

REPORT

Meeting: **European Maritime Day 2026**
Parties: **DG MARE, AC secretariats, stakeholders**
Date: **21-22 May 2026**
Location: **Limassol, Cyprus**
Moderator: **Katrina Sichel**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

European Maritime Day 2026 took place in **Limassol**, Cyprus on **21-22 May 2026** and featured 21 workshops, 8 special sessions, and around 80 exhibition stands.. The prevalent themes of this year's EMD were coastal and small-scale fisheries, MFF, and MSP. For the third year in a row, Advisory Councils were given the opportunity to co-host a dedicated workshop on SSF and MSP.

[Opening statement by Commissioner Costas Kadis](#)

Commissioner Costas Kadis highlighted the **European Ocean Pact** as a shared commitment to protect and sustainably manage the ocean. He described the CFP as a strong policy tool. In terms of the evaluation of the CFP, the overall approach established in 2013 remains valid, **targeted improvements** will be required to address identified gaps and shortcomings.

The Commissioner also underlined the **Ocean Observation Initiative** ("Ocean Eye"), expected to be adopted in June, aiming to improve the EU's capacity to monitor and predict changes in the ocean. The EU Ocean Dashboard will track progress towards ocean sustainability objectives.

The **European Ocean Act**, to be presented later this year, will serve as the key legislative instrument for implementing the European Ocean Pact. The Act will establish **clear timelines and accountability mechanisms for Member States**, support more informed decision-making, improve the management of maritime space, align planning with environmental objectives, and help resolve inconsistencies between existing legal frameworks.

[High-level Plenary: How can the future Multiannual Financial Framework support the implementation of the Ocean Pact?](#)

DG MARE Director General Charlina Vitcheva explained that the proposed MFF introduces a more flexible approach, granting Member States greater responsibility for allocating funding according to national priorities. While a dedicated **€2 billion allocation** has been proposed,

this amount is intended as a starting point and can be complemented through other funding streams, including additional EU funds and National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).

On the other hand, Members of the European Parliament highlighted potential risks associated with the MFF. Fisheries and aquaculture are comparatively small sectors and may struggle to compete with larger policy priorities. Without stronger safeguards, funding for maritime sectors could be diluted within broader national spending priorities. In audience feedback, as participants argued that insufficient funding is currently secured for the blue economy and warned against the dilution of maritime priorities at national level.

The Parliament expressed strong reservations regarding the Commission's proposal. It emphasised ongoing efforts within Parliament to modify the MFF architecture, seeking to strengthen regional policy funding and rebuild a dedicated fisheries fund comparable to the current EMFAF budget. They warned about a potential “flexibility trap”, since flexibility alone does not guarantee that funding will reach maritime actors. There is need for dedicated tools, clear funding mechanisms and a strategic roadmap to ensure that Ocean Pact objectives are adequately financed.

Vitcheva argued that maritime affairs have been recognised as a political priority alongside other major objectives such as defence, food security and decarbonisation. The €2 billion allocation should be viewed as a minimum guaranteed amount rather than a ceiling, with additional resources potentially available through other funding instruments.

MEPs noted that achieving the objectives of the Ocean Pact will require stronger financial commitments and more precise provisions within the legislative framework.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the need for a **clear roadmap for financing the Ocean Pact**. Political ambition must be matched by predictable and accessible funding mechanisms.

The fisheries sector highlighted that there needs to be adequate support for generational renewal, fleet modernisation and long-term sector resilience. An additional question is whether increased reliance on Member State discretion could lead to fragmentation and uneven support across the EU.

The debate also addressed the **balance between flexibility, simplification and accountability**. Minister of Rural Development and Food of Greece welcomed efforts to simplify funding rules and reduce administrative burdens, arguing that excessive complexity does not necessarily improve transparency and may even encourage non-compliance. MEPs noted that the proposed Omnibus package is viewed by some stakeholders primarily as a deregulatory exercise rather than a genuine simplification initiative.

Regarding the **National and Regional Partnership Plans**, Vitcheva explained that the preparation and assessment of the plans will provide opportunities to shape priorities and ensure that identified challenges are adequately addressed. Maritime priorities are expected to be reflected through the European Semester process and will be assessed by the Commission before plans are formally adopted.

While concerns remain regarding funding levels and governance arrangements, some speakers argued that stakeholders should embrace the changes and actively engage in shaping implementation, noting that those most successful in the new system will be those best able to adapt to it.

Workshop: Pathways for Resilient Islands & Coastal Areas

The workshop explored practical solutions for islands and coastal regions within the broader political context of the European Ocean Pact. Discussions were structured around three key perspectives: **development, vulnerability and justice**.

Several key challenges facing islands and coastal regions were identified. These include increasing cumulative environmental pressures, fragmented regulatory and governance frameworks, limited monitoring capacities and digital technologies, and the absence of long-term strategic planning. To address challenges, a number of priority actions were indicated: strengthening integrated governance approaches, enhancing environmental monitoring systems and digital technologies, and promoting responsible stewardship of marine and coastal resources. **Greater coordination between sectors and authorities** was seen as essential.

In this context, the proposed EU Islands and Coastal Resilience Strategy was identified as a potentially **important framework** for bringing together existing and future actions under a coherent approach. The strategy should place particular focus on **climate change adaptation**, disaster preparedness and the development of effective early-warning systems. State aid and funding frameworks were identified as critical tools for supporting resilience measures and long-term investment.

Workshop: Making the Sea-Basin approach work through MSP

The discussion focused on ocean governance, ecosystem-based management, maritime multi-use, and cooperation with non-EU countries as key elements for advancing a sea-basin approach.

The Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) was presented as one of the most recent examples of a sea-basin governance approach. The initiative brings together all countries bordering the North Sea Basin, as well as stakeholders from key sectors, including fisheries, offshore energy and environmental conservation. GNSBI promotes a multi-use approach to maritime space.

The Northern European Sea Basins ([NESB](#)) project, building on the experience of the [eMSP](#), was presented as an important mechanism for strengthening international cooperation in maritime spatial planning. The project supports the implementation of the GNSBI and fosters collaboration across the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions on MSP.

The discussion also touched on the strategic direction of the GNSBI. Participants concluded that an overarching vision already exists through internationally agreed commitments and

objectives, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement and broader food security goals. The initiative is therefore focusing on translating these commitments into practical cooperation and implementation. Engagement with non-EU partners, including Iceland, was highlighted as an important avenue for knowledge exchange and collaboration on the future of ocean governance.

High-level Panel: Present and future sustainable and competitive EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors

The discussion was framed by the **Commission's evaluation of the CFP**, which acknowledges significant achievements since the 2013 reform, including reductions in overfishing, improved scientific knowledge, and stronger reliance on scientific advice in decision-making. At the same time, it highlights a number of **persistent challenges**. Many fish stocks have not yet been restored to levels capable of producing MSY, progress towards ecosystem-based fisheries management has been slower than anticipated, and the socio-economic performance of parts of the sector remains under pressure. The evaluation also points to the need for stronger support for small-scale fisheries, generational renewal and fleet modernisation. A broader concern identified in the evaluation is the EU's **increasing dependence on imports** of fisheries and aquaculture products, raising questions about competitiveness, resilience and the maintenance of a level playing field with third-country producers.

The evaluation confirms the continued relevance of the balance established by the 2013 CFP between environmental, economic and social objectives. However, socio-economic considerations should be better integrated into policy discussions and scientific advice. **Vision 2040** process as an opportunity to define what the fisheries and aquaculture sectors should look like in the coming decades and identify the actions required today to achieve that objective. The vision is expected to address issues such as value chains, consumer information and labelling, maritime spatial planning, financing needs, and the major trends that are likely to shape the future of the sector.

Several panellists noted that the principal challenge is no longer the design of the policy framework itself but rather its **implementation and enforcement**. In addition, the increasing difficulty of managing fish stocks in a rapidly changing environment, where species distributions, productivity and ecosystem dynamics are shifting was stressed. Policy frameworks must become more adaptive while remaining firmly grounded in science. MEP suggested priority should be to **establish a shared vision for the future of the sector** before considering legislative changes. Proposed initiatives included the creation of a **Fisheries Transition Facility** to support adaptation within the sector, a **European Food Sovereignty Act**, and a **New Generation for the Ocean** initiative aimed at attracting young people to fisheries and maritime professions.

Maria Damanaki, former EU Commissioner, reflected on the 2013 CFP reform process. The key challenges identified at the time (overfishing, excessive discarding, the absence of a long-

term vision and highly centralised decision-making) were addressed through measures such as stronger reliance on science, the introduction of the landing obligation, long-term management plans and regionalisation. However, **implementation and enforcement were not given sufficient attention** during the reform process, largely because it was assumed that Member States and institutions would ensure compliance. Thus, any future discussion on the CFP should focus primarily on implementation tools, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, including the potential use of new technologies and artificial intelligence.

The Panel stressed that small-scale fishers represent a significant share of the EU fleet but often face unequal access to support and opportunities. Dedicated funding mechanisms should be established to address these disparities and ensure a fairer distribution of resources.

The importance of maintaining a **science-based approach** to fisheries management was stressed. While MSY remains a valuable indicator for assessing the sustainability of fish stocks, climate change is altering ecosystem conditions and, in some cases, changing the reference points. As species distributions and productivity shift, management systems will need to adapt accordingly.

The discussion also explored how to **balance the growing number of uses competing for marine space**. Fishers increasingly feel excluded from discussions about the future management of the ocean and fear losing access to marine resources and maritime space. Innovation, both technological and socio-economic, will be essential to managing these competing demands.

Charlina Vitcheva closed the session with a broader reflection on the root causes of current challenges. While views differed on whether the primary obstacle lies in implementation, governance, economic incentives or environmental pressures, there was broad consensus on several points: healthy fish stocks remain a prerequisite for a sustainable and profitable sector; effective implementation is critical to achieving policy objectives; and climate change must be fully integrated into future fisheries and ocean governance discussions.

Strengthening Europe's Role in the Global Ocean Observing System and the importance of the “OceanEye”

The **Ocean Eye** initiative aims to develop a more integrated and efficient system for ocean observation and marine data, moving beyond the current fragmentation of data sources and observation efforts.

A central element of the proposal is the evolution of existing systems such as EMODnet and Copernicus into a more unified **Digital Twin of the Ocean** framework. This integrated system would provide advanced analytical tools and insights for policymakers, researchers, industry and coastal communities. **Industry** was highlighted as a **key partner** in both the development and application of these tools.

There are existing barriers within Member States to the collection, coordination and sharing of ocean observation data. These include varying levels of maturity in national observation systems and differences in institutional coordination.

Improving coordination will require more structured and frequent engagement among stakeholders at national level, bringing together relevant actors to share needs and priorities. A bottom-up approach was also highlighted, encouraging stakeholders to engage directly with ministries and decision-makers, and to reduce siloed working practices across sectors.

the Ocean Act could play an important role in facilitating cross-sectoral cooperation and helping to overcome institutional fragmentation.

Finally, the need for a more strategic approach to ocean observation was stressed. This includes defining more clearly what should be measured, identifying where additional data is needed, and recognising areas where sufficient information already exists. The importance of combining high-end technological solutions with more accessible and cost-effective approaches, such as data mining, low-cost sensors and citizen science, was also highlighted.

[Workshop: ACs knowledge on SSCF, MSP & co-management](#)

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

[Workshop: Gear to Governance: Sustainable Fish Value-Chain](#)

The joint [DecarbonyT](#)–[MarineGuardian](#)–[EcoCatch](#)–[MrGoodFish3.0](#)-WGING workshop focused on advancing ecosystem-sensitive and sustainable fisheries through the integration of climate-smart innovations aimed at more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

The **Mr GoodFish** programme was presented as a key awareness-raising initiative targeting both the general public and professionals in the seafood sector. Each season, the programme publishes expert-reviewed recommendations on seafood species, with the aim of promoting sustainable consumption choices and helping to reduce pressure on vulnerable marine resources.

The **DecarbonyT** project was introduced as an initiative focused on defining future pathways for improving the performance of high-potential fishing fleets. Its main objective is to assess how the use of optimised trawling gears in the Mediterranean and Black Sea can contribute to reduced fuel consumption and support the decarbonisation of fishing fleets.

The **ECO-CATCH** project was highlighted as a collaborative, cross-sector initiative working to support fisheries in the Baltic and North Sea in achieving environmental, social and economic sustainability. The project focuses on nine case study fisheries characterised by significant interactions with sensitive species or juvenile fish.

The **MarineGuardian** is an initiative aimed at delivering impact-driven solutions to reduce the environmental footprint of fisheries on marine species and habitats. It focuses on the development of tools, technologies and operational strategies, alongside enhanced scientific and practical knowledge, to support the transition towards fisheries that are both environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

The workshop emphasised the importance of co-created, area-based management approaches and the development of next-generation low-impact fishing gear aligned with biodiversity protection objectives.

Energy Transition for the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture

In 2023, the European Commission launched the Energy Transition Partnership (ETP), designed to support a coordinated approach to decarbonising the sector and guiding its transition towards more sustainable energy use.

In 2025, the Commission tasked the ETP Support Group Coordinators, organised into ten working groups, to consolidate key considerations from across all relevant parts of the sector. The aim is to feed these contributions into the forthcoming **roadmap for the energy transition**. A central message was that the energy transition must be grounded in sound economic principles. It should be realistic in its implementation, affordable for stakeholders, predictable in its regulatory direction, and socially just, ensuring that the costs and benefits of the transition are fairly distributed across all parts of the sector.

The roadmap is expected to be published in the third quarter of 2026, alongside the 2040 Vision.

The next EMD2027 will take place in Santander, Spain, in May 2027!