



EUROPEAN UNION



# EU MISSIONS

RESTORE OUR OCEAN AND WATERS



2024

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Mission Ocean and Waters Forum Insights

09:30 – 10:00

### WELCOME & OPENING REMARK

During the opening remarks, **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries (via video message) stressed that the world needs a big push to restore Ocean and waters. He underlined that “the only ‘win-win’ balance possible is between fisheries and protecting the ecosystem.” He also invited participants to take initiatives home, and to adjust to their concrete needs.

**Maria da Graça Carvalho**, Member of the European Parliament, Vice Chair of the Committee of Fisheries underlined that there was a lot of progress in recent years in EU climate change policy, mentioning the EU Green Deal, and the Nature Restoration Law; but stressed, “More needs to be done to secure the good health of the planet and ocean, including specific measures on biodiversity, communities living near the ocean, security issues and the blue economy.”

**Pascal Lamy**, Chair of the Mission Board, Mission “Restore our Ocean & Waters” noted that a high level of ambition was set up in defining the Mission, with full political support behind this formidable target. There are also new actors involved next to EU support, thanks to the charter, lighthouses, and catalysts of engagement, which are now in put in place. This is also visible in figures: EU investment in the Mission is 400 mln, but overall resource engaged in Mission comprises over 4 bn EUR (through Mission Charter) – a reasonable multiplier. Lamy also shared the observation that the Mission was successful in engaging various stakeholders, “...beyond ‘usual suspects...’ there are citizens, businesses, various coalitions, EU Member States engaged.” This joint engagement will contribute to the deployment of the Mission’s solutions. He concluded that, “after two years of implementation, in case of our Mission, the glass is more than half full. [There is] still a lot to be done, but the dynamics we tried to create [when we invented the Mission] is there. We are walking the talk, which matters at the end of day!”



09:30 – 10:00

### SYNERGIES OF MISSION OCEAN AND WATERS

During this session, **Charlina Vitcheva**, Director-General, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission admitted that “Driving policy ambition is a difficult task.” She pointed out some failures, i.e., the recent WTO discussions in Abu Dhabi on fisheries subsidies. However, she also acknowledged recent successes and key milestones, such as Nature Restoration Law and High Seas Treaty, which show that EU is keeping up with the ambitions. Furthermore, she noted achievements of the Mission Work programme (40 grant agreements signed, 26 new projects are forthcoming, 15 associated regions already selected; 50 forthcoming), and Mission Charter pledges (over 600 pledges, mobilising 4.5 billion EUR), citizen engagement and development of Digital Twin Ocean. Vitcheva noted that Ocean management requires international action. She also outlined importance of synergies with other EU funds and instruments, mentioning as concrete examples European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), ERDF, ESF, European Blue Champions programme and Resilience and Recovery funds; as well as collaboration (in form of joint calls). Vitcheva concluded that, “synergies and citizen engagement will be crucial for the success of the Mission.”



**Joanna Drake**, Deputy Director-General, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission spoke about “the need to develop infectious narratives,” as the achievement of the 2030 objectives requires further mobilisation, scale up solutions, provision of direct support to the communities, and bringing innovation to reality. There is a need to incentivise synergies and to enable knowledge transfer to local level to address the challenges holistically. The Mission allows to combine actions, taking a holistic approach and maximising synergies. It should draw on knowledge developed by other instruments, e.g., joint calls and best practices exchange between the different Green Deal Missions. Knowledge management, monitoring, and governance are cross-cutting issues. She noted that, “Mission Portfolio Analysis shows that projects from 16 EU programmes are contributing to the Mission objectives. Mission Ocean also seeks synergies with national and regional programmes, and other Horizon components (such as, Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership).” Furthermore, different clusters of the Horizon programme include R&I actions for biodiversity, for better monitoring, and for citizen engagement. Drake concluded, that while there is enough evidence that the Mission is acting as a catalyst, this is not enough. There is a need to increase private sector involvement, including foundations and charities, as well as the private-public partnerships, to achieve the blue transition.

**Ragna Fidjestøl**, Managing Director of the European Economic Area and Norway Grants, provided highlights of the programme. While the EEA and Norway grants have not been initially designed to address the Mission, there are many synergies. These grants address development of

carbon free local economies, ghost fishing, biodegradable fishing gear, marine litter, elementary and vocational training and mobilisation of the local communities. She confirmed, “happy to be part of joint effort, to replicate and upscale.”

**Dr. Marijn Rabaut**, International Marine Policy Manager Blue Cluster, underlined that a sustainable economy is an important part of the Mission Ocean; and that “Clustering of companies and working together with scientists is a game changer.” He also noted the role of Mission Ocean helping to translate achievements to the European level.

## 11:30 – 12:15 RESTORING MARINE AND FRESH- WATER ECOSYSTEMS – PANEL DISCUSSION

The opening statement of the discussion was that there is a lack of stakeholder engagement, but also lack of proper communication. Different types of stakeholders require knowledge of communication on these topics. There are governance issues as well.

**Manuel F. Sousa**, “BlueHorizon” Charter action (ES), shared his experience that, “... communication takes energy, but local communities have been engaged. We are creating more projects.” The project aims to reduce waste in Atlantic and engage with local stakeholders, fisheries (100 fishing boats), and persons with intellectual disabilities, creating several full-time jobs.

**Ulla Rosenström**, Director John Nurminen Foundation, “Baltic Seagrass project” Charter action (FI), shared her experience of collaborating with volunteer scuba divers. Goals of the action include restoring the marine biodiversity of the Baltic Sea. It focuses on eelgrass, which provides shelter, fights climate change (binds carbon & nutrients), and mitigates coastal erosion. So far, the project has planted 300 eelgrass meadows, with continuation of work planned till 2026. There is cooperation with other EU foundations and regions (France and Italy). The project is raising awareness and has a vision to establish a green belt, ensuring connectivity of eelgrass areas.

**Gilles Lecaillon**, “Artificial habitats with ecological connectivity” Charter action (FR), spoke about their



experience in creating ecological infrastructure in shallow habitats. With their solution (BIOHUT), they are creating locations in harbors where fish can seek protection (fish nurseries) to recreate food chains using oyster substrates. There are 55 projects in various countries; they achieved restoration of 30% of marine fauna (in project locations). He underlined the importance of connection with scientists in certifying concrete solutions.

**Mihai Cristian Adamescu**, “Restoration of wetland complexes as life supporting systems in the Danube River basin (Restore4Life)”; Mission project, too, stressed importance of stakeholder engagement, as the protection of wetlands cannot be realized without community engagement. The project is spending significant funds on restoration, with 10 demonstration sites and 31 partners across the Danube region; they are working with initiatives at school level to explain to students' restoration and its importance and are engaging local economic actors.

## Q&A SESSION

During this session, answers were provided to the key questions below:

- “How to ensure that initial threats (to biodiversity, in case of eelgrass) are removed, Ensuring proper wastewater treatment, and installing sandy bottoms?”
- How to control spread of IAS (in Mediterranean) through monitoring?”

### Key takeaways:

- Civil society engagement is essential;
- Showing the positive results is important to keep the citizens and other stakeholders engaged;
- It is important to learn about various solutions employed (Scuba divers; Bio-hats (artificial solutions); planting of eelgrass);
- There is need to demonstrate that improving of habitats does not only benefit nature, but also the livelihoods of the local communities;
- EU actions are necessary, but there is a need to understand and speak to people's emotions;
- Researchers and civil society should lead the way and should avoid working in silos.



## 12:15 – 12:30 MARINE PROTECTED AREAS AWARDS

During this session, **Kęstutis Sadauskas**, Deputy Director General, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission and Mission Manager, Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030,” and **John Bell**, Deputy Mission Manager and Director of Healthy Planet, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission, announced the winners of the Marine Protected Areas awards: Torre Guacetto Marine Reserve (IT), represented by Francesco de Franko; and Marine Protected Area Côte Agathoi-e - Natura 2000 marine site, Agde, Hérault, FRANCE, represented by Renaud Dupuy de la Grandrive.

## 12:30 – 13:15 PREVENTING AND ELIMINATING POLLUTION

Participants: Francesca Portincasa, “Good wastewater management for environmental protection” Charter action (IT); Piia Leskinen, “Eliminating Micro-Pollutants from Effluents for Reuse Strategies (EMPEREST) project” Charter action (PL); Gert Everaert, “Innovative Solutions for Plastic Free European Rivers (INSPIRE)”, Mission project.

During this session, participants shared their experiences in elimination and control of pollution and tackling local challenges.

### Lessons learned across the projects:

- Approaching and engaging the stakeholders requires patience, constant dialogue and mutual understanding;
- Relevant EU-regulations are in place but, the municipalities and water utilities have to implement them on the ground;
- It is important to connect grassroots and national levels. Personal approach of the team working at the wastewater management treatment facilities at municipality level is important to identify cross-cutting challenges, e.g., governance;
- Developing roadmaps is essential to show the way of operating, but also sharing failures;
- Education targeting the new generation (school level, teach water management culture) is the key.



14:30 – 15:15

## CLIMATE NEUTRALITY AND CIRCULARITY IN THE BLUE ECONOMY

**Philip Easthill** presented the roadmap, "Implementing a circular economy for end-of-life boats," as a Charter Action. An initiative was prepared in collaboration with stakeholders to address the end-of-life boats issue, showcasing dismantling and recycling schemes from various countries.

**Roger Preston** discussed "TRESOILPower2X Waste Plastic To Hydrogen/Ammonia" as another Charter action. This involves converting plastic litter into oil for propulsion on river transportation along the BG/RO border, with the potential for replication elsewhere. The initiative aligns with the goal of establishing the Danube as a hydrogen hub.

**Angela Schultz-Zehden** presented "AlgaeProBANOS" as a Mission project, focusing on algae's versatility and environmental benefits. Collaboration with start-ups and research institutes aims to advance value chains to TRL 8. Low-trophic aquaculture, including offshore algae growth, is explored for sustainable development.

15:15 – 16:00

## EU DIGITAL OCEAN AND WATERS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM PANEL

The speakers provided compelling insights into various Charter actions aimed at driving progress in the digital ocean arena. **Vanessa Sarah Salvo** introduced the "Minka Citizen Observatory" from Spain, highlighting its mission to gather data from citizens to construct a comprehensive library for the digital twin of the ocean. **Bjørn Egil Asbjørnslett**, representing the "Norwegian Ocean Technology Center," showcased the innovative approach to data collection, both on land and in fjords, thanks to cutting-edge technologies such as aerial drones and satellites. Lastly, **Emmanuelle Dilasser** presented the "Ocean Hackathon" initiative from France, which operates under the umbrella of Campus Mondial de la Mer. By mobilising citizens and providing support from local and data coaches, the initiative empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to address data needs in the digital ocean realm.

Overall, the session highlighted the pivotal role of citizens, multidisciplinary collaboration, and EU projects in driving innovation and progress in the digital ocean landscape, underscoring the importance of collective action in addressing the complex challenges facing our oceans.

16:30 – 17:00

## MISSION OCEAN AND WATERS IN ACTION

The session featured representatives from various lighthouse initiatives under the Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030." **Kęstutis Sadauskas**, Deputy Director-General of DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission, and Mission Manager, introduced the session, emphasising the experimental nature of the Mission. Key highlights included the launch of 40 Horizon Mission projects with 26 more underway, the operational Mission Implementation Platform, and plans for the Digital Ocean Forum and new funding calls from the EU.

**Cécile Nys**, representing PREP4BLUE, highlighted the horizontal coordination and support provided across all Coordination and Support Actions (CSAs), focusing on governmental and local engagement. Key outcomes included initiatives such as wavelinks.eu and stakeholder engagement methods, as well as the Mission Digital Academy.





Other representatives included **Fedra Francocci** for BlueMissionMed, **Alberto Terenzi** for BlueMissionBanos, **Jose Moutinho** for BlueMissionAA, and **Nadja Schlichenmaier** for Ecodalli. These lighthouse initiatives focus on regional coordination and support, addressing specific areas such as the Mediterranean, Baltic-North Sea, Atlantic-Arctic, and Danube regions, respectively. Each initiative emphasised stakeholder engagement, innovation, and sustainability, aiming to achieve the objectives of Mission Ocean and Waters by connecting local communities and experts with existing governance structures.

## 17:00 – 17:30 THE MOMENT OF TRUTH AND CONCLUSION

Before concluding the conference, an engaging interactive quiz open to all participants on issues related to the Mission.

To conclude, **Kęstutis Sadauskas** and **John Bell** delivered key takeaways on the Mission Ocean and Waters, emphasising the communal aspects and the importance of understanding the role of the Ocean Union. They highlighted the essential need for patience in overcoming the challenges of implementing the Mission, transforming it into tangible hope for the future despite political shifts. Additionally, they underscored the ongoing relevance of the Mission's objectives and the urgent need for action, with noticeable impacts expected in the long term. They also acknowledged the significant diversity among interest groups and political landscapes, emphasizing the pivotal role of R&I in addressing challenges and fostering the transition. Furthermore, they recognised the significance of promoting dialogue among local communities to foster effective collaboration in restoring ecosystems, particularly within Marine Protected Areas.

