

# Charting the Course for a Sustainable Offshore Future

## *Calling for joint political action on climate and biodiversity goals after the 2024 EU elections*

The Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN) is committed to addressing the intertwined challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. We recognise the urgent need for Europe to expand offshore wind capacity while preserving and restoring marine ecosystems. Our coalition, comprised of NGOs, wind industry actors, and electricity grid operators, is dedicated to ensuring that this expansion contributes positively to both the environment and society.

In light of the upcoming EU elections, OCEaN calls for the following actions to be prioritised and implemented. These actions are integral to our collective mission and intend to chart a sustainable course for the future of offshore wind and grids, and therefore must be reflected in the new mandates given to our leaders. We must seize this moment to amplify our efforts, achieve climate and energy goals, and ensure that our seas and their ecosystems are given the protection they require.



### **Champion Sea Basin Planning**

Member States and the European Commission are urged to lead in regional cooperation

We emphasise the need for comprehensive regional and sea basin planning to ensure the harmonious integration of offshore wind development, grid infrastructure, and nature conservation. This approach must also include effective collaboration with non-EU members, acknowledging that environmental and social sustainability and energy security are shared transnational challenges. Regional cooperation organisations at the sea basin level must be empowered with robust governance structures and increased financial and human resources to enable effective marine conservation and sustainable use of the sea.



### **Implement Ecosystem-based Approach**

Member States are urged to reduce impacts of human activities on nature

An ecosystem-based approach is vital to manage human activities in a manner that ensures the long-term health and resilience of ecosystems upon which we depend. The effective use of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is essential to balance human activities at sea and reduce impacts on nature. MSP can facilitate the identification of suitable areas for energy infrastructure, while minimising negative impacts and promoting positive environmental and social outcomes. It should be informed by tools like sensitivity mapping and socio-economic assessments for a balanced and sustainable use of marine spaces. We call for comprehensive sea basin planning frameworks that integrate both electricity generation and ecological preservation, recognising the interconnectedness of species and habitats. This includes expanding and improving connectivity of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), supporting nature in and around generation sites, and adopting a holistic basin-wide strategy for biodiversity.



### **Champion Effective Environmental Law Implementation**

Members States are urged to ensure compliance with environmental law

European Member States (MSs) must rigorously enforce Environmental Directives and Laws. Given the substantial size and potential environmental impacts of offshore wind infrastructure, it is essential that Environmental Impact Assessments for each offshore wind project are executed comprehensively to aim for minimal ecological disruption. This adherence serves a dual purpose: it safeguards the environment and concurrently facilitates the deployment of renewable energy by reducing uncertainty for project developers. In addition, the timely implementation of the newly adopted EU Nature Restoration Law will also be crucial. This law should be closely aligned with climate goals, integrated in the MSP process, supported by transboundary cooperation, and ensure ecological connectivity across regions.

Stakeholder engagement processes, a mandatory element of many environmental laws and other regulations, are fundamental for a just transition. Offshore wind and grid projects need to be accompanied by the meaningful involvement of coastal communities, as the construction and operation of energy infrastructure can be intrusive. Therefore, ongoing efforts from developers to refine their engagement processes and contributions to local communities should be scaled up and supported by MSs and the European Commission.

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### **Ensure the Inclusion of Socio-Ecological Criteria in Offshore Developments**

Member States are urged to systematically integrate non-price criteria in offshore wind auctions to increase projects' sustainability

We emphasise the importance of incorporating sustainability and socio-ecological criteria in both the pre-qualification and award/competitive phases of offshore wind auctions. This approach ensures that projects are evaluated not just on economic grounds but also on their ecological, social, and technical innovation contributions. The use of non-price criteria can contribute to preserving the competitiveness of European industries and ensure that projects are implemented with high socio-ecological standards. The alignment of these criteria to global labour and environmental standards, such as the OECD guidelines on responsible business conduct, is essential for a socially just and ecologically sustainable offshore wind development.

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### **Collaborate for Nature-Positive Infrastructure**

Member States and the European Commission are urged to build synergies between industry, academia, and NGOs

We encourage collaboration across sectors for a renewable energy transition at sea that contributes to the achievement of a nature-positive future. This includes avoidance and minimisation of adverse ecological impacts, scaling up innovative Nature-Inclusive Design solutions, and harmonising methods for measuring biodiversity impact and benefits. Further promoting a centralised collection of long-term environmental data – in cooperation with research institutes, civil society, and the private sector – can enable the sharing of knowledge and costs, ensure data availability, support adaptive management, and reduce risks for project developers and permitting authorities. Measures taken to restore and enhance nature should also be coordinated at sea basin level to ensure coherence and allow for action at a more ecologically relevant scale.

### ***OCEaN Members commit to collaborative and sustainable solutions***

***OCEaN reaffirms its commitment to finding solutions that balance energy infrastructure development with nature protection. We are ready to contribute to initiatives that promote sustainable offshore development and ensure the health of our seas and marine biodiversity.***