

A BLUE NEW DEAL for the Ocean and Humans: Baltic Sea Edition

Summary of the BLUE NEW DEAL policy report for Rasmus Andresen, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) / THE GREENS / EFA in the European Parliament

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Ocean and humans

We humans love our ocean. We sail and surf across it. We swim and dive in it. The ocean has provided people with food and goods for centuries. Already as small kids, most of us were fascinated by all the creatures that live in the ocean, and by the many wonders of the underwater world. And especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have felt how just being outside near the ocean can help us feel good.

The ocean touches each of our lives. However, our relationship with the ocean is not a balanced one. Despite all of its beauty and benefits, we are often abusing our ocean, trying to squeeze every last bit of value out of it with horrible consequences. We have been polluting the ocean with plastic, oil and nuclear waste. We have overfished our ocean, thereby often ripping up the seabed, and have taken so much marine life that many species are struggling to reproduce.

And yet, the ocean is continuing to provide benefits for us humans. Even if we don't feel the touch of the ocean directly, the ocean has taken up a vast majority of the heat and a quarter of the CO₂ emissions related to global warming, thereby protecting us from the most severe impacts of climate change. But this process has also had devastating impacts on marine life. Deadly heat waves, ocean acidification and deoxygenation are not only directly killing marine life, but also changing the fundamental processes governing life in our ocean. Without doubt, unabated, the impacts of climate change will have severe impacts not just for our ocean, but also for each one of us humans living on land.

Our ocean has done a lot for us. It is time for a new deal between the ocean and humans: A Blue New Deal! A deal that leads to a healthy ocean to also allow future generations to connect with the ocean and enjoy its full potential while protecting marine life.



Photo: K. Müller



Photo: K. Müller

A Blue New Deal “cross check” of EU legislation

Almost half of the EU population live less than 50 km from the sea⁴, and the ocean is crucial for the European economy. In 2017, ocean related activities produced a gross profit of EUR 74.3 billion while providing 4 million jobs. At the same time, the European Union aims to be a leader in combating climate change. Despite the core role of the ocean for climate change mitigation and adaptation, the ocean is only an instrument of the transformation set out in the European Green Deal through the prism of the blue economy.

Furthermore, major EU policy instruments are not well aligned with the sustainable use and conservation of our ocean. For example, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which accounts for 33.1 % of the EU budget (55.71 billion in 2021), **does not directly support the funding and operationalization of coastal and marine policy**, even though intensive agriculture causes ocean eutrophication and deoxygenation. Thus, a **Blue New Deal “cross check” of EU legislation**, taking into account the complexity and the reciprocal interlinkages between humans and the ocean, is a dire necessity.

Such cross-check will need to be based on a **strong-willed coherence and implementation of EU relevant sectoral policies with coastal and marine policy**, in particular the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. **Reaching a good environmental status**, this will respond to the imperative of preventing any socio-ecological problem from shifting from one sectoral framework to another when implemented by EU member States. It starts, inter alia, with:

- the **congruent implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, guaranteeing a good status under the Water Framework Directive, and the exploration of the possibility of result-based payments to reduce nutrient losses to water;
- the **revision of the Nitrates Directive** regarding the designation of Nitrates Vulnerable Zones, and the adoption of a whole territory approach for areas of the Baltic Sea catchment basin most affected by nutrient flows from agriculture;
- the **adoption of a phosphorus Directive** to regulate the agricultural use and recycling of phosphorus;
- the **establishment of an adaptation strategy for aquaculture** under the EU Climate Adaptation strategy to ensure the sector implement comprehensive and efficient climate-change adaptation measures;
- the development and implementation of the future commission **action plan to address by-catches of sensitive species and adverse impacts on sensitive habitats.**



Photo: M. Heitzmann



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Photo: S. Müller

HELCOM: A window of opportunity to protect our Baltic Sea

Protecting the Baltic Sea, as one of the world's most polluted seas, can be the starting **point for an European Blue New Deal**. There is a **window of opportunity through the HELCOM ministerial meeting in Lübeck, Germany on October 20, 2021**, to take concrete action. HELCOM is the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission established through the 1974 Helsinki Convention. The EU as a body and its eight EU member states surrounding the Baltic Sea (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland) plus Russia are the contracting parties to this convention. Germany holds the HELCOM presidency from July 1, 2020 until June 30, 2022 and thus is in the unique position to show true leadership in protecting our ocean.

Key action points for EU member states surrounding the Baltic Sea:

- Increase ambition to reduce nutrient input in the Baltic Sea, in particular the **phosphorus loads which were 44 % above the target values in 2015**. Establishment of closed nutrient loops and reducing industrial animal farming are key measures. Take future increase in nutrient leakage due to climate change into account.
- Invest into **zero input low and multi-trophic community-based aquaculture**, e.g. combined algal or mussel farming, as a low impact nutrition and protein source for human consumption. Ensure that any aquaculture farms established have closed nutrient loops and fish feed is fully decoupled from wild fisheries overseas.
- Set **quotas based on scientific advice** and promote **selective fishing practices with minimal environmental impact**. Establish at least **10 % strong marine protected areas (MPA's)**, where no fishing activities nor any other extractive activities (e.g. like sand extraction) are allowed. Ensure solutions are co-developed with local communities and that they are also culturally feasible and generally supported.

Our vision for the future of the Baltic Sea region is one that brings people closer to the ocean again while creating jobs in community-based shellfish aquaculture and low-impact fisheries in a way that protects marine biodiversity and ecosystems. In this future, we imagine children excitedly telling their parents and grandparents about **growing numbers of harbour porpoises**, their local Baltic Sea 'whale'!

Now is the lifetime opportunity for the EU and all member states to raise their ambition to protect our ocean collectively via an ambitious European **Blue New Deal**.