constructive dialogue and possible compromise.

Audience question: Is GNSBI currently collaborating with organizations already doing stakeholder engagement, or does it plan to conduct its own stakeholder engagement directly?

Caulier responded that GNSBI is already connected to various organizations through its working tracks, which are engaging with stakeholders in different ways. However, the main goal now is to develop a clear and coherent stakeholder engagement strategy, a flexible framework that outlines how people can get involved, what impact they can have, and how their input will be used. Importance of tapping into existing knowledge and experience is recognized.

Audience question: How is the cooperation with other sea basins seen by the GNSBI? What could be learned or shared across regions like the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Baltic?

Caulier noted that the GNSBI is currently looking into cross-sea basin cooperation, especially with the Atlantic and the Baltic, where overlaps already exist. Lessons from the Mediterranean can be explored to understand how these can inform GNSBI's approach. The plan is to leverage tools like the Assistance Mechanism to help build that a wider view.

Philippe flagged that ACs face a similar challenge as some are based on sea basins, others on sectors like pelagic fisheries or markets. ACs work together to identify common issues and avoid redundant recommendations, while also sharing best practices. There's value in understanding both the differences and synergies between sea basins to improve coordination and harmonization.

Falke De Sager (Rederscentrale) stressed concerns around transparency. Right now, inconsistent information from different tracks is heard, which risks reducing trust and causing stakeholder fatigue. The question is: with GNSBI working across several thematic tracks, how is siloed thinking and internal competition between tracks prevented, for instance, between fisheries and nature restoration, or wind farms and biodiversity? Additionally, how is coherence and inclusiveness across the initiative ensured?

Caulier responded that no track is considered more important than another. GNSBI has a steering group with all track leads present to ensure shared decision-making and alignment.

Jérôme Chladeck (German Ministry and GNSBI fisheries working track lead) added that all track leads are in constant contact. 2024 was dedicated to setting up individual work plans, but currently focus is on cross-track collaboration. Steering group meetings help stay aligned, and goal is to break silos. Other institutions like OSPAR focus on the environment, NSEC on energy, but GNSBI is meant to bring those domains together.

Audience question: How do you plan to reach stakeholders, how will their input be used, and what impact will it actually have?

Philippe noted that by engaging with existing stakeholder organizations, such as ACs, engagement is established with all members. ACs have spent 20 years bringing together people from very different backgrounds with the aim of delivering meaningful results. Early, open communication is key to preventing the perception that some sectors are more prioritized than others.

Workshop: making co-operation in MSP & regulation a reality

MSP should ensure that all uses of the sea are considered, balancing environmental protection with economic and social needs. With many activities and regulations in the marine space, collaboration and shared knowledge are essential for sustainable outcomes.

The workshop provided a forum for such MSP practitioners within EU sea basins to share best practices and foster cross-border cooperation. Speakers included: Laura Brien (Maritime Area Regulatory Authority), Ronan Boyle (Commissioners of Irish lights), Hans Niewenhuis (Dutch Ministry for Infrastructure and water management), Paul Gilliland (Marine Management Organisation, UK), and Eda Bayar (European Environmental Agency).

Dutch Practices for MSP:

1. **Political Leadership:** MSP is driven by government priorities, adapting to political shifts (e.g. recent changes in Dutch ambitions between ORE and fishing interests).
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** In the Netherlands, the North Sea Agreement brings together fishers, NGOs, and government to co-create policy, ensuring legitimacy and wide engagement and discussion of needs.
3. **Scientific Evidence:** Planning requires anticipatory knowledge. Early integration of scientific input leads to sound, future-proof decisions.

In addition, the role of the GNSBI, a product of previous EMD sessions, was stressed as a practical example of improving coherence across borders, sectors, and legal frameworks (MSP + MSFD), especially in the context of the EU Ocean Pact.

European Environmental Agency point of view:

- MSFD aligns well with MSP, enabling spatially explicit measures to achieve GES.
- Three enablers for effective MSP:
 - Cross-regional communication
 - Harmonised, cross-border data
 - Shared assessment methodologies
- EEA acts as a data hub, supporting national and pan-European assessments.
- Future relevant reports: State of Europe's Seas (interactive overview of GES status) and Marine Messages (integrated spatial pressure analysis).

Overall, panellists reflected on the following challenges and lessons:

- Decisions in one country affect neighbouring waters, but cooperation becomes essential as marine activity grows.
- Commercial sensitivity (e.g., oil and gas) limits transparency. One-on-one dialogues and confidentiality agreements can build trust.
- Conflicting messages and siloed processes can undermine engagement. Transparent processes and early input are vital.
- In the post-Brexit context, continued collaboration through bilateral meetings, workshops, and shared spatial planning tools are needed.

In conclusion, a more harmonised European approach to marine regulation enhances shared understanding, reduces conflict, and supports sustainable ocean use.

Workshop: Have your say – Future Ecosystem Informed Advice

During this workshop participants engaged in using the ICES Framework for Ecosystem-Informed Science and Advice (FEISA) in a hypothetical case study to explore how to reconcile the development of offshore renewable energy with the 30x30 Global Biodiversity Framework and the need for sustainable seafood production.

FEISA supports transitioning from traditional single-species assessments to an integrated socio-ecological approach, accounting for multiple sectors, cumulative pressures, and socioeconomic trade-offs. Key components of FEISA are:

- Knowledge plurality which allows to incorporate multiple forms of knowledge (scientific, stakeholder, and experimental), using various methods (empirical, experiential, mechanistic) to build a broad evidence base
- Indicators, which translate diverse knowledge into measurable trends, forming the evidence base for decision-making. These feed into two types of risk assessments: contextual and objective-based.
- Operational objectives are the engine of FEISA. These goals, informed by societal values and policy targets, define what management aims to achieve and provide a benchmark for evaluating progress.

- Risk based approach and communication, with risk being a shared language to prioritize action and compare alternative management strategies, enhancing transparency and decision-making.

FEISA supports adaptive management, starting with available knowledge, identifying gaps, and gradually refining approaches.

In conclusion, the workshop demonstrated FEISA's value as a practical, flexible framework for integrating diverse knowledge into marine decision-making. The framework supports better alignment between ecological and economic objectives, cross-sector collaboration and risk-informed, adaptive MSP in line with EU biodiversity and renewable energy goals

EFCA session: 20 years of uniform and effective control and inspection

2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), established in 2005 to enhance consistency and coordination in the control and enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Moderated by EFCA Executive Director Susan Steele, panellists Stylianos Mitolidis (DG MARE), Sean Murran (Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority), Elin Hedman (Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Mangement), Nikolay Kerekov (Executive Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Bulgaria) and Claus Wille (Danish Agricultural Fisheries Agency) reflected on EFCA's evolution, assessed current challenges, and identified future priorities for the agency.

EFCA was created to address inconsistent control practices among Member States. Since then, it has successfully fostered a cooperation-based model, aligning enforcement standards and supporting sustainability objectives. EFCA's role now goes beyond fisheries control, supporting maritime surveillance, border security, and the fight against IUU fishing. Over time, industry acceptance of inspections has grown, supported by digitisation and enhanced communication. Tools like VMS and AIS have transformed control efforts, making data-sharing in real-time possible and effective.

Panellists listed perceived current challenges and ways forward as follows:

- Tools like CCTV, AI, and real-time monitoring offer promise but have limitations: e.g., difficulty identifying species or fostering dialogue. Technology should complement, not replace, human inspection.
- Fishers face overlapping rules, often poorly understood. Ongoing efforts like the GDPR harmonization project help, but simplification is needed.
- The Control Regulation remains the "Bible" of enforcement, but interpretation varies across Member States. Ensuring interoperability and consistent standards is essential.

Additionally, Joint Deployment Plans (JDPs), standardised training across national agencies, the insurance of level playing field for all EU vessels, the support of cooperation with RFMOs and with third countries, and the enhancement of integration across EU coast guard and maritime functions were listed as main added values of EU cooperation promoted by EFCA.

Looking ahead in the next 20 years, participants proposed strategic priorities for EFCA and the EU:

- Strengthen cooperation through RFMOs and promote EU standards globally.
- Reduce regulatory complexity to improve understanding and compliance.
- Invest in AI, digital tools, and real-time surveillance to modernise control systems.
- Extend EFCA's model to other international marine regions.
- Share successful approaches across Member States to drive continual improvement.
- Reinforce global standards and coordination to deter illegal activities.

The next EMD2025 will take place in Limassol, Cyprus, from the 21 to 22 May 2026!