OCEaN's Statement on the upcoming EU Restoration Law

NGOs, wind industry and Transmission System Operators (TSOs), working collaboratively in the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN), call for a strong EU Restoration Law with clear and quantifiable legally binding targets, as well as implementation and enforcement rules that enable ecologically-sound offshore wind and electricity grid deployment.

The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity, both on land and at sea, need to be tackled jointly as they are intrinsically linked: biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation accelerate climate change, while climate change increases stress on natural systems and biodiversity.

Europe's seas are among the most overexploited in the world and their ecosystems are in a poor state[1]. Around 65% of protected seabed habitats are in a state of unfavourable conservation[2]. Over 30% of seabird species are experiencing significant population declines, as well as approximately 30% of species associated with marine habitats[3]. Harmful human activities, such as oil drilling, marine transport, pollution, dredging, coastal development and unsustainable fishing practices have contributed to the loss of most of the rich biodiversity of the seafloor and continental shelf. In addition, the impacts of high atmospheric CO_2 and climate change (acidification, marine warming, deoxygenation) are already exacerbating this ecosystem decline.

The EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy represents a key opportunity to halt and reverse biodiversity loss at sea by (1) increasing the coverage of EU Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to at least 30%, with at least 10% being strictly protected and (2) ensuring effective protection, management and enforcement of all protected areas[4].

Considering the current degraded state of the marine environment, protection of the remaining ecosystems needs to be complemented by stronger actions to improve their health, resilience and ability to provide ecosystem services. Consequently, the upcoming Restoration Law must urgently deliver concrete restoration targets for marine ecosystems in the European Union. This must include a binding restoration target of at least 15% of European sea basins, through passive and active restoration measures. Passive restoration refers to areas where human pressure is removed – these are often strictly protected areas such as "no-take-zones". Meanwhile, active restoration measures involve direct human interventions to assist ecosystem recovery. Such a restoration target will contribute to the achievement of 30% of MPAs by 2030 as well as to the attainment of the Good Environmental Status of European seas[5].

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[1] https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/marine-messages-2/download

[2] https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/soer-2020/chapter-06_soer2020-marine-environment

[3] https://www.birdlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/BirdLife-European-Red-List-of-Birds-2021.pdf

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/publications/criteria-and-guidance-protected-areas-designations-staff-working-document_en

[5] Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)

Nature restoration and the energy transition must be planned and implemented hand-in-hand so they can jointly support each other in delivering the EU's climate and energy goals. This means that the designation of MPAs and energy generation sites should happen simultaneously to prevent negative effects of one on the other. A coordinated designation of these areas will contribute to addressing the joint climate and biodiversity crises we face, while achieving the necessary speed and scale for the expansion of renewables and electricity grids.

The current geopolitical context adds an additional layer to the already dramatic climate crisis, increasing the urgency of a fast transition towards renewables. The scale and speed needed in the roll-out of offshore wind energy and the connecting electricity grids can only be achieved through an ecosystem-based approach that respects nature and reduces cumulative pressures. Such an integrated approach will allow nature to thrive while reducing deployment delays and financial risks.

The signatories of this statement commit to actively contribute to the restoration of European seas, and consequently to achieve the related objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, by finding joint practical solutions together with governments, authorities, and other users of the sea.

About the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN)
OCEaN is a coalition of NGOs, wind industry and transmission system operators (TSOs), who joined forces in late 2020 to cooperate on the sustainable deployment of offshore wind energy and grid infrastructure, while ensuring alignment with nature protection and healthy marine ecosystems.

OCEaN is funded, convened and moderated by the Renewables Grid Initiative. Members of OCEaN are: TSOs - 50Hertz, Amprion, Elia, EirGrid, National Grid Ventures, RTE, TenneT; NGOs - BirdLife International, Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe), Germanwatch, Naturschutzbund (NABU), Natuur&Milieu, the North Sea Foundation (Stichting De Noordzee), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Wildlife Trusts, the World Wildlife Fund for nature - European Policy Office (WWF EPO); Wind industry - Iberdrola, Ørsted, Seawind Ocean Technology, Siemens Gamesa, Vattenfall, WindEurope, Wind Energy Ireland, the German Network for Wind Energy (WAB), the Federal Association of Offshore Wind Farm Operators Offshore (BWO).

More information: https://offshore-coalition.eu/