



ENERGY & NATURE | Conference Summary Report

Strong Winds THRIVING SEAS

Turning Ambition into Action
for Nature-Friendly Offshore
Wind and Grids

30 October 2024 | Brussels





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Introduction

On 30 October 2024, the conference **‘Strong Winds, Thriving Seas: turning ambition into action for nature-friendly offshore wind and grids’** was organised by the Renewables Grid Initiative (RGI), Members of the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN) and WindEurope. Gathering over 150 diverse attendees and more than 40 speakers at Maison de la Poste in Brussels, this conference provided a forum for participants to share solutions and debate needed actions to deliver offshore wind and grids across Europe’s seas with nature and people at the forefront.

Representing EU and national decision makers, civil society, wind and grid industry, think tanks, and academia, our attendees came together to listen to experts, exchange solutions, and learn from one another. In this summary report, RGI aims to present the highlights from the conference sessions, the new OCEaN products launched to support an environmentally-friendly deployment of offshore wind and grids, and insights from our expert speakers. Working together with all users of Europe’s seas is the only way we can achieve an offshore energy transition that meets the needs of European citizens, eco-systems, and the planet.



Executive Summary

Participants highlighted the importance of scaling up examples of sustainable project planning and implementation to speed up wind and grid development. They discussed how offshore wind and grids can be deployed in a timely manner while minimising impacts on nature, restoring biodiversity, and involving coastal communities.

Demonstrating concrete examples with the conference’s fair, participants applauded the 20 projects pioneering innovative approaches to maritime spatial planning, nature restoration, multi-use and the measurement of environmental impacts. These projects should be taken as inspiration for future action and in some cases, scaled up. Driving further inspiration, OCEaN launched two databases on their **redesigned website** at the event: one featuring nature enhancement and restoration projects and another on mitigation measures for offshore wind and grids.

Members of the Offshore Coalition for Environment and Nature (OCEaN) called upon the incoming European Commission and EU Member States to ensure robust maritime spatial planning and make better use of ecological and social non-price criteria in offshore wind auctions. In their **joint statement**, OCEaN Members further outlined how the EU’s biodiversity protection and restoration targets can go hand in hand with the further expansion of offshore wind and grid infrastructure.

The insights gained from the conference will be vital in shaping policies and practices that harness wind energy while protecting Europe’s precious marine and coastal ecosystems. As we move forward, the collective effort from stakeholders such as OCEaN will continue to be crucial in achieving a truly Nature-and People Positive energy transition in Europe.

“Offshore wind, together with an interconnected grid and grid reinforcement on land to reach consumption centres, is pivotal for European energy security and economic development. Offshore wind and grids are also essential for the decarbonisation of Europe’s energy systems. Promising examples of nature-friendly, community-centred planning are already emerging, and it’s time to scale up these efforts. We are all called to support this essential transition, and RGI is committed to driving this progress through its initiatives, OCEaN and GINGR.”

ANTONELLA BATTAGLINI, CEO of RGI

“With the adoption of milestone legislations on both renewable energy and nature restoration, we have a unique opportunity to coordinate two of the most important things we need to do for the survival of our society. We can and must allocate space both to renewable energy and grid installations, and to protected areas for biodiversity. And we must rapidly invest in both types of infrastructures, the artificial and the natural.”

ARIEL BRUNNER, Director of BirdLife Europe

STATEMENT

OCEaN Calls for Outstanding Challenges to be Addressed to Achieve Nature- and People-Friendly Offshore Wind and Grids



ANTONELLA BATTAGLINI, CEO of RGI

In parallel with the conference, OCEaN – North & Baltic Seas published a [statement](#) calling on European policymakers to address outstanding challenges and asking for the **effective implementation of key policy files** to achieve our ambitious targets for offshore wind and biodiversity.

They also recognise that policy integration at both EU and national level is needed to efficiently address both the urgency to deploy renewables and biodiversity targets. Upcoming initiatives, such as the announced **EU Oceans Pact**, should adopt a holistic approach and serve as a tool to ensure coherence across all policies, sectors and economic activities linked to EU seas.

In order to successfully deliver on this, OCEaN Members call for **increased regional cooperation**,

which includes all relevant stakeholders and civil society, and therefore, the strengthening of sea-basin fora.

In their statement, OCEaN – North & Baltic Seas stressed their commitment to supporting the European Parliament and Commission and Member States in the achievement of these critical objectives. OCEaN remains available to offer their expertise and collaboration to develop policies and initiatives and share practices that align offshore wind and grid development with environmental stewardship. By working together, we can achieve a cleaner, more secure, and competitive Europe that leads global efforts to net-zero and inspires the world with both renewable energy, and nature conservation and restoration.

Policies in Focus

- Strengthening Maritime Spatial Planning is crucial for balancing sea use and ecosystem health, requiring Member States to integrate renewable energy and environmental regulations while enhancing cross-border cooperation and stakeholder participation.
- Meeting the 300 GW offshore wind target by 2050 demands clear spatial allocation, streamlined permitting, investment in grids and supply chains, and auctions incorporating ecological and social criteria to support competitiveness.
- The EU must protect 30% of its seas and restore 20% by 2030, requiring adequate public funding, and coordinated action among policymakers and stakeholders.

KEYNOTE

A Wave of Optimism for Addressing the Climate and Biodiversity Crises Side-by-Side



HUUB DEN ROOIJEN CBE, 3blue, Marine Advisor

Huub den Rooijen CBE set the scene for the conference by presenting his reasons for optimism and what is needed to deploy offshore wind energy in a nature-friendly way across Europe's seas. With over 20 years of experience working on advancing offshore wind alongside nature protection in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, he emphasised that we should reframe conflicts among marine sectors as **shared opportunities to optimise** and find the best solutions together. Success in the offshore wind sector can therefore mean wins for other sectors and users of the sea.

He also asserts that making **evidence-based decisions** and adopting **a comprehensive seabed approach** are the only sustainable long-term strategies. He insists that if we incorporate this perspective into our planning, there is reason for optimism.

Finally, he highlighted the ambitions of GINGR to build business cases for nature with concrete metrics so that developers, industries, and countries can be clear about the benefits of investing in nature.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Achieving a Nature- and People-Positive Offshore Energy Future



The opening plenary session set the stage for the conference by exploring a shared vision of the **benefits offshore wind expansion can bring for the planet and citizens**. Panellists addressed the challenge of defining ‘Nature-Positive’ and ‘People-Positive’ in the context of offshore wind and grid deployment, and though views differed, all agreed that offshore wind and grids need to play a positive role in bringing ecosystems back while including and empowering communities. With regards to nature, effective measures must be massively upscaled to see impacts while holistic planning at a sea basin level is required to reduce conflicts among different users of the sea. The importance of data availability and impact metrics was also underlined by panellists, with OCEaN and GINGR flagged as key initiatives to build on existing work. Other suggestions from panellists emphasised the need to continue sharing good practices, work to better integrate planning processes, create regulatory incentives for developers, and address a just transition of fisheries. The overall message of this session was that there must be a joint effort to incentivise both action and innovation to achieve a Nature- and People-Positive offshore energy transition across Europe. This means taking bold steps without knowing all the answers.

MODERATOR



Cristina Simioli
Director – Offshore Energy and Nature
Renewables Grid Initiative

SPEAKERS



Dr. Oscar Bos
Marine Ecologist
Wageningen Marine Research



Ariel Brunner
Regional Director
BirdLife Europe and Central Asia



Emma Hospes
Head of Strategic Environment & Permitting and Biodiversity Programme
Ørsted



Dr. Karsten Sach
Chair of International Advisory Board
GINGR

REPORT

New Report Shines Light on Avoidance and Minimisation Measures

Launched shortly before the conference, OCEaN – North & Baltic Seas’ new report **‘Avoidance and Minimisation of Environmental Impacts from Offshore Wind and Grid Infrastructure’** aims to support the deployment of offshore wind and grid in a nature-friendly manner. OCEaN – North & Baltic Seas identified 80 measures through which wind and grid developers can minimise potential environmental impacts on marine ecosystems. This work includes measures that reflect the first two steps of the mitigation hierarchy – avoidance and minimisation. This was done by combining the fragmented knowledge on available avoidance and minimisation measures for offshore wind and grid infrastructure, including the most recent, relevant, and available information, and finding common ground between the diverse stakeholders that make up OCEaN. Furthermore, ‘best practice’ measures were identified, which are implemented across multiple sites and are proven to effectively reduce negative environmental impacts.

We invite you to explore the report and then check out our **Mitigation Measures Database**, featuring a summary of collected measures to help developers avoid and minimise potential environmental impacts on marine ecosystems.

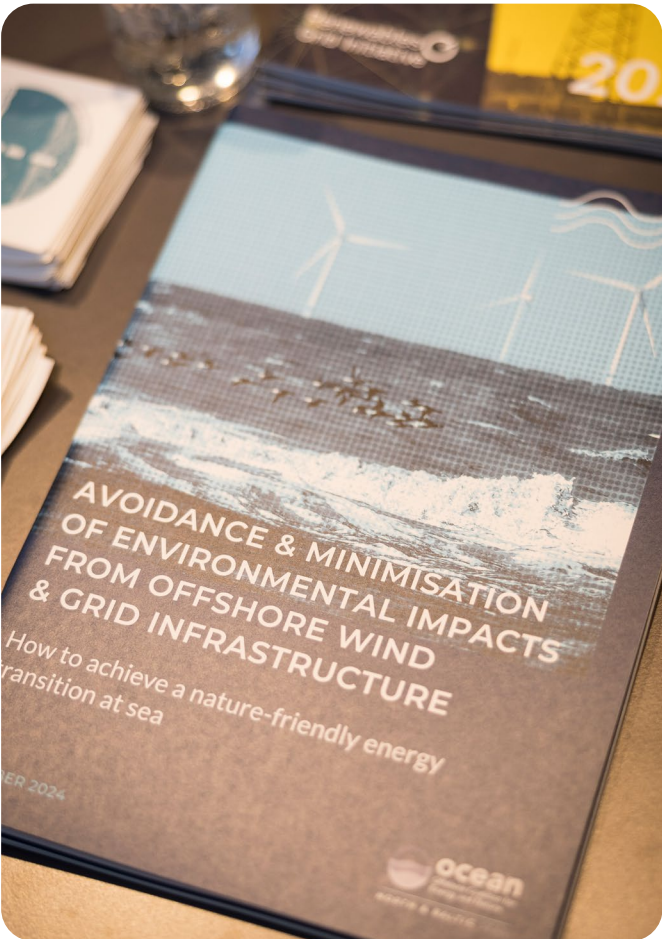
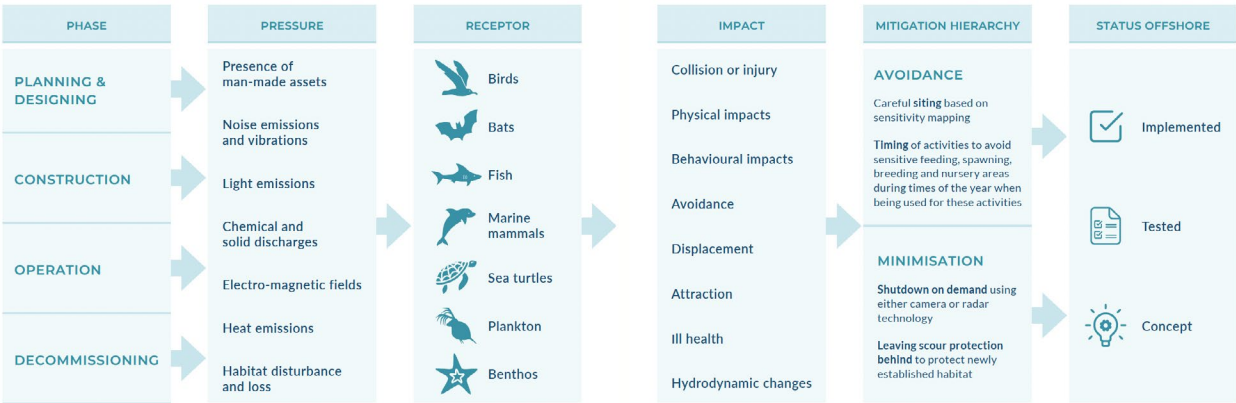


FIGURE 1
FRAMEWORK USED FOR IDENTIFYING MEASURES



Sailing Through Solutions: Tour of Offshore Energy and Nature Fair

Innovators across Europe are working everyday to demonstrate that offshore wind and grids can be deployed alongside nature and with the support of stakeholders and communities. To share these initiatives with our audience and inspire new action, our conference brought together 20 organisations to showcase their practices on how nature can be protected, enhanced, or restored in tandem with offshore wind and grid expansion in a dedicated area within the event. Touring the fair gave participants the chance to learn about academic research, EU-funded projects, entrepreneurial innovations, NGO-industry partnerships, and more across topics ranging from MSP, nature restoration, environmental data and monitoring, and nature-friendly offshore wind and grid infrastructure.

"RGI is proud to continue to organise exhibition fairs such as these to demonstrate inspirational projects across Europe to our event participants. These 20 pioneering projects showcase that a nature-friendly deployment of offshore wind and grids is not only possible, but can inspire their replication and expansion."

CRISTINA SIMIOLI, Director –
Offshore Energy and Nature, RGI



Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)

- **eMSP NBSR** – Community of practices for ecosystem-based MSP
- **MPA Europe** – Optimal siting of marine protected areas
- **MSP Green** – Maritime Spatial Planning as an enabler of the European Green Deal

Environmental Impacts, Data & Monitoring

- **EMODnet** – European Marine Observation and Data Network
- **Fugro** – Marine geotechnical investigation services
- **Hub Ocean** – Collaborative ocean data platform
- **RWE's SeaMe project** – Non-invasive low-tech biodiversity monitoring
- **Vattenfall's Kattegat West Baltic Bats** – Monitoring bat behaviour
- **WinMon.be** – Belgian offshore Wind Monitoring programme

Nature Inclusive Design (NID) & Nature Restoration

- **Ecocean** – Biohuts as artificial fish nurseries
- **ECONcrete** – NID for marine infrastructure
- **Elia's Princess Elisabeth Island** – NID on marine energy hub
- **Reefy** – Modular artificial reefs
- **TenneT's cable crossings** – Biodiversity stepping stones
- **The Rich North Sea program** – Underwater nature enhancement
- **Wilder Humber project** – Collaborative large-scale restoration

Multi-Use of Marine Space


- **DG MARE's Multi-use compendium** – Collection of case studies
- **EU SCORES** – Combining offshore wind, wave and solar energies



Important Initiatives

- **Black Sea Renewable Energy Coalition** – Platform for collaboration
- **GINGR** – Global Initiative for Nature, Grids and Renewables

A Fresh Look at Our Nature Enhancements and Restoration Projects




Energy & Nature Database

Nature enhancement and restoration projects

The **Energy and Nature Database** collects and showcases innovative projects that demonstrate how offshore wind and grid infrastructure can enhance or restore marine ecosystems and provide a positive impact on local communities, whose well-being is linked to healthy ecosystems.

Projects included in this database have been implemented in the marine environments by wind energy developers, transmission system operators, research institutes, local communities, and/or environmental NGOs. Although OCEaN works in the European context, the projects included in this database are from around the world. They vary in their objective and scope, ranging from restoration actions to nature-inclusive designs which enhance marine habitats. All practices are being monitored for their impact, and in some cases positive impacts have already been observed.

The aim of this database is to share ideas and lessons that can inform and inspire other projects and that may be replicable if adapted to the local conditions, species, and habitats. The inclusion of a project in this Database doesn't constitute or imply endorsement from OCEaN Members.



Showcase your project

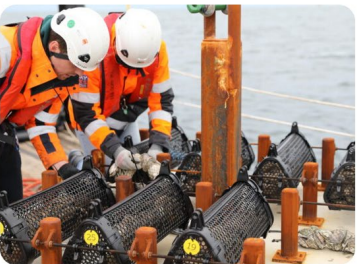
Share your innovative projects with us now and contribute to our growing collection of inspiring work!

Submit project

Criteria for selection


View

Search




North Sea Netherlands


Oyster Broodstock Structures at the Blauwwind (Borssele III & IV) Offshore Wind Farm



North Sea Netherlands

Artificial rock reefs bring new life to Hollandse Kust Zuid





Some of the projects presented at our fair are also highlighted in OCEaN's [Energy and Nature Database](#), which was re-launched at the conference on our newly designed OCEaN website.

The database collects and showcases innovative projects that demonstrate how offshore wind and grid infrastructure can enhance or restore marine ecosystems and provide a positive impact on local communities, whose well-being is linked to healthy ecosystems.

OCEaN aims for this database to become a hub which shares ideas and lessons that can inform and inspire other projects and that may be replicable if adapted to the local conditions, species, and habitats.

From artificial reefs to the restoration of coastal ecosystems to eco-friendly cable protection, fish hotels, and more, we invite you to explore the database and submit your own innovative project for consideration!

KEYNOTE

Leadership to Drive Action for Nature-Friendly Offshore Wind and Grids

TINNE VAN DER STRAETEN, Minister for Energy, Belgium

We were honoured to have our afternoon sessions opened by **Tinne Van der Straeten, Belgium's Minister for Energy**. In her keynote, she underscored the intrinsic link between the biodiversity crisis and climate change, and argued that we cannot tackle one crisis, climate change, while destroying our ecosystems on land and at sea and therefore contribute to a second crisis: biodiversity collapse.

A spotlight was shone on the Princess Elisabeth Island, an offshore energy hub connecting offshore wind farms and interconnectors to the onshore electrical transmission grid, which is being designed with nature-inclusive infrastructure and strong stakeholder collaboration.

Minister Van der Straeten also underlined the importance of policies to improve and enhance electrification, nature-inclusive finance, and regulations which support citizens with energy affordability.

“In a world where we always build alongside nature and communities, nature protection and citizen participation are essential to make the energy transition an inclusive reality that benefits all. In the upcoming tender for the Belgian offshore zone, public participation has been set as a mandatory criterion. Meanwhile, we are building Princess Elisabeth Island, a pioneering project designed with nature inclusive principles to protect and enhance marine biodiversity. These two examples show that Belgium is fully committed to advancing sustainable offshore wind and grid solutions, while prioritising biodiversity and keeping these critical issues high on the EU and regional agendas.”

TINNE VAN DER STRAETEN, Belgium's Minister for Energy

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Navigating a Path to 2030 – Centering Nature Alongside Offshore Wind Ambitions in European Political Agendas

Bringing together representatives from the European Commission, the Netherlands, and Spain alongside NGOs and industry, this session highlighted what is required to ensure nature is discussed in tandem with offshore wind and grid ambitions in European political agendas. In conversation with moderator Antonella Battaglini, RGI's CEO, panellists underlined the importance of early, collaborative planning of space at sea, done across basins, sectors, and in a manner which prioritises nature. This approach to planning

activities in European waters will save money, materials, and boost societal acceptance. Panellists also flagged the need for effective governance structures and increased policy coherence, with the Ocean Pact recognised as a strong step, but one which requires clear accountability and responsibilities. To address narratives that support a return or continuation of fossil fuels, panellists debated the need to build a business case for nature and what is needed to support this effort, including improved availability and sharing of data.



MODERATOR



Antonella Battaglini
CEO
Renewables Grid Initiative

SPEAKERS



Ester Asin Martinez
Director
WWF European Policy Office



Maria Jimenez
Energy Coordinator
Counsellor
Spanish Permanent Representation to the EU



Giles Dickson
CEO
WindEurope



Dr. Danuta Kneipp
Team Lead
Group Strategy
Elia Group



Eleni Hatziyanni
Policy Officer
DG MARE,
European Commission



Claudine Vliegen
Team Coordinator
Regional Sea and EU
Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (Netherlands)


Reflecting on the Day and Path Ahead – OCEaN’s Role in Nature-Friendly Offshore Wind and Grid Development

The conference's final session brought together representatives of OCEaN Members from across the North, Baltic, and Mediterranean seas to reflect on the day's discussions, the role of OCEaN, and the path forward for nature-friendly offshore wind and grid development. Panellists emphasised the value of collaboration to achieve Europe's offshore renewable energy and biodiversity goals. This is done within OCEaN, but collaboration should also bring local communities along through Maritime Spatial Planning, while policy makers are encouraged to exchange and work together across borders. Reflecting on OCEaN's role and its successes, one panellist


underlined that the common goals of Members alongside a positive mindset contributed to building trust and creating tangible outcomes. RGI and OCEaN's role in sharing knowledge and making sure that conversations about offshore wind acceleration do not forget the connecting grid was also highlighted. In the Mediterranean, where Med OCEaN is still new and faces a different context, speakers applauded the initiative as spurring never-before-seen conversations between civil society and industry. They also underlined that ambitions for the region can be guided by lessons learned in the North and Baltic Seas



MODERATOR




Cristina Simioli
Director – Offshore Energy and Nature
Renewables Grid Initiative




Saskia Jaarsma
Head of Offshore Development, Large Projects Offshore
TenneT


SPEAKERS




Nailia Dindarova
Chief Market Development Officer
BlueFloat Energy



Dr. Eva Julius-Philipp
Director Environment & Sustainability, Unit BA Wind
Vattenfall



Ewout van Galen
Director
The North Sea Foundation



Mauro Randone
Regional Projects Manager
WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative

Concluding Remarks



Closing our conference, RGI's CEO Antonella Battaglini was joined onstage by WindEurope's CEO Giles Dickson and Huub den Rooijen CBE. Antonella Battaglini emphasised that the dialogue this conference brought is valuable and needed, but that exchanges are not enough and we must move faster and into new, uncharted waters, taking courageous steps together to achieve an offshore energy transition that is Nature and People-Positive.

“Collaboration is key to ensure the expansion of wind energy and the restoration of Europe’s seas. Europe wants the North Seas to become a green energy powerhouse and is increasingly taking a sea basin approach to offshore wind planning. It must also take a sea-basin approach to biodiversity mitigation and restoration. Mitigate and restore wherever in the sea basin you can have the most impact. And if the wind industry, environmental groups and relevant national authorities think the best mitigation is to ban a certain type of fishing in a certain area, then don’t let a few other national fishing industries get in the way. EU law now says renewables are a matter of ‘overriding public interest.’”

GILES DICKSON, CEO of WindEurope

SPEAKERS



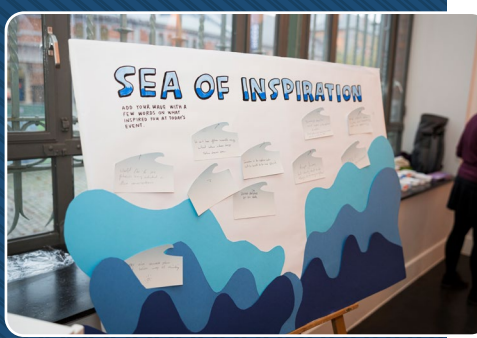
Antonella Battaglini
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Marine Advisor
3blue

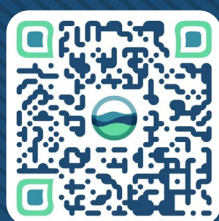


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