

BSAC statement on the Ocean Act

The members of the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) welcome the European Ocean Act as a key legislative instrument for implementing the objectives of the Ocean Pact, following its adoption in June 2025, to which the BSAC has contributed through consultations in March 2025. The BSAC considers the Ocean Act a crucial opportunity to strengthen ocean governance and policy coherence as well as address the challenges affecting marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

The BSAC welcomes the fact that the European Ocean Act will seek to foster a broader, integrated and holistic approach to ocean governance across all sectors, including internal and external policies. The European Ocean Act creates a unique opportunity to place fisheries and fishers at the centre of blue economy policies while strengthening policy coherence through the effective integration and delivery of environmental, economic and social objectives. It should ensure that ocean-related policies are mutually supportive and fully aligned with EU environmental, fisheries, climate and maritime objectives, making the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems a fundamental pillar of sustainable ocean governance.

The BSAC takes note that the Ocean Act will build on the revision of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD)¹ to improve the coherence and effective implementation of maritime governance in the EU. Increasing demands from different blue economy sectors are placing growing pressure on limited marine space. Effective coordination between fishing activities, renewable energy projects, and restoration initiatives is essential to prevent conflicts and promote balanced and sustainable ocean space usage.

The BSAC recommends that the revised MSPD and the Ocean Act support the objectives of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) by preventing further degradation of marine ecosystems, supporting the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES), and avoiding conflicts with food production and other existing sea-based economic activities.

As noted in the BSAC's input to the MSFD call for evidence in March 2026², the revision of the MSFD must establish clearer and more operational definitions of Good Environmental Status and the Ecosystem-Based Approach. Procedures for setting legally binding thresholds at regional and EU level, as well as measurable descriptor-specific targets and milestones, should be harmonised to enable Member States and stakeholders to assess progress and identify priority areas for action based on the best available scientific advice.

The Ocean Act is expected to improve coherence between the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), Common Fisheries Policy

¹ Directive 2014/89/EU

² BSAC input to the MSFD call for evidence [[Modtagerfelt](#)]

(CFP) and other EU environmental legislation, such as Water Framework Directive (WFD) through harmonised reporting, coordinated governance structures, integrated implementation and coordinated monitoring at Member State level. The Ocean Act must align with and support the objectives of the CFP including its goals on rebuilding fish stocks and implementing ecosystem-based fisheries management.

Some BSAC members consider that the Ocean Act should clarify the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy with regard to marine protected areas (MPAs). It is important that the Ocean Act provides clear definitions of protected areas and strictly protected areas and offers clear guidance on which activities are permitted within different categories of protected areas. The Ocean Act should also ensure consistency across Member States in the definitions of “protected” and “strictly protected” areas, thereby creating a level playing field across the Baltic Sea region. Clear definitions should provide legal certainty for authorities, stakeholders and maritime sectors while ensuring effective biodiversity conservation.

The CFP alone cannot deliver all the environmental improvements required to restore marine ecosystems. An integrated approach aimed at enhancing synergies between fisheries and environmental policies is needed. There is an urgent need to establish a governance framework to resolve user conflicts and to enable region-specific solutions. Marine spatial planning, energy, transport, defence, environmental and other sectoral policies should also take into account their direct and cumulative impacts on the marine ecosystem, the fish stocks and the fisheries when implemented. In addition to national marine spatial plans, greater regional coordination of national maritime spatial plans should be pursued to ensure that new activities do not add more pressure on the marine ecosystem and that existing ones are sustainable. The BSAC has already made extensive recommendations regarding the development of offshore windfarms and the risk they can pose³.

With regards to the uniqueness and fragility of the Baltic Sea, any marine measures, including efforts addressing pollution and eutrophication, must go hand in hand with efforts on land. This points to the need to include agricultural policies as well as the objectives of the Water Framework Directive in the Ocean Pact, to foster a broader, holistic governance approach needed for the sea and the marine environment and fish stocks in the Baltic region. Socio-economic assessments should accompany environmental assessments when evaluating alternative maritime uses.

Particular attention should also be given to the specific challenges facing the Baltic Sea, including eutrophication, biodiversity loss, regime shifts affecting fish stocks, changing ecosystem conditions, competing maritime uses and the need for stronger cross-sectoral and regional cooperation.

³ BSAC recommendations concerning the development of offshore windfarms and fisheries interactions
<https://www.bsac.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BSACOffshoreWindRecommendations2023-2024-01.pdf>

For the Baltic Sea region, strengthened regional coordination, clear and practical operational targets, and improved cross-sectoral governance are essential.

There is also a need for strengthened and coherent maritime spatial planning that facilitates genuine co-existence between maritime activities. While the expansion of offshore renewable energy is supported as part of the EU's climate agenda, it is essential that such developments take due account of existing maritime uses, including fisheries, which remain strategically and economically important within the blue food value chain.

We emphasise that fisheries and blue-food production should not be treated as residual users of marine space.

Sustainable fisheries contribute directly to European food security, employment and the resilience of coastal communities and must be adequately considered in future spatial planning decisions.

The BSAC further underlines that decisions affecting fisheries should be based on cumulative impact assessments that evaluate all activities operating in the marine environment rather than assessing fisheries in isolation.

Spatial planning processes should ensure early and meaningful stakeholder involvement and maintain a balanced approach between food production, energy generation, and ecosystem protection. Safeguarding adequate space for fisheries and blue-food activities is critical to avoiding unintended trade-offs for food security of the European Union.

Climate change continues to influence the Baltic Sea ecosystem structure, ecosystem functioning and fisheries productivity. The Ocean Act should integrate climate change management so that national maritime spatial plans demonstrate consideration of the changing climate in the ocean. Adaptive management measures that take account of evolving marine habitats, ecosystem processes, food-web dynamics and the migratory behaviour of fish populations should be implemented. This will ensure spatial plans and MPAs account for changes in the marine ecosystem over time. The impacts of climate change, such as rising sea temperatures and decreasing salinity, should be urgently incorporated into management decisions to adapt fisheries management to the observed and expected changes in the fish stocks, their recruitment and habitat availability and in the ecosystem as a whole, including trophic interactions and marine food-web dynamics. Precautionary management is essential, as the full impact of climate change on the marine ecosystem and its fish populations is not yet fully understood⁴. Climate change considerations should be fully integrated into the Ocean Act through adaptive and ecosystem-based management approaches capable of responding to changing marine ecosystems, habitats and fish populations.

⁴ BSAC advice on the implementation of the EBM approach to fisheries management [\[Modtagerfelt\]](#)

The Ocean Act should ensure implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management⁵ that addresses changes in the ecosystem and fish populations, while providing for a precautionary, adaptive and timely decision-making process at the regional level. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that a resilient and economically viable fisheries sector is needed to ensure food supplies and safeguard the socio-economic fabric of coastal communities. A rapid rebuilding of depleted Baltic stocks through the creation of a rebuilding framework⁶, and long-term sustainable fishing levels with ambitious precautionary buffers are needed to ensure food supplies and safeguard the socio-economic interests of coastal communities⁷.

Our members generally support ambitious marine conservation and restoration objectives, but these objectives will only succeed if they are implemented together with viable fisheries, sustainable food production and resilient coastal communities.

The BSAC emphasises that effective ocean governance requires systematic stakeholder participation throughout policy development and implementation. Existing regional advisory structures, including the Advisory Councils established under the Common Fisheries Policy, should play a central role in ensuring that scientific knowledge, practical fisheries experience and regional expertise contribute to balanced and workable policy solutions.

On behalf of the Baltic Sea Advisory Council



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⁵ BSAC advice on implementation of Ecosystem-Based Approach to Fisheries Management in the Baltic Sea" [\[Modtagerfelt\]](#)

⁶ BSAC recommendation for creation of a Rebuilding Framework for Baltic Sea stocks [\[Modtagerfelt\]](#)

⁷ BSAC response to the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council "Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2026" https://www.bsac.dk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/BSAC-response-to-the-Communication_28082025-sent-to-COM.pdf