

AN UPDATED ACTION PLAN FOR A SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE EU ATLANTIC AREA

The Commission adopted an Atlantic action plan¹ in 2013 to operationalise the Atlantic strategy and address genuine challenges² and opportunities that France, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the UK are facing in the EU Atlantic area. The mid-term review³ of the Atlantic action plan, conducted during 2017-2018 and backed by a public consultation, confirmed the relevance of the overarching objectives of the plan and its “contribution to strengthening the Atlantic community of maritime stakeholders, by building awareness and buy-in around common objectives and developing networks of relevant policymakers and funding programmes”. These achievements were largely due to the bottom-up and participatory manner in which it was elaborated.

In addition, the mid-term review suggested various avenues to improve the implementation of the action plan, mainly by removing shortcomings in its architecture, by calibrating the focus of the objectives, improving the coherence of the underlying actions and by addressing weaknesses in the overall governance framework. Adding a robust framework for monitoring and evaluating the performance was stressed as equally important.

To address the findings of the mid-term review, the European Commission launched a consultation process. Series of workshops⁴ conducted in the 5 EU Atlantic Member States between September and November 2018 brought together a specialised audience of maritime stakeholders to discuss the shortcomings of the original action plan. The work centred on few but highly relevant areas with development potential for the Atlantic area, such as ocean energy, where a joint action is expected to increase their competitiveness, foster growth, reduce red tape and add value to existing regional cooperation. The results of the 5 workshops built the backbone of the present policy document.

The updated Atlantic action plan aims to improve the implementation of the Atlantic strategy. It provides a pioneering framework for collaboration on maritime affairs among the EU Atlantic countries and with their citizens based on a *common vision for innovation-driven blue growth and a sustainable blue economy in the EU Atlantic area*. The plan considers the challenges facing the Atlantic sea-basin outlined in the Atlantic strategy, the ambitious agenda of the Galway declaration, and the overarching UN Sustainable Development Goals. The action plan sets out a general roadmap for a joint and smart response — across all countries, coastal regions, sectors, and stakeholders.

The updated action plan is based on the following four mutually-reinforcing thematic priority areas aimed to mobilise trans-national and cross-regional collaboration involving businesses, government bodies, regional actors, civil society, and research partners: **i) Atlantic ports as blue economy hubs; ii) Marine renewable energy; iii) Blue jobs and ocean literacy; iv) Clean ocean and resilient coasts**. An improved governance mechanism will help the design and implementation of the joint actions. The plan also aims to ensure alignment between existing funding schemes and involvement of future funding instruments, thus encouraging greater cohesion in the whole EU Atlantic area by 2027.

The work on the implementation of the Atlantic action plan will start under the incoming Portuguese chairmanship of the Atlantic Strategy Group as one of Portugal’s priorities.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1395674057421&uri=CELEX:52013DC0279>

² The strategy sought identified the challenges and opportunities facing the region, grouping them under five thematic headings: *Implementing the ecosystem approach, Reducing carbon footprint & responding to threats and emergencies resulting from climate change, social inclusion and updating skills, building knowledge about the ocean’s seafloor.*

³ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2018-49_en.pdf

⁴ [Add link to the workshop results on the EU maritime forum.](#)

1. COMMON VISION FOR A SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE EU ATLANTIC AREA⁵

The EU Atlantic area and its coastal regions are *leaders in marine and maritime innovation in Europe* that nurture a sustainable and competitive blue economy and work in partnership to master the adverse effects of climate change in line with the global commitments for sustainable development.

This common vision rests on the idea that by 2027:

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|--|--|
| The Atlantic ports become true blue economy hubs | The EU Atlantic area supports blue jobs of the future and ocean awareness |
| The EU Atlantic area exploits marine renewable energy | The EU Atlantic area is clean and its coasts resilient |

2. THEMATIC PRIORITY AREAS⁶

The new action plan includes four thematic priority areas, which represents a practical way to make the common vision a reality. The thematic areas listed below are integrally interconnected, supra-national and trans-regional by nature, addressing key challenges with a view to fostering sustainable blue growth in the EU Atlantic area. They focus on issues that one coastal region and one single Member State cannot solve alone or where it is more efficient to act together and efficiently deliver on challenges that matter in the daily lives of citizens living in the coastal areas.

The feedback received from national workshops held in the Portugal, Spain, France, UK and Ireland, as well as discussions with these Member States have guided the thematic selection and suggested actions. The priorities are not intended to be exhaustive.

This action plan is an invitation to the coastal regions, private sector, researchers, national public bodies and other actors to start designing projects that respond to the priorities. Existing and new partnerships in the EU Atlantic area should use the umbrella of the action plan to exchange knowledge and innovate.

2.1. Atlantic Ports as Blue Economy Hubs

Objective: Develop the role of ports as community managers

Coastal tourism, aquaculture, ship-building, as well growing industries like marine renewables are centered on or closely interlinked with the activity of ports, thus ports can play a major role in their development. This entails an evolution of the governance mechanisms of ports including the *role of port operators – from mere landlords for logistical enterprises towards playing the more active role of a community manager and catalyst for blue business.*

⁵ Based on typical Atlantic challenges as defined in the Atlantic strategy: *Implementing the ecosystem approach, Reducing carbon footprint & responding to threats and emergencies resulting from climate change, Updating skills and building knowledge about the ocean's seafloor.*

⁶ Inspired by the vision, by the results of the mid-term review and the national workshops; Aligned to the future MFF priorities; In line with the national policies and smart specialisation.

On the other hand, ports must *cooperate* among themselves to mobilise financing for specialised smart infrastructures that will *increase sea-basin trade*.

To address the needs identified above, the thematic priority includes *two specific work strands* that can be pursued through a set of concrete actions.

2.1.1. Ports as catalysts for business and platforms for marine exploration

Potential Actions

- ▶ **Create blue hubs of excellence, ports acting as a catalyst for the blue economy through developing local exchange and cooperation mechanisms**
- ▶ **Create conditions to attract new stakeholders in ports, encourage partnerships, install incubators for start-ups of the blue economy, allocate dedicated areas to industry**
- ▶ **Educate and include citizens regarding port development activities**
- ▶ **Increase communication and availability of data on marine exploration, especially related to the economic potential and the environmental aspects**
- ▶ **Share best practices through the Atlantic Port Forum, exchange ideas and tackle problems jointly**
- ▶ **Expand data collection beyond traditional (logistics) data, including employment and other social factors, bottom-up approach, show results to the public to generate support**

In order to act as blue growth hubs, ports will have to evolve from their role as mere landlords to a more interactive role such as that of a community manager. This specific priority includes a few actions on this issue. A first action is to **create blue hubs of excellence** across the Atlantic area. This would entail ports actively seeking cooperation with other local maritime stakeholders and acting as a catalyst for the blue economy through developing local exchange and cooperation mechanisms. To ensure the maximum effect of this action, it will be important to simultaneously **create conditions to attract new stakeholders** in ports. This could be done through encouraging partnerships with e.g. research institutions or the tourism industry, installing incubators for blue economy start-ups or through allocating dedicated areas to industry.

To ensure a wider public is aware and supportive of these developments, it will be important to **educate and include citizens** on the development and evolution of the port. This will require launching a communication campaign and engaging citizens regularly. At the same time, **communication and data availability on marine exploration** and the economic potential of the field will need to be increased, to gain both the interest of economic actors and the support the expand this area of the local population.

To ensure the necessary funding and support from legislators is available, ports will need to **expand data collection** beyond traditional data on logistics. While ports may not be among the largest in terms of logistical activity, they may nonetheless have an immense impact on the local economy through these diversification activities. To show this, it will be important for ports and communities to gather and present data on their impact on social factors such as employment.

- ▶ The creation of blue hubs of excellence could be built on the national example of Portugal, which has launched the development of Port Tech clusters. Through the upcoming Portuguese presidency of the ASG, this could be a flagship project to be implemented. Actual implementation will rely on the ports themselves as well as other

local blue economy stakeholders.

- ▶ To facilitate the development, the **Atlantic Port Forum**, developed under specific priority 1.2, could be used to share knowledge and exchange best practices. Cooperation can help increase the visibility of the issue and challenges could be tackled jointly through EU-funded projects. At the same time, in the area of promoting marine exploration, the AORA working group on seabed mapping could provide an initial starting point for stakeholders.

2.1.2. Ports as gateways for trade in the Atlantic

Potential Actions

- ▶ **Create an ‘Atlantic Port Forum’ under the TENT-T ‘Atlantic corridor Stakeholder Forum’**
- ▶ **Develop a strategy to better integrate Ireland to continental Europe and for improving short sea shipping links in the Atlantic area**
- ▶ **Conduct a study to analyse the existing freight flows (maritime – hinterland)**
- ▶ **Launch a global Atlantic strategy on LNG (to avoid unnecessary investments) supported by the EIB’s Green Shipping Financing Programme**
- ▶ **Develop eco-incentives schemes (Portugal and France are working on a common scheme) to be funded under Interreg or CEF / H2020 for related projects**
- ▶ **Create a ‘Green port’ network by 2025**

The central action of this specific priority is the creation of an **Atlantic Port Forum** and the Atlantic corridor Stakeholder Forum. The Port Forum will allow Atlantic ports to join and coordinate in areas where they are not directly competing. It will also facilitate further actions included under this specific priority. For example, through the forum, Atlantic ports that have taken a leadership role on environmental action can cooperate to create a **Green Port Network**, which will allow them to exchange and share best practices to develop the environmental friendliness of Atlantic ports.

To further advance the development of port to become eco-friendlier, this priority also includes the **development of eco-incentive schemes**. Currently, Portugal and France are already working on a common scheme, which could be shared through the coordination mechanisms established and expanded across the Atlantic area. Further environmental action under this specific priority includes the launch of a **global Atlantic strategy in liquid natural gas (LNG)**. A coordinated strategy would help avoid unnecessary investments and could be supported by the EIB’s Green Shipping Financing Programme.

Next to environmental action, this specific priority also includes actions to foster Short sea shipping activity in the Atlantic area. This area is of increasing importance in light of Brexit. One concrete action would be to develop a **strategy to better integrate Ireland and continental Europe**. This would include ensuring the ports have the necessary capabilities and infrastructure as well as making Short Sea Shipping feasible for shipping companies. To better understand the circumstances and needs to develop this field, this specific priority includes commissioning a **study to analyse the existing freight flows** looking at both the maritime and hinterland flows.

- ▶ The actions could be implemented through the Atlantic TEN-T Core Network and the Atlantic corridor Stakeholder Forum. This would be facilitated by DG MOVE through

launching a joint event chaired by the coordinators of Motorways of the Sea, the North Sea Mediterranean Corridor, and the Atlantic Corridor. The event would serve as a first initiation of the coordination mechanisms proposed and would help address the ports' and maritime links in the Atlantic sea basin;

To implement these action, partners would be all core ports of the Atlantic and North Sea Mediterranean NSM corridors, as well as comprehensive ports within the range of between Amsterdam and Algeciras. They would also include Member States' representatives as well as shipping and ferry lines, freight forwarders and other logistical stakeholders. While the actions would be spearheaded by DG MOVE, DG MARE and DG REGIO would also need to be involved.

2.2. Blue Jobs of the future and Ocean Awareness

Objective: Increase the competitiveness of the EU Atlantic blue economy

Having the right set of skills is essential to take advantage of innovation and rapidly deploy blue technologies. *Smart specialisation of educational offer based on an industry-led framework can attract young talent in the blue economy, stimulate productivity and increase the competitiveness of the EU Atlantic area.* While specialised clusters already operate at local and regional level, *efficient sea-basin cooperation can facilitate cross-border flow of qualified workers.* Another focus area is ocean literacy because *ocean literate citizen can "adapt their everyday behaviour to make informed and responsible decisions that promote ocean stewardship in a co-creation approach"*⁷.

2.2.1. Quality education and life-long learning

Potential Actions

- ▶ **Identify blue skills gap in maritime communities, develop a skill set for healthy oceans and respond to the needs by mapping actual / future skill sets and linking technological and environmental issues**
- ▶ **Harmonise data collected, build future initiatives on what has been done, use Interreg funds for harmonisation**
- ▶ **Take inventory of the economic organization of the marine sectors in the different Member States, with the roles and responsibilities of each organisation in each region, encourage the structuring of the sector, strengthen the links between these actors and homogenize the approach based on good practice**
- ▶ **Develop a business intelligence scheme: collection of data from businesses, standardise definitions.**
- ▶ **Promote the 'honest broker approach' to have institutions that collaborate both with apprenticeship programmes (job training) and employers to align**

⁷ As stated by the Transatlantic Implementation Strategy drafted by the Marine Working Group Ocean Literacy of the Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance.

future workforce with skills demand

- ▶ **Create a geographic information platform on the existence of job opportunities and needs, utilise both top-down and bottom-up approach**

To ensure quality education and the promotion of blue skills, it will be important to continue the identification of the current **blue skills gap** in maritime communities through a comprehensive mapping of actual and future skills sets. Work in this area has already been undertaken by the MATES project, which focussed on the shipbuilding and marine renewable energy sector. It will now be important to deepen cooperation between stakeholders, building on the results of past projects. A first step would be to **harmonise data collected** across all sectors in the Atlantic region, to be able to build this process on what has been done and avoid duplication. To ensure that the mapping is successful, additional actions to increase cooperation will be necessary.

Firstly, it will be important to create cooperation between businesses and educators. One action would be to **promote the ‘honest broker approach’**, in creating institutions that act as a liaison between employers and apprenticeship programmes. These institutions would help align the future workforce with the skills demand. To facilitate the process, a **business intelligence scheme** would be developed, which would collect data from businesses on their demand and standardise definitions for all actors, thus facilitating exchange.

Secondly, it will also be important to increase regional cooperation, to allow for a flexible and mobile workforce. This specific priority includes an action **to take inventory of the organisations** active in the sector of blue skills in the different Member States. A mapping of the roles and responsibilities across regions would help structuring the sector. Through strengthening the links between these actors, best practices could be shared and approaches harmonised. At the same, the **creation of a geographic information platform** on the existence of job opportunities could assist mobility and help fill short term demand.

- ▶ The ongoing blue economy call of the EMFF includes a blue careers topic. Initiatives launched under this could serve as a starting point for future cooperative actions. Furthermore, the harmonisation of the collected data could be done through an Interreg project to provide a first initiative. Actual implementation will rely on local and national authorities, as well as employers, facilitators and educators. In bringing together the various stakeholders, maritime clusters can play an important role.
- ▶ Regional information on job opportunities can also be built on the work already being done in the scope of the EURES network. Cooperation and exchange would be useful to avoid a duplication of efforts.

2.2.2. Ocean literacy

Potential Actions

- ▶ **Develop an Atlantic Ocean Literacy Implementation Strategy**
- ▶ **Develop an Atlantic Ocean literacy curriculum by 2021**
- ▶ **Create 25 Atlantic Blue schools by 2025**
- ▶ **Implement an ocean literacy component (training) in future blue projects**
- ▶ **Engage citizen through an annual beach cleaning day in the Atlantic**
- ▶ **Engage citizen through a Marine science day**

The key action in the specific priority would be the development of an **Atlantic Ocean Literacy Implementation Strategy**. This would serve as a guiding document on all further ocean literacy actions in the Atlantic. It would include actions on a level of school education, training and general awareness.

Regarding schools, this specific priority includes two actions to increase ocean literacy in the Atlantic. The first step would be the development of an **Atlantic Ocean literacy curriculum** in the near future. The curriculum would detail potential actions schools of the Atlantic area can implement to increase ocean literacy among students. It would serve as a basis to create **25 Atlantic Blue schools by 2025**, inspired by the Escola Azul action in Portugal. Through the previously mentioned strategy, best practices in this field could be shared and help distinguish school with a distinct maritime focus.

To ensure that ocean literacy goes beyond schools, future national and EU blue skills training projects could be encouraged to include an **ocean literacy component** in their activities. Best practices and ideas would be shared through the previously mentioned strategy.

Regarding raising awareness, the strategy could include actions aimed at engaging citizens with the ocean. For example, an **annual beach cleaning** day where citizens of coastal regions are invited to help clean up their beach through joint initiatives and surrounding activities could be implemented. Furthermore, a **marine science day**, where marine research institutions and museums open their doors and facilitate access to the general public could help raise ocean awareness throughout the Atlantic area.

- ▶ The actions could be implemented with or through AORA (Transatlantic Research Alliance) which includes Canada and the USA. It has a separate Ocean literacy Working Group where the European Marine Educators Association, the Canadian Network of Education, DG RTD and IOC UNESCO already exchange on a regular basis.
- ▶ Implementation could be advanced through joint events and funding. For example, the next meeting of the Working Group in April 2019 is back to back with the closing of a RESPONSEABLE ocean literacy project. This event could serve as a start for the development of an Atlantic Ocean literacy Strategy. Furthermore, through the future European Ocean alliance, which will include the European Network of Blue Schools and the European Youth Forum for the Ocean, further coordination and implementation activities could be undertaken.

2.3. Marine renewable energy

Objective: Foster growth in the marine renewable energy sector

The EU Atlantic area is the leader in and the testbed for development of novel marine renewables, especially ocean energy. *Reaching the next step of development, namely the commercial maturity of successful prototypes, is essential to maintain technological leadership, retain talent and provide affordable clean energy.* This thematic area responds to couple of interconnected challenges, namely *increasing access to finances, obtaining the necessary strategic and political support as well as facilitating knowledge sharing and making use of best practices* across the region.

Ocean energy

Objective: Retain Atlantic leadership in ocean energy

Potential Actions

- ▶ Set specific objectives for Atlantic regions in the (ocean energy) through the

SET Plan

- ▶ **Define best sites for MRE farms and adjacent ports across the Atlantic**
- ▶ **Implement an Atlantic feed-in tariff (area for the deployment of technologies)**
- ▶ **Pool together different initiatives covering the EU Atlantic area, including the SET plan actions to avoid duplication of efforts**
- ▶ **Develop a Communication strategy on ocean energy in the Atlantic (through an explicit analysis of performance/ economic study)**
- ▶ **Strengthen the Atlantic Ocean ERA-net further via longer projects and longer funding through facilitating access to test facilities in the future Marinet scheme and identifying flagship projects**
- ▶ **Seek a specific framework for islands through the Clean energy for EU islands initiative to coordinate with the national authorities to allow fast track processes (to cover permission and price issues)**

The Atlantic area is home to many ocean energy test centres and developers. To ensure the area remains on the forefront of development, this specific objective includes an action to set **specific objectives for ocean energy development in the Atlantic** region through the SET Plan for ocean energy. This would allow to steer the development in a concrete direction and allow next steps on the route to commercialisation to be taken. It would furthermore be part of a more general action to **pool together different initiatives** in the area, which would facilitate knowledge sharing and avoid duplication of efforts. A part of the knowledge sharing would entail defining the **best sites for MRE farms** across the Atlantic. This includes both identifying which type of MRE would be the most profitable in a certain area as well as which infrastructure, especially which type of ports, are available in the area to facilitate the deployment of the technology.

To ensure funding availability, the specific priority includes two actions. The first would see the development of an **Atlantic feed-in tariff** built on the model of those already implemented on a national level in some Member States. The second would **strengthen the Atlantic Ocean ERA net** further, through longer projects and funding possibilities. This would also entail facilitating access to test facilities through a future Marinet scheme designed according to the lessons learnt from the past one. The closer cooperation through these networks would also provide the possibility to identify flagship projects for each of the ocean energies, which could help inform and engage the coastal communities in the area of ocean energy.

On a more general level, this specific priority includes developing a **communication strategy on ocean energy**. As part of this, an explicit analysis of the performance through an economic impact study would be conducted. Similar to the flagship projects previously mentioned, this would help inform and engage both policy makers as well as the wider public.

Lastly, the specific priority includes **developing a specific framework for islands** to facilitate ocean energy development. This could be arranged through the Clean Energy for EU Islands Initiative, and would need to be coordinated with both the national and local authorities to allow fast track processes. This would help address both the cost and administrative burden issues.

- ▶ The actions could be initiated and steered through a SET Plan Working Group, under the co-leadership of DG MARE. Actual implementation on the technical level would rely on MRE developers and interest organisations such as Ocean Energy Europe, Ocean Energy Systems, Wavec or MaREI. It would also need the expertise and support of regional and local authorities.

- ▶ A first process to build cooperation could be based on the exchanges and work of the Blue-GIFT project, which involves MRE from across the Atlantic area, such as EMEC, BiMEP, PLOCAN, SEENOE, WavEC, SmartBay Ireland and SEM-REV.

2.4. Clean ocean and resilient coasts

Objective: Improve the health of the Atlantic Ocean

Large Atlantic storms hit equally hard all EU Atlantic coasts. Erosion has a detrimental effect on large parts of the coast and will likely be exacerbated through climate change. To *reduce the environmental and humanitarian impacts and protect risk areas*, there is *need for joint action*, which requires cooperation among various actors. Another major problem that benefits from transnational is marine litter. Valuable materials are polluting Atlantic beaches and damaging the environment instead of being pumped back into the economy. *Coastal regions and citizen can develop an Atlantic response to marine litter through a system of coordinated actions*, adding to the ongoing initiatives in the framework of OSPAR and the Marine Directive.

2.4.1. Coastal protection

Potential Actions

- ▶ **Create an EU strategy for observation of coastal line evolution, built on local points of contact that work in a coordinated way, using common language and indicators**
- ▶ **Establish research projects to strengthen knowledge on:**
 - **Identification of tools for measuring hydro sedimentary dynamics**
 - **Strengthening the network of wave recorders and tide-gauges (inside and outside ports)**
 - **Measuring the impact of marine activities on hydro sedimentary dynamics**
 - **Social acceptability of risks related to coastal erosion**
- ▶ **Develop test spaces, pilot areas, and experimentation on coastal protection**
- ▶ **Take inventory of regional adaptation strategies at all levels, share best practices**
- ▶ **Create information campaigns for new residents and property developers in coastal areas (natural evolution of the coastal line, roles of vegetation and natural habitats, protection and emergency plans)**
- ▶ **Educate younger people through school programmes on natural evolution of the coastal line**

The flagship action of this specific priority would be the creation of an **EU strategy for the observation of coastal line evolution**. This would be built around local points of contact, using common language and indicators. As a first step, this would include **taking inventory of regional adaptation strategies**, in order to take stock of what has already been done and share potential best practices.

To support this strategy, **research projects** on several issues would be launched, to strengthen the available knowledge base. Potential research topics include identifying tools for measuring hydro sedimentary dynamics, strengthening the network of hydrographers and tide-gauges (inside and outside ports), measuring the impact of marine activities on hydro

sedimentary dynamics, and researching the social acceptability of risks related to coastal erosion. To further support this, this specific priority includes and action to **develop test spaces** and pilot areas. This would allow to conduct experiments on different methods of coastal protection.

At the same time, it will be important to ensure the public is aware and engaged on the issue. One action would be to **educate younger people** on the natural evolution of the coastline and the potential dangers of coastal erosion. This could be done in the framework of the blue school programme proposed under specific priority 2.2. A second action would be to **create information campaigns** for both new residents and property developers in coastal area. This would inform on the natural evolution of the coastal line, the roles of vegetation and natural habitats and protection and emergency plans.

- ▶ The efforts of DG ENV through its LIFE programme on coastal erosion present a good starting point to implement the actions. Through coordination of past project participants with both DG ENV and DG MARE, a first step towards a joint strategy on coastal observation. This would also need to involve local and national stakeholders, such as CEREMA in France.
- ▶ The efforts of Atlantic cooperation on MSP, launched in light of the MSP directive, could also provide a platform for exchange and cooperation, as well as the Natura 2000 (the largest international network of protected areas including coastal and marine habitats) especially when designating test spaces or protected areas.

2.4.2. Fight against marine litter

Potential Actions⁸

- ▶ **Develop a pilot project of ‘litter-free’ coastal communities, integrating marine litter removal, collection, waste management, recycling, re-use and awareness raising. Develop the project across multiple Atlantic communities**
- ▶ **Make use of available tools to identify hotspots, work with local communities in the respective areas to remove litter from the ocean, pilot new approaches in doing so**
- ▶ **Commission a research study to quantify economic impact of marine litter**
- ▶ **Promote transition towards a circular economy based business actions, develop incentives and environmental certification schemes**
- ▶ **Create joint actions to promote a public perception of the problem, e.g. beach days where communities meet to clean the beach**
- ▶ **Encourage business opportunities to develop innovative product design for marine litter prevention, for example through increased recyclability and reuse of products and avoidance of micro-plastics**

⁸ The actions on marine litter must be done in coordination with the authorities in the respective countries which are implementing the OSPAR Regional Action Plan against marine litter that is in place since 2014.

► **Encourage harmonised approach to marine litter monitoring and assessment between the communities**

A major action under this specific priority would be the development of **litter-free coastal communities**. Within these communities, marine litter removal, waste collection and management, recycling, preparation for re-use and raising awareness would be united under a common scheme. This project could be implemented across different communities in the Atlantic Member States. This would firstly allow the sharing of knowledge and minimize duplication, and secondly help raise awareness for marine litter related issues specific to the regions. Within these communities as well as beyond, **joint actions to promote a public perception** of the problem could be organised. For example, this could be beach days, which are also mentioned under the ocean literacy specific priority, where communities meet to clean the beach.

There are currently already some ongoing projects that map marine litter across the Atlantic. Building on these projects, the specific priority includes and action to use available tools to **identify litter hotspots**, and subsequently work together with communities that are close to the hotspots to remove litter from the ocean. This could also help pilot new approaches to litter removal.

On a research side, this priority includes commissioning a **research study to quantify the economic impact of marine litter**, which could help raise awareness to the gravity of the problem and entice authorities, industry and consumers to act. To further motivate business action, **circular economy based business models** could be promoted, through the development of incentives and environmental certification themes. Business opportunities for small scale waste management operations or large scale investments in waste management and waste water treatment could be further enhanced, and companies encouraged to develop new markets for innovative multi-use alternatives, new materials and better designed and more circular products.

- Implementation of these action would rely to a large part on local communities. However, ongoing projects such as the MARELITT, and the relevant involved actors provide a first community of stakeholders. Furthermore, conferences and workshops taking place within the scope of the EU action on plastics in circular economy could serve as a starting point for first exchanges between stakeholders. For example, actions in the framework of recently agreed new measures on single-use plastics and on port reception facilities could be beneficial to engage with various stakeholders.

On a more general level, the AORA Ecosystem Approach to Ocean Health & Stressors Working Group could also provide a platform for exchange on launching actions to increase overall ocean health through the reduction of marine litter.

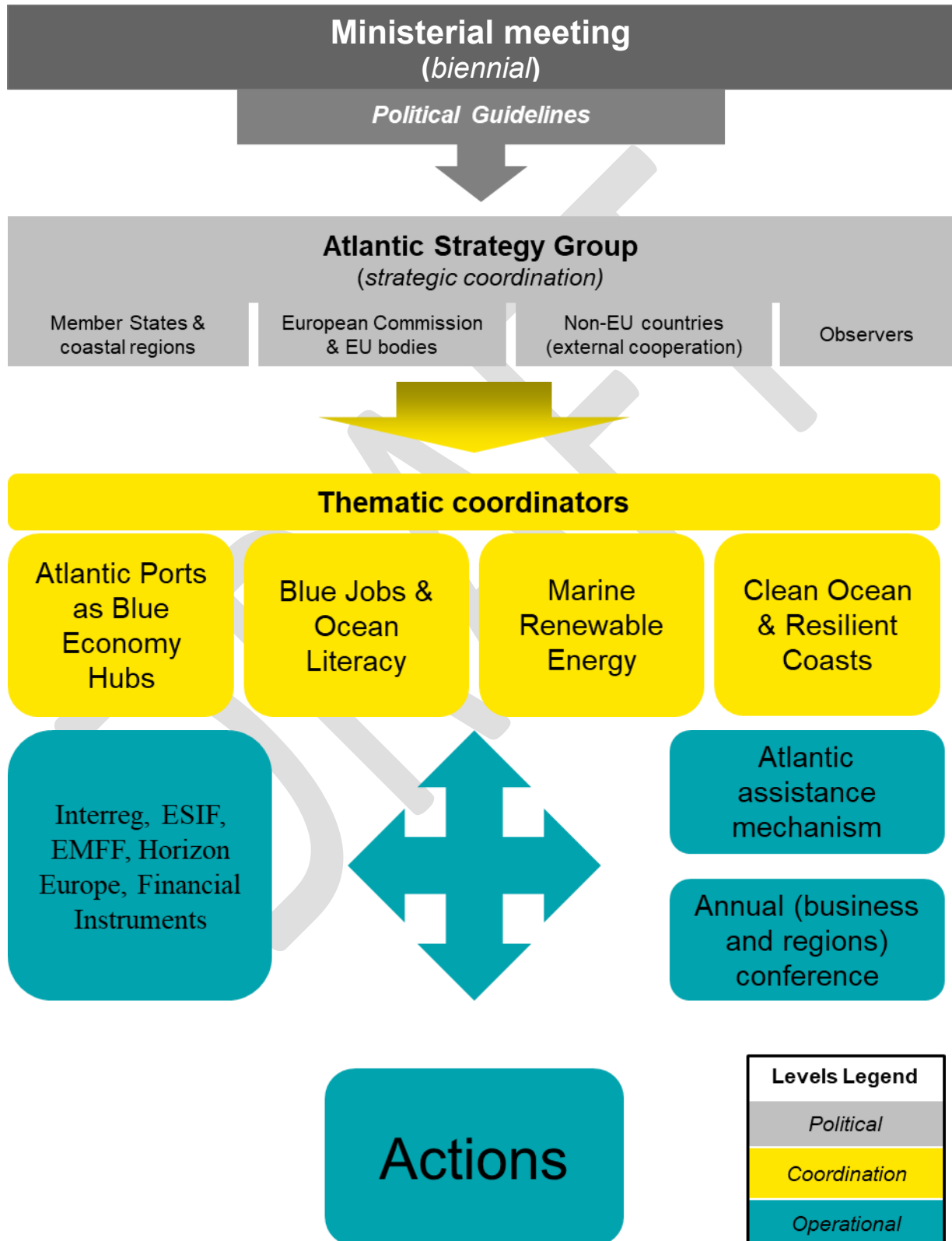
3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN

A new governance framework will support the design and implementation of the actions, and catalyze engagement of relevant stakeholders across sectors, coastal regions and countries. The thematic priority areas will be advanced through dedicated action groups led by a coordinator.

Strengthening the governance can include a *biennial political forum* where ministers responsible for maritime affairs will define the broad political guidelines, take stock of the progress of the implementation and emphasize ownership of the initiative. *Operational coordination* will be ensured through the Atlantic Strategy Group that will better involve representatives of the coastal regions and act as an *executive body* for the action plan. Non-EU countries, coastal regions with access to the EU Atlantic area and relevant regional organisations can also be invited to join the Atlantic Strategy Group. Representatives of the relevant funding and financing bodies can be invited as observers. *Thematic coordinators* will

effectively steer the thematic priority areas, shape flagship actions and follow closely their implementation while at the same time working together with the Atlantic assistance mechanism to support the development of further actions.

While the exact modalities, roles and rules of procedure in the governance bodies will be subject to discussion within the current Atlantic Strategy Group, an illustration of the relationship between the new governance bodies, the key actors and the four thematic focus areas is outlined below.



3.1. MOBILISING INVESTMENT

As with the original Atlantic action plan, the AAP 2.0 will not have a dedicated funding instrument. To ensure a successful implementation of the identified actions, it will be necessary to mobilise investment and seek other sources of funding, notably through strategic alignment of EU and national funding relevant to the thematic priority areas and actions.

The EU Atlantic countries and coastal regions should commit to drawing on this funding to implement the action plan. In particular, **relevant country-specific, cross-border and transnational programmes from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for 2021- 2027** can provide significant resources and a wide range of tools and technical options to support the action plan. The role of a new **Interreg Atlantic Area programme** would be crucial to support the implementation and potentially finance the governance arrangements of the Atlantic strategy.

Impact-oriented investments in blue growth actions could be accelerated through the future **EMFF Investment platform** that aims to facilitate access to investment readiness support for SMEs and start-ups based or operating in the EU Atlantic area.

Synergy and complementarities with **ESIF funding and other funding schemes** will need to be sought, notably with: *Horizon Europe, the COSME programme, the Connecting Europe Facility, the Erasmus and the LIFE programmes*. Furthermore, funding may be available under the **European Fund from Strategic Investments, the European Investment Bank and other international financial institutions**. In addition, national and regional budgetary resources will also mobilised, in particular in the non-EU countries covered by the Atlantic Strategy and its action plan. These funds and instruments should bring significant leverage and attract funding from private investors.

There also exist a number of **programmes on the national level** which could help implement actions under the new action plan, as the mid-term review found they have already been active in the area before. It will be up to the thematic coordinator along with the Atlantic assistance mechanism to identify the most suitable ones.

3.2. IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Improving communication about the action plan and the overarching Atlantic strategy is important for the successful implementation. The **Atlantic assistance mechanism**, funded by the European Commission, will have a key role in **devising and coordinating a consistent communication approach** in the EU Atlantic area and its coastal regions through a **set of visible initiatives: webpage, social media, annual stakeholder conferences, national events**. In addition, the assistance mechanism will **amplify the efforts of funding institutions to inform** the Atlantic stakeholder community about open funding and financing opportunities and support them to access private investment. Keeping track of the genuine Atlantic projects that received funding and implement the action plan is another key task that will require **maintenance and regular update of the Atlantic maritime datahub⁹**.

⁹ <https://maritime.easme-web.eu/>

Improving communication and widening the support base for the action plan will involve **working with well-known networks for engagement with specialised stakeholder groups**, such as the European Enterprise Network, FARNET, regional and local clusters, and funding programmes.

4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK (INDICATORS)

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework is necessary to measure the success of the new action plan and help to:

- identify whether the plan is being applied on the ground as expected;
- address any implementation problems of an intervention; and/or
- identify whether further action is required to ensure that it can achieve its intended objectives.

Evaluation will be based on the work of the objective coordinators and the action group leaders, who will report on progress towards the agreed targets. While the prime measure of success is the implementation of the action plan, a set of **core indicators, in line with the proposed overall intervention logic** (*presented in an annex*), describe in detail what evidence needs to be collected. These indicators aim to serve the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the progress made towards the desired objectives under each thematic priority area. These indicators have been categorised according to three levels: impact, outcome and output.

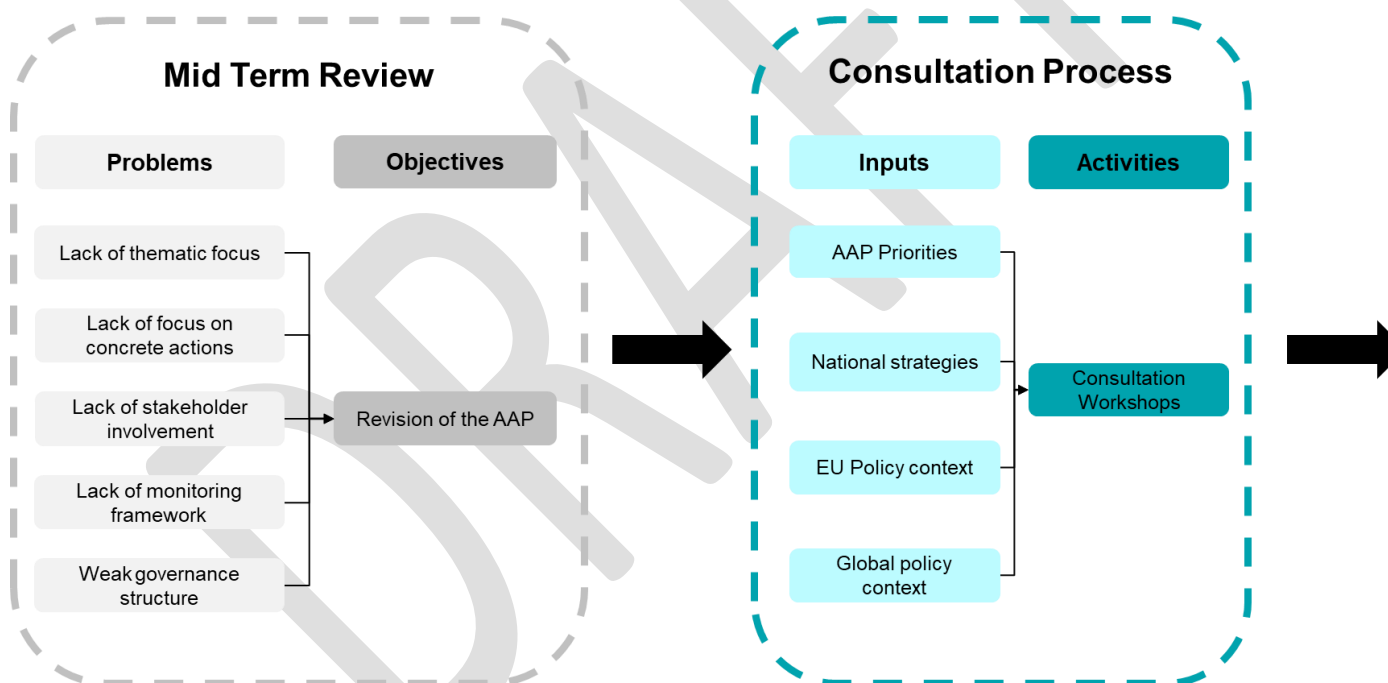
The proposed indicators should be able to capture the changes that the action plan is expected to bring about. The countries and regions part of the Atlantic strategy will organise an annual forum to take stock of achievements and progress made, consult on revised actions and, where appropriate, develop new approaches.

5. CONCLUSION

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse the action plan and the orientation set out in this Communication. The Commission also invites the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee to provide opinions on this initiative.

ANNEX

INTERVENTION LOGIC



AAP 2.0

Outputs – Concrete Actions

- Create blue hubs of excellence, ports acting as a catalyst for the blue economy through developing and financing local exchange and cooperation mechanisms
- Create conditions to attract new stakeholders in ports, encourage partnerships, install incubators for start-ups of the blue economy, allocate dedicated areas to industry
- Educate and include citizens regarding port development activities
- Increase communication and availability of data on marine exploration, especially related to the economic potential and the environmental aspects
- Share best practices through the Atlantic Port Forum, exchange ideas and tackle problems jointly
- Expand data collections beyond traditional (logistics) data, including employment and other social factors, bottom-up approach, show results to the public to generate support

- Creation of 'Atlantic Port Forum' under the TENT-T 'Atlantic corridor Stakeholder Forum'
- Development of a strategy to better integrate Ireland to continental Europe and for improving short sea shipping links in the Atlantic area
- Conducting a study to analyse the existing freight flows (maritime – hinterland)
- A global Atlantic strategy on LNG (to avoid unnecessary investments) supported by the EIB's Green Shipping Financing Programme
- Development of eco-incentives schemes (Portugal and France are working on a common scheme) to be funded under Interreg or CEF / H2020 for related projects
- Creation of a 'Green port' network by 2025

- Identify blue skills gap in maritime communities, develop a skill set for healthy oceans and respond to the needs by mapping actual / future skill sets and linking technological and environmental issues
- Harmonise data collected, build future initiatives on what has been done, use Interreg funds for harmonisation
- Take inventory of the economic organization of the marine sectors in the different Member States, with the roles and responsibilities of each organisation in each region, encourage the structuring of the sector, strengthen the links between these actors and homogenize the approach based on good practice
- Develop a business intelligence scheme: collection of data from businesses, standardise definitions, combined global jobs database
- Promote the 'honest broker approach' to have institutions that collaborate both with apprenticeship programmes (job training) and employers to align future workforce with skills demand
- Create a geographic information platform on the existence of job opportunities and needs, utilise both top-down and bottom-up approach

- Development of Ocean Literacy Atlantic Implementation Strategy
- Development of Atlantic Ocean literacy curriculum by 2021
- 25 Atlantic Blue schools by 2025
- Implementing ocean literacy component (training) in future blue projects
- Engaging citizen: Annual beach cleaning day in the Atlantic
- Engaging citizen: Marine science day

- Specific objectives for Atlantic regions in the (ocean energy) SET Plan
- Definition of best sites for MRE farms and adjacent ports
- Atlantic feed-in tariff (area for the deployment of technologies)
- Pooling together different initiatives covering the EU Atlantic area, including the SET plan actions to avoid duplication of efforts
- Development of a Communication strategy on ocean energy in the Atlantic (through an explicit analysis of performance/ economic study)
- Atlantic Ocean ERA-net could be further strengthened (via longer projects and longer funding) in the future to facilitate access to test facilities in the future Marinert scheme (maintain/ extent) and identify flagship projects
- Through the Clean energy for EU islands initiative seek a specific framework for islands/ coordinate with the national authorities to allow fast track processes (to cover permission and price issues)

- Create an EU strategy for observation of coastal line evolution, built on local points of contact that work in a coordinated way, using common language and indicators
- Establish research projects to strengthen knowledge on:
 - Identification of tools for measuring hydrosedimentary dynamics
 - Strengthening the network of houlographers, tide-gauges (inside and outside ports) and sharing of knowledge
 - Measuring the impact of marine activities on hydrosedimentary dynamics
 - Social acceptability of risks related to coastal erosion
- Develop test spaces, pilot areas, and experimentation on coastal protection, out in place an adapted and more flexible regulatory framework for litigation prevention.
- Take inventory of territorial adaptation strategies at all levels, share best practices
- Create information campaigns for new residents and property developers on coastal areas (natural evolution of the coastal line, roles of vegetation and natural habitats, protection and emergency plans)
- Educate younger people through school programmes on natural evolution of the coastal line

- Develop a pilot project of 'litter-free' coastal communities, integrating marine litter removal, collection, waste management, recycling and awareness raising. Develop the project across multiple Atlantic communities.
- Make use of available tools to identify hotspots, work with local communities in the respective areas to remove litter from the ocean, pilot new approaches in doing so
- Commission a research study to quantify economic impact of marine litter
- Promote circular economy based business actions, develop incentives and environmental certification schemes
- Create joint actions to promote a public perception of the problem, e.g. beach days where communities meet to clean the beach

Outcomes

Impact

Atlantic Ports are catalysts for business and platforms for marine exploration

Atlantic Ports are gateways for trade in the Atlantic

The Atlantic area has quality education and lifelong learning opportunities

The Atlantic Area has high ocean literacy

The Atlantic area is a leader in ocean energy

The Atlantic coast is protected

The Atlantic area acts against marine litter

Atlantic Ports are blue economy hubs

The Atlantic area develops jobs of the future and ocean awareness

The Atlantic Area develops Marine Renewable Energies

The Atlantic Area is green and resilient