

What is the European Ocean Act?

On 9 February 2026, OPP responded to the European Commission's Call for Evidence about the European Ocean Act. The European Ocean Act is a legislative proposal, set for release in 2026, aimed at providing a unified governance framework for all EU policies related to the ocean. It builds on the revision of the EU's Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and new Ports Strategy, supporting their coherence and effective implementation. The European Ocean Act will provide measures to implement the European Ocean Pact, the EU's Ocean strategy released in June 2025.

OPP, alongside 700+ other organisations from civil society (e.g., Seas at Risk), academia and policy concerned about the future of the ocean, responded to the EU's Call for Evidence to inform the upcoming legislation.

Why did OPP contribute?

There is no ocean governance without ports. Ports are central actors in maritime trade and massive contributors to the deterioration of ocean health, through ocean acidification, biodiversity harm, greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, etc.

“Almost every environmental pressure on the oceans begins and ends through port activities; from shipping to oil extraction, fisheries to mining.” Dr Lucy Gilliam, co-founder of One Planet Port.

Yet ports are poorly regulated and their role in protecting and regenerating ocean health is rarely acknowledged. **OPP, as a science-based non-profit organisation focused on aligning port strategies within planetary boundaries, calls for an integrated EU ocean governance framework that fully recognises and addresses ports as key actors of ocean governance and ocean health.** This is the key message of OPP's submission to the European Commission's Call for Evidence.

This is the summary of our OPP Contribution to the Call for Evidence:

Ports are central, yet largely ignored, actors of ocean health and ocean governance. Ports enable maritime trade, enforce rules applicable to ships, and connect trade to industries and transport. Although port operations and port-enabled shipping activities contribute massively to ocean acidification, biodiversity harm, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, water pollution (e.g., waste discharges), etc., they are regulated through disconnected instruments and policies, each addressing only part of the problem. But with a clear, integrated EU ocean governance

framework based on Earth systems science, regulation, enforcement, and incentives to change, ports can become stewards of ocean health in line with planetary boundaries.

The upcoming European Ocean Act, revised Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and new Ports Strategy should address ports essential roles in protecting and regenerating ocean health. This is currently missing in the European Ocean Pact, which focuses on decarbonisation but not the wider environmental impacts of port ecosystems. The European Ocean Act should adopt clear measures and implementation mechanisms to:

1. Bring ports and the maritime sector under one coherent ocean governance framework that prioritises ocean protection goals.
2. Document, regulate, and actively reduce the comprehensive environmental footprints of European ports and associated maritime shipping activities.
3. Embed spatialised environmental impact assessments of port-enabled activities in the Ocean Act and the revised Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
4. Bolster the implementation of decarbonisation measures aligned with planetary boundaries, through wind propulsion, truly sustainable maritime fuels, and tenant climate mitigation.
5. Accelerate the research, implementation and scaling of nature-based solutions and circular and regenerative zones at the port-city interface, while setting limits on ports spatial expansion.

Our full response to the Call for Evidence can be accessed here: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16238-European Ocean Act/F33372431_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16238-European_Ocean_Act/F33372431_en)