



THIS REPORT HAS
BEEN PRODUCED WITH
THE SUPPORT OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION



REPORT
SUMMARY

EU

2020

IMPROVING INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE FOR LIFE BELOW WATER

14 LIFE BELOW
WATER



A healthy ocean to secure climate resilience

Five years on from the adoption of the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), WWF presents European and Member State decision makers with a comprehensive, evidence-based critique on the achievement of the targets within SDG14 – Life Below Water.

The ocean provides fundamental ecosystem services which support the livelihoods of billions of people worldwide.¹ Cumulatively, the SDG14 targets aim to secure the sustainable use of our ocean, robust protection of marine ecosystems, the livelihoods of those whose economies are tied to our seas and food security for a growing population in a changing climate.

However, insufficient progress has been made across all SDG14 targets, with European and national marine strategies failing to include clear, concrete objectives to achieve them. Of the four targets due by 2020 (i.e. 14.2, 14.4, 14.5 and 14.6), three have not been achieved, with the last target only partly achieved. EU Member States are unequivocally missing the mark on provisions for sustainable and viable seafood production, healthy marine ecosystems and biodiversity conservation.

For only two of the six targets related to measures for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources, progress is “partial”. However, the lack of monitoring and accurate reporting remains a critical issue. The absence of effective protection of marine ecosystems and failure to eliminate the overfishing currently wreaking havoc on the sustainability of our seas indicate significant compliance problems on the part of EU Member States.

The climate and biodiversity crises have become paramount threats to our ways of life. Comprehensive actions to fulfill the EU's commitments to secure a healthy and resilient ocean must be a priority, both at EU and national levels. An EU SDG implementation strategy is also needed to ensure coherence among EU policies and foster synergies, so that progress in one area does not undermine progress in another. WWF calls for urgent action from all stakeholders to achieve the SDG14 targets maturing in 2020, and presents recommendations for how to secure a healthy ocean and climate resilience by 2030.



1. European Commission (2018) Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2018 edition. Statistical books. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

Minimum actions to effectively achieve the SDG14 targets

KEY  PARTIAL PROGRESS  NOT ACHIEVED  INSUFFICIENT DATA



Target 14.1:
Reduce marine
pollution

1

The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union support a legally binding global treaty to combat marine plastic pollution with shared targets to create greater mutual accountability between States and bring an end to plastic leakage into nature by 2030.

2

EU Member States ensure that the principle of extended producer responsibility is applied across the entire life cycle of materials, with schemes to hold industries accountable for the downstream impacts of their products.

3

EU Member States and neighbouring countries encourage transnational collaboration to solve the issues of global pollution by openly and proactively sharing best practices and innovative tools.



Target 14.2:
Protect and restore
ecosystems

1

EU Member States ensure that the main priority of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) is the conservation of biodiversity and marine ecosystem services, not short-term economic opportunity. MPAs must effectively conserve and restore ecosystems and include zones that are fully protected from destructive activities.

2

EU Member States actively and urgently establish, enforce and implement effective management and monitoring in already designated MPAs, including appropriate management plans and means to monitor and enforce them.



Target 14.3:
Reduce ocean
acidification

1

The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union urgently agree on a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 and implement immediate actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

2

The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union commit to double the EU's current level of CO₂ removal from the atmosphere by 2030, achieved by supporting the activity and expansion of European carbon sinks, in particular through ecosystem restoration.

3

The European Commission supports literacy and monitoring schemes to increase understanding of ocean acidification and its consequences among stakeholders, targeted audiences and local communities to ensure better compliance with environmental legislation.



Target 14.4:
Sustainable fishing

1

The European Commission and the Council of the European Union follow advice based on the best available scientific evidence to set fishing opportunities aligned with sustainable levels, i.e. below F_{MSY} , and apply the precautionary approach when data on the status of marine populations is lacking.

2

Marine experts, including fishers and scientists, improve the selectivity of fishing gear to reduce the impact of the EU fleet on marine biodiversity and the seabed.

3

EU Member States and vessels face appropriate penalties, e.g. fines, when fishing activities are found to exceed agreed catch quotas (i.e. overfishing), including in the waters of partner countries, where relevant.



Target 14.5:
Conserve coastal and
marine areas

1

UN members commit to effectively manage MPAs covering at least 30% of their marine and coastal areas by 2030. Together, these MPAs will act as a coherent network to restore biodiversity, improve ocean resilience and increase the asset base that is the foundation for a Sustainable Blue Economy.

2

EU Member States increase transparency on how their marine areas are protected by ensuring timely and accurate reporting to all relevant MPA authorities and databases.

3

EU and Member State decision makers encourage inclusive, multi-stakeholder participation for long-term and adaptive management plans of marine resources.



Target 14.6:
End subsidies contributing to overfishing

1 The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union maintain the ban on harmful subsidies that increase fishing capacity and eliminate all subsidies to operational effort-enhancing costs, including engine replacement.

2 The EU and Member State decision makers remove any funding for temporary and permanent cessation of fishing activities as it contributes to maintaining the status quo instead of promoting structural changes needed to end overfishing.

3 The EU leads on the negotiations at the World Trade Organization for an ambitious agreement on fisheries subsidies reform to strengthen ocean governance. This agreement should mandate that all stakeholders be included in fora to inform sustainable management, effectively enforce marine legislation and mitigate negative environmental impacts.



Target 14.7:
Increase the economic benefits from sustainable use of marine resources

1 The EU strengthens the coherence of its regional and international initiatives to ensure effective cross-border and multi-jurisdictional governance, and develops an accurate oversight of Sustainable Blue Economy opportunities, especially for developing State partners.

2 The EU and its Member States fully implement the Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Regulation and apply sanctions for non-compliant vessels to deter IUU activities and help compensate for the damage done to marine ecosystems, as well as to the communities impacted by reduced marine stocks and diminished seafood production economies.

3 The EU and partner countries of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements increase transparency of their marine activities through robust catch data collection and reporting, while ensuring full compliance with monitoring, control and surveillance measures.



Target 14.A:
Increase scientific knowledge, research and technology for ocean health

1 EU Member States improve and optimise data collection by establishing harmonised monitoring of how marine resources are used and comprehensive data exchange systems to facilitate scientific evaluations of both the ecological and economic effects of adopted management measures.

2 EU Member States align annual fishing opportunities with scientific recommendations and apply the precautionary approach for sustainable fishing mortality rates consistently across the EU.

3 The EU and its Member States proactively integrate strong political, legal, financial and social measures within all partnerships to ensure appropriate and practical approaches for adaptation to climate change. Increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change into research, management and policy is key to ensure acceptance and support of climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Target 14.B:
Support small-scale fisheries

1 EU Member States set fishing limits aligned with the best available scientific evidence to allow marine populations to recover above sustainable levels, ultimately increasing the benefits of fishing and marine activities to all stakeholders in the marine sectors.

2 EU Member States and marine sector organisations include clear environmental, compliance and socio-economic criteria in their allocation systems to favour the most sustainable marine practices in sectors such as low-impact fishing; progress toward achieving these criteria must be measured and reported via means that are available to public scrutiny.

3 The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union take immediate steps to incentivise vessel owners, Member States and third party partner States to improve their practices at sea by applying strong sanctions to rule breakers, whether this involves illegal fishing activity or misreporting of information.



Target 14.C:
Implement and enforce international sea law

1 The EU and its Member States implement a regime of enhanced cooperation between States, RFMOs and other competent bodies that sets out concrete provisions on cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional ocean conservation and sustainable use.²

2 The EU and its Member States promote an oversight framework between regional implementation of global standards to deliver holistic and integrated ecosystem-based management with concrete measures to protect sensitive species and habitats.²

3 The EU and its Member States unpack the broad category of area-based management tools² spelling out the designation of effective MPAs; they must also ensure that strategic environmental assessment and Marine Spatial Planning will be adopted in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

2. Wright, G. and Rochette, J., (2019), 'Regional Ocean Governance of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction: Lessons Learnt and Ways Forward', STRONG High Seas Project

The way forward

Strong political will, a robust legal framework and appropriate national plans of action are key to achieving all SDG14 targets on time and ensuring the sustainable use of our ocean. As the largest seafood market and as the political body with the most extensive Exclusive Economic Zone worldwide, the EU must lead the way and set a strong global example for others to achieve the SDGs. The success of SDG14 plays a central role in achieving the entire 2030 Agenda³ as the Goals are indivisible: 38% of all SDG targets require ocean sustainability in order to be achieved, particularly SDG1 (No Poverty), SDG2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG13 (Climate Action).⁴

Immediate action to implement best practices across all sectors and to increase accountability via control and monitoring can help ensure better use of our marine resources and safeguard their availability to future generations. In the face of the climate and biodiversity crises currently impacting ocean health and food security, all EU Member States must intensify their efforts towards sustainable fisheries, ecosystem-based management of our seas and fair socio-economic development in the use of our ocean. A transformation of EU and international ocean governance is urgently required to deliver the 2030 Agenda and safeguard both marine ecosystem health and human livelihoods, while mitigating our changing climate and adapting to its impacts.

WWF calls on the European Commission and the EU Member States to urgently take the crucial steps necessary to achieve the SDG14 targets due by 2020 and secure thriving coastal communities, sustainable access to marine resources and comprehensive protection for threatened marine ecosystems. The EU must fulfill its 2015 commitments to propagate transparent and ambitious initiatives to deliver the 2030 Agenda, as well as its own sustainability objectives laid out in the Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

3. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-14-life-below-water.html>

4. Singh, G. et al. b(2017), A rapid assessment of co-benefits and trade-offs among Sustainable Development Goals. Marine Policy. 10.1016/j.marpol.2017.05.030.

How EU and international ocean governance can deliver the 2030 agenda

100%
RECYCLED



0

No single SDG14 target has been fully achieved

38%

Over 1/3 of all SDG targets are only achievable with the accomplishment of SDG14

2050

Essential marine ecosystems like coral reefs are projected to disappear in the next 30 years

1/10

Fisheries and aquaculture support the livelihoods of 10–12% of the world's population

For further information:

WWF European Policy Office

www.wwf.eu

Dr Anne-Cécile Dragon

Marine and Fisheries Policy Officer
acdragon@wwf.eu

Dr Samantha Burgess

Head of Marine Policy
sburgess@wwf.eu

Katrin Vilhelm Poulsen

Seafood Policy Officer
kpoulsen@wwf.eu

Larissa Milo-Dale

Communications Officer
lmilodale@wwf.eu



Design and production Evan Jeffries and Catherine Perry (www.swim2birds.co.uk)
Printed by Zwartopwit, Belgium

Published in March 2020 by WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund), Brussels, Belgium. Any reproduction in full or in part must mention the title and credit the above-mentioned publisher as the copyright owner. © Text 2020 WWF. All rights reserved.



THIS PROJECT
IS CO-FUNDED
BY THE
EUROPEAN UNION



This publication has been produced with the financial contribution of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of WWF and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU.