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Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature

Feedback to the OCEAN ACT

Call for evidence

February 2026

Members of the **Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN) in the North and Baltic Seas** welcome the European Commission's call for evidence regarding the upcoming Ocean Act. We acknowledge this as an opportunity to strengthen Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), increase policy coherence, and better align offshore wind, grid, climate, and biodiversity objectives at national, regional, and EU level.

In particular, the Ocean Act should:

Strengthen MSP as a central and strategic governance tool[1]: To optimise the use of Europe's seas while enhancing their health and resilience, it is essential to strengthen MSP. In this regard, we encourage the European Commission (EC) to further guide and support Member States (MS) in reviewing their MSPs to better integrate the requirements of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) and environmental legislation, including the objective to protect 30%[2] (with 10% strictly protected) and restore at least 20%[3] of EU seas by 2030.

Today, energy and nature planning is often not aligned, leading to conflicts, delays, and sub-optimal outcomes. Early consideration of the spatial implications and environmental constraints of energy system planning (e.g. TYNDPs, ONDPs) is needed to effectively inform MSPs, align objectives, and accelerate delivery. In addition, MS should spatially translate their energy targets in their NECPs and monitor whether maritime space availability and environmental constraints allow for their timely implementation.

MSP is also key to designating suitable areas for offshore wind. Though the majority of MS have succeeded in allocating space for offshore wind deployment, this process has not been without friction, with competing spatial claims and reassessments of areas delaying implementation. For example, analyses from both

[1] OCEaN's messages to the North Sea Energy Cooperation, November 2025: **Aligning offshore wind and grid expansion with nature conservation through integrated and strategic planning**.
[2] **EU Biodiversity Strategy**, European Commission
[3] **Nature Restoration Regulation**, European Parliament

industry and **NGOs** show most MS still fall short of allocating 30% of their seas to Marine Protected Areas, creating uncertainty and preventing integrated, long-term solutions.

*Supporting example: In the Netherlands, the **North Sea Programme** provides an example of how different economic developments can be spatially integrated within their national policy framework and the marine ecosystem.*

Strengthen the cross-border and sea-basin perspective: Drawing upon the vision highlighted in OCEaN's press release[4] published during the North Sea Summit in January 2026, MSP should also contribute to greater **cross-border coherence** and **cooperation**, including through the coordination of planning approaches at sea-basin level and by ensuring the sharing and interoperability of relevant data across borders. Planning offshore wind with adequate international cooperation can avoid inefficiencies, such as those brought by the wake effect, and decrease the overall spatial and environmental footprint.

Supporting example: Initiatives at regional level, such as the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI), the Offshore TSO Collaboration (OTC), and multi-stakeholder coalitions, such as OCEaN, can play a key role in advancing integrated MSP and the alignment of energy and nature objectives. These initiatives are already actively contributing to this goal and can be replicated in other regions. The EC should recognise, support, and build upon their work to accelerate coordinated action across Member States and sea basins.

Enable co-existence and multi-use: Identifying co-existence and multi-use opportunities for activities at sea should be done early in MSP and alongside frameworks on monitoring and implementation. The goal should always be to avoid further pressures on the marine environment by bundling uses to leave more space for nature to recover. The application of specific scenarios needs to be evaluated based on environmental and socio-economic factors and a solid understanding of their individual and cumulative impacts[5]. These processes should be underpinned by early and meaningful **stakeholder engagement** to identify joint solutions, reduce conflicts, and improve the quality and acceptance of projects at later stages.

Supporting example: *An example of stakeholder engagement approaches that can support co-existence can be found in France. In the context of MSP processes, the country held a large public debate from 2023-2024 to identify areas for offshore wind and nature protection, resolve conflicts among stakeholders, and enable coexistence and acceptance.*

Improve data sharing: We welcome the establishment of an **Ocean Observation Initiative**, as effective MSPs depend on accessible, high-quality data. To promote comparability and the assessment of cumulative impacts, this data collection should be done as early as possible and be coupled with the

[4] OCEaN's press release, January 2026: **North Sea Summit: Moving towards a shared vision for offshore wind, grids, and marine ecosystems in the Norths Seas**.
[5] OCEaN publication, October 2022: ***10 Recommendations How to improve Maritime Spatial Planning to reach European climate, energy and biodiversity targets***

establishment of harmonised indicators, assessment methods, and data formats across EU legislation and monitoring frameworks.

Supporting examples: *Inspiring platforms already exist at the European level, (e.g. **EMODnet**) and at the national level, (e.g. Belgium's programme **WinMon.Be**)*[6]*. In addition, the **Marine Net Gain Assessment Frameworks** by Natural England explores how project-level environmental monitoring and net gain assessments could be measured.*

We underline the importance of this call for evidence being published alongside the consultation for the revision of the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)**, as better alignment between the MSFD, MSPD, and project-level assessments should be ensured. Monitoring, assessment and reporting cycles should be aligned to the greatest extent possible, with synchronised implementation across Member States. As the MSFD establishes the overarching objective of GES, it should inform the ecological boundaries within which MSP and all sectoral policies operate and be underscored in the Ocean Act.

By reinforcing MSP as a strategic, integrated, and participatory planning tool, and by strengthening links with environmental objectives, regional cooperation, and ocean observation, the European Ocean Act can enable a coherent and future-proof governance framework for Europe's seas. OCEaN stands ready to support this process and contribute to implementation across sea basins and sectors.

About OCEaN

OCEaN brings together NGOs, TSOs and wind industry organisations from across Europe to work towards a sustainable deployment of offshore energy and grid infrastructure, while ensuring alignment with nature protection and healthy marine ecosystems. Visit our **website** to learn more.

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[6] OCEaN case study, October 2022: **Collection of marine environmental data monitoring for nature-friend offshore wind in Belgium since 2025**