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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Action Plan for a Maritime Strategy in the Atlantic area**

**Delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**

(Text with EEA relevance)

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The marine and maritime sectors that make up the 'blue economy' have the potential to provide 7 million jobs in Europe by 2020. These jobs will be found not only in emerging sectors, such as offshore renewable energy, but also through revitalising traditional maritime industries. The Atlantic area can make a significant contribution to this 'blue growth'. At the same time, the environmental and ecological stability of Europe's largest and most important ecosystem needs to be safeguarded for future generations.

This Action Plan therefore sets out priorities for research and investment to drive the 'blue economy' forwards in the Atlantic area. The five Atlantic Member States<sup>1</sup> and their regions can draw on the Action Plan to help create sustainable and inclusive growth in coastal areas. The Action Plan builds on the Commission's Atlantic Strategy<sup>2</sup>, and is the result of consultations conducted through the Atlantic Forum. The Forum has enabled Member States, the European Parliament, regional and local authorities, civil society and industry to contribute to the development of the Action Plan and consider response to the challenges of delivering growth, reducing the Atlantic area's carbon footprint, ensuring sustainable use of the sea's natural resources, setting up effective responses to threats and emergencies and implementing an ecosystem based management approach in Atlantic waters. The Forum also drew on input from stakeholders through a series of workshops, an on-line call for suggestions, and contributions provided by Member States and regional authorities.

The timing of the Action Plan fits well with the development of the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)<sup>3</sup>. The thematic objectives of the CSF have broad relevance to the Atlantic Strategy, notably:

- supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy;
- increasing the capacity for research and innovation through education and training and bringing industry closer to research; and

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<sup>1</sup> France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> COM 782/2011 of 21 November 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Funds (ESF), the European Agricultural and Rural Development Fund (EARDF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

- enhancing the competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), such as those prevalent in the EU's tourism, fishing and aquaculture industries.

The Action Plan is intended to have a strong signalling effect for regions and the private sector. They should begin consideration of where they could work together, including on a cross-border basis, to implement the agreed priorities. The process of developing the Action Plan, conducted in partnership with the five Atlantic Member States, has encouraged stakeholders, including regions, port cities and the private sector, to consider how they could take action to grow the blue economy and contribute to sustainable development in the Atlantic area. This should help to attract investment and private sector activity into the blue economy and, in doing so, help to revitalise coastal regions in the Atlantic area.

Successful implementation of the Action Plan needs to be underpinned by a combination of efforts in three areas to enable the blue economy to reach its potential in the Atlantic area – targeted investment, increasing research capacity and higher skills:

- **investment:** investment will need to be targeted towards innovation, technological capabilities and smart specialisation strategies with SMEs being particularly important. Effective use of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in these areas is key to achieving the overarching objectives of growth, competitiveness and jobs. Investment in infrastructure may also be needed. For example, vessel technology and marine infrastructure such as ports and marinas have an important role to play in supporting the blue economy. The Atlantic Forum has identified their potential for providing new services, for instance, to the growing cruise tourism market and to offer assembly and maintenance stations for new offshore installations. The EU has already provided considerable financial support to this process, including complementary loan finance from the European Investment Bank. The ESIF will in future allow greater coherence between EU funding mechanisms, though finance for infrastructure or tourism investment will still need to come largely from the private sector;
- **research:** ocean governance, the sustainable exploitation and management of marine resources, safety at sea, marine environmental protection (including the designation of coastal and high-seas Marine Protected Areas) require not only data and an understanding of how ecosystems function and interact, but also an ability to model, forecast and predict.. This approach facilitates the assessment and mitigation of risk. It encourages investment and reduces operational costs. Ocean observation, mapping and forecasting are therefore critical for the sustainable growth of economic activity in the Atlantic area and for furthering our understanding of the oceanic processes in the Atlantic which play an important role in determining our climate. Making this information widely available is critical. There is growing evidence of the significant push to innovation that better access to public sector information can provide.
- **higher skills:** shortage of a suitably-skilled workforce for certain sectors of the marine and maritime industry must be tackled if the blue economy is to reach its potential, both by upskilling the existing workforce and by attracting young people into the sector. This is particularly the case for emerging fields such as renewable energy, but is also true for more traditional sectors such as shipbuilding, fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing, where innovation,

specialisation and adaptation to new technologies are needed to compete in the global market.

## 2. ACTION PLAN

Discussions with Member States and feedback from the Atlantic Forum have resulted in the following Action Plan, which should be implemented through to 2020. These action areas are designed to meet the challenges of the Atlantic strategy and deliver smart, sustainable and socially inclusive growth and jobs. This Action Plan is not intended to be exhaustive. It comprises an indicative set of action areas for research and investment to tackle common challenges. Much is already being done by the Member States in question, both individually and collectively, to develop their marine and maritime economies. This Action Plan therefore identifies areas where there is scope for additional collective work. Addressing these priorities can promote innovation, contribute to the protection and improvement of the Atlantic's marine and coastal environment, improve connectivity and create synergies for a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development.

This Action Plan is an invitation to the private sector, researchers, regional and national public bodies and other actors to start designing projects that respond to the priorities.

### **Priority 1: Promote entrepreneurship and innovation**

Specific objectives of this priority include:

- *sharing knowledge between higher education organisations, companies and research centres*

Increasing the capacity of the Atlantic area to innovate through **research and technology** by encouraging:

- (a) networking and co-operative research between research centres, higher education and business in the Member States;
- (b) transferring knowledge and insights, as well as skills between higher education, business and research, including through regional, national and cross-border maritime clusters and technology platforms.

- *enhancement of competitiveness and innovation capacities in the maritime economy of the Atlantic area*

Improving **skills** in traditional Atlantic industries, such as shipbuilding, aquaculture and fisheries, as well as in the emerging sectors of the blue economy by:

- (a) putting in place educational and training measures, including cross-border programmes and mutual recognition of national education and training programmes;
- (b) raising awareness of sea-related careers, generating an enthusiasm for maritime culture and careers among young people and addressing other barriers that discourage young people from embarking on a maritime

career<sup>4</sup>; for example through sail-training, advanced technology courses and other joint Atlantic initiatives.

- *fostering adaptation and diversification of economic activities by promoting the potential of the Atlantic area*

Supporting the reform of the **Common Fisheries Policy** and revitalising the EU's **aquaculture** industry through:

- (a) developing improved multi-species modelling, fishing gear and related techniques and technologies so as to minimise carbon footprint, seabed damage, discards and by-catch;
- (b) sharing information on tools that improve fisheries managers' understanding of the socio-economic and ecosystem impacts of management measures;
- (c) carrying out research to improve the growth, productivity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability of aquaculture (including offshore aquaculture) and the industry's ability to respond to market needs;
- (d) improving the market position of EU-sourced fisheries and aquaculture products by improving processing, labelling, traceability and certification.

## **Priority 2: Protect, secure and develop the potential of the Atlantic marine and coastal environment**

Specific objectives of this priority include:

- *improving maritime safety and security*

Reinforcing the **safety and security** of seafarers, coastal populations, property and ecosystems by:

- (a) evaluating and extending as necessary existing warning, reporting and response mechanisms for invasive and harmful marine species and foster exchanges of best practice on how to deal with such threats;
- (b) supporting initiatives undertaken by Member States in the Atlantic, including risk assessments, coordinated response mechanisms and investments in state-of-the-art equipment that contribute appropriately to enhancing coordinated preparedness and responses to marine threats, natural disasters, marine accidents, spills of oil and hazardous material or trafficking<sup>5</sup>;
- (c) developing, testing and deploying new technologies to improve the inspection of vessels and enhance the safety and security of ports and shipping by better integrating data from satellites and from air, sea and

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<sup>4</sup> a number of recommendations on this issue were delivered to the Commission on 9 June 2011 by The Task Force on Maritime Employment and Competitiveness..

<sup>5</sup> Existing initiatives include the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre - Narcotics (MAOC-N) and the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) coordinated by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the EU (Frontex).

land-based surveillance facilities and innovative *in-situ* instruments to improve situational awareness in the maritime domain;

- (d) helping to deliver regional sea-basin-related information services within the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE), based on agreed EU-wide standards and experience gained by Member States in pilot projects.

– *exploring and protecting marine waters and coastal zones*

Developing a **European Atlantic ocean observing and predictive capability**, based on existing structures, platforms and mechanisms to support the implementation of EU policies, reduce costs for industry, public authorities and research institutions, stimulate innovation and reduce uncertainty in the behaviour of the Atlantic ocean and the impact of climate change by:

- (a) using existing systems and mechanisms to develop and maintain a sustainable integrated programme for surveying and observing the coasts, seabed and water column, covering the waters of EU Member States, Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories from the coasts to the deep ocean;
- (b) developing new instruments and platforms for ocean observation and ecosystem monitoring (including seabed mapping) that increase the number of parameters that can be measured automatically, lower the costs of observation and accelerate the dissemination of data to users;
- (c) contributing to a more effective stewardship, cataloguing and distribution of interoperable marine data and a multi-resolution seabed map through contributions to a European Marine Observation and Data Network;
- (d) developing a network of coastal oceanographic forecasting systems (including risk assessments) that build on the Copernicus marine service.

Contributing to the development of tools and strategies to address **global climate change** issues, including mitigation and adaptation strategies by:

- (a) supporting an assessment of the carbon footprint of the blue economy in the Atlantic area;
- (b) develop a platform for exchanging best practice on emissions reduction and energy efficiency;
- (c) developing co-operative partnerships to identify and monitor the impacts of global climate change on marine activities, ecosystems and coastal communities in the Atlantic area, including developing better predictive and risk assessment capabilities.

Supporting marine environmental protection and efforts to achieve "**good environmental status**" of Atlantic waters by 2020<sup>6</sup> by:

- (a) continuing to build on national plans, OSPAR processes and Natura 2000 sites to help develop a coherent network of Marine Protected Areas for Europe's Atlantic coast by agreeing on good practices and shared

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<sup>6</sup>

As set out in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)

evaluation processes that could also benefit Macaronesia and the Outermost Regions in the Caribbean;

- (b) encouraging further cooperation between Member States, including through OSPAR, for example on coordinated and integrated monitoring programmes and joint action to restore ecosystems.

Assessing the social and economic value and functioning of the Atlantic's **ecosystems and biodiversity** in order to support decision-making.

Contributing to Member States **maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal management** processes, for example by sharing best practice and facilitating cross-border coordination.

– *sustainable management of marine resources*

Developing a better understanding of the technical feasibility, economic viability and environmental impact of **mining for minerals** in the Atlantic Ocean, and develop and test innovative mining technologies.

Laying the foundations for a sustainable, high-value-added European **marine biotechnology** industry by:

- (a) exploring the seafloor and assessing its genetic make-up, biodiversity and potential for providing material for the biotechnology industry, taking account of applicable international law and the need to protect the marine environment;
- (b) strengthening links between research and industry in the Atlantic area in order to develop biobanks and identify markets for innovative marine bioproducts (biomedicine, tissue engineering, pharmaceuticals, industrial enzymes) and focusing research on delivering industrial processes for manufacturing them.

– *exploitation of the renewable energy potential of the Atlantic area's marine and coastal environment*

Considering ways to accelerate the deployment of sustainable **offshore renewable energy** by:

- (a) encouraging assessment and mapping of the potential of the European Atlantic Ocean's energy resource and determining how to mitigate the environmental and navigational impact of the construction, operation and decommissioning of installations as part of regional Smart Specialisation Strategies for offshore renewable energy;
- (b) contributing to a European electricity transmission system that allows the balancing of loads between national systems and provides better links between offshore and onshore energies;
- (c) promoting research, development and demonstration of technologies for the construction and maintenance of renewable energy installations for offshore wind, wave, tidal and biomass energies including integration with desalination plants and multipurpose offshore platforms;
- (d) encouraging the harnessing of the special geological, oceanographic and meteorological conditions of the Outermost Regions of the Atlantic in

order to help them achieve energy self-sufficiency and meet carbon emission reduction targets.

### **Priority 3: Improve accessibility and connectivity**

Specific objectives of this priority include:

- *promoting cooperation between ports*

Facilitating the development of **ports** as hubs of the blue economy by:

- (a) facilitating upgrades of infrastructure to improve connectivity with the hinterland, enhance intermodality and promote fast turnaround of ships through measures such as provision of shore side electricity, equipping ports with liquefied natural gas refuelling capacity and tackling administrative bottlenecks;
- (b) enabling ports to diversify into new business activities such as the maintenance of offshore renewable energy installations or tourism;
- (c) analysing and promoting port networks and short-sea shipping routes between European ports, within archipelagos and to the coast of Africa through initiatives such as Motorways of the Sea to increase seaborne traffic.

### **Priority 4: Create a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development**

Specific objectives of this priority include:

- *fostering better knowledge of social challenges in the Atlantic area*

Exchanging best practice on enhancing the health, social inclusion and well-being of coastal populations and developing appropriate and usable marine socio-economic indicators to measure, compare and follow trends in the development of the blue economy;

- *preserving and promoting the Atlantic's cultural heritage*

Combating seasonality and improving prospects for SMEs through diversification of **maritime and coastal tourism** products and development of niche markets by investing in:

- (a) marine sport, marinas and nautical leisure activities;
- (b) port services, including those for cruise passengers;
- (c) identifying and promoting cultural and natural attractions of the Atlantic seaboard such as artisanal fishing, local cuisine and maritime heritage;
- (d) protecting and restoring tourist attractions, including coastal and underwater cultural attractions and maritime heritage sites, with archaeological, ecological or historical value<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> following as appropriate the principles of the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage;

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.1. Funding channels

The timing of this Action Plan will enable Member States to take account of the priorities identified in their Partnership Agreements with the Commission that are to be negotiated before the end of 2013.

- The 2014-2020 Partnership Agreements for the ESIF are an important funding channel that Member States can use, where appropriate, to implement the priorities of the Action Plan. Partnership Agreements should take into account relevant sea-basin strategies, such as the Atlantic Strategy, when identifying priority areas for cooperation. They provide an opportunity to identify the main development needs and development potential of the blue economy in the Atlantic Member States and their coastal regions. They also allow Member States to put in place arrangements that will ensure coordination between ESIF and other funding sources. National authorities in Member States responsible for the negotiation of Partnership Agreements and the authorities responsible for drawing up operational programmes therefore have an important role to play in the implementation process of the Action Plan over the coming months. The Action Plan can also be a source of inspiration to those drawing up operational programmes at national and regional level, subject to the needs of the programme area.
- Furthermore, the Action Plan will serve to guide the Commission itself in implementing directly managed funds, including Horizon 2020, LIFE+, COSME and the directly managed elements of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Indeed, Horizon 2020 will be a key support to the implementation of the Action Plan and is already considering "blue growth" as one of its focus areas for research in the coming years. It can support the blue growth agenda to explore and maximise the potential of the diversity of marine life, to harvest deep-sea resources in a sustainable way and develop new ocean observation technologies. This will help boost the marine and maritime economy and the marine environment by accelerating the transfer of research and innovation into the economy.
- Well-targeted public investment can and should trigger private investment and business initiatives. Member States may also wish to approach the private sector in order to explore complementary involvement and finance.
- In addition, the European Investment Bank Group (EIB Group<sup>8</sup>) stands ready to mobilise its financing tools and expertise in support of suitable projects in order to further the Action Plan's priorities. The EIB can extend support to both public and private sector activities in the form of lending, blending<sup>9</sup> and technical advice. It offers a variety of financing instruments, ranging from investment loans for both direct and indirect financing to equity funds via the EIF, in order to support activities across a range of sizes.

In the context of budgetary restraint and the need for authorities in the Atlantic area to consider a range of development priorities it should be stressed that the process of implementing the Action Plan remains voluntary, but should be in line with the

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<sup>8</sup> European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Investment Fund (EIF)

<sup>9</sup> Blending: EIB loan finance to complement grant support from either EU or other public sources

implementing priorities set out in the Partnership Agreements of the five Member States concerned. All projects that are submitted to relevant authorities in response to the Action Plan will need to comply with the criteria established in relevant funding regulations. Under the shared management of EU funds, the decision on whether or not to take up a specific project will be taken by the competent managing authority.

### **3.2. Intelligent collaboration**

The Action Plan identifies opportunities for Member States, regional and local authorities and EU institutions to work together where necessary to meet the challenge of sustainable growth. But such collective work is not, of course, the only way in which the Action Plan can be implemented. Specific actions and projects at national, regional and local level can also play an important part in delivering on the Action Plan. Where appropriate, cooperation between different country-specific programmes should be fostered.

Working together in a targeted way can bring a range of additional benefits, not least in sharing information, sharing costs, sharing results and sharing best practice, as well as generating ideas for further areas of collaboration. More specifically, Member States and regions can work with the support of different funding sources to develop joint projects or other approaches.

The Horizon 2020 programme and other EU programmes and funding instruments can support cooperation in research by facilitating projects proposed by consortia of public and private institutions. For example, these projects can test different solutions to common problems or compare the performance of different technologies. France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom are already participating in a number of joint projects, research networks, technology platforms, and a joint programming initiative on Healthy Seas and Oceans. These mechanisms offer a way for Member States to work together in ways that can be reinforced by Horizon 2020. Establishing an intra-European coordination and cooperation could also be the foundation of enhanced transatlantic research cooperation.

Joint projects and actions are not restricted to research. European Territorial Cooperation (for example through the Atlantic Area Programme), which will be funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), provides a mechanism for neighbouring regions and cities from different EU Member States to work together and learn from each other through projects that explore options to cooperate on common challenges. The Erasmus for All programme will provide opportunities for partnerships in education and training

Working together can also involve collaborative actions to exchange information and good practice. Initiatives such as Copernicus<sup>10</sup>, or "Marine Knowledge 2020"<sup>11</sup> can provide a framework. For instance, understanding how neighbouring countries or regions with similar oceanographic or meteorological conditions tackle coastal erosion can help drive operational efficiency. Knowing what has worked and what has not worked elsewhere can prevent the same mistakes being made twice. Good

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<sup>10</sup> Copernicus, formerly Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (or GMES) is a European satellite system for monitoring the Earth (<http://copernicus.eu>)

<sup>11</sup> Marine Knowledge 2020 is an EU project bringing together marine data from different sources with the aim of helping industry, public authorities and researchers find the data and make more effective use of them to develop new products and services as well as improving our understanding of how the seas behave ([http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/marine\\_knowledge\\_2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/marine_knowledge_2020/index_en.htm))

practice can be exchanged through dedicated workshops, staff exchanges or internet fora.

### **3.3. Support**

In order to implement the Action Plan successfully at national and regional level, an appropriate implementation mechanism would enhance the engagement of national, regional and local actors and enable progress to be monitored. The Atlantic Forum has provided useful lessons in organising dialogue and coordination. To move forward with implementation, it will be important to continue that dialogue with Member States and regions, including the private sector. Implementing the Action Plan will not only depend on the public sector, it will also depend on the extent to which the private sector becomes involved.

Any implementation mechanism should be light, tightly-focused and draw on good practices that have been successful in other sea-basin strategies by:

- providing political commitment and oversight;
- raising awareness of the Action Plan and its objectives;
- promoting private sector buy-in;
- providing an evaluation and assessment of progress.

It could also:

- give guidance to stakeholders and potential project promoters;
- enable cooperation across the Atlantic area;
- liaise with managing authorities of EU funding programmes;
- bring together possible project partners to develop activities that would respond to the priorities set out in the Action Plan;
- identify potential funding sources for projects at both EU and national level.

The implementation mechanism for the Action Plan should be defined in consultation with Member States and stakeholders before the end of 2013. In order to encourage further networking and exchanges of best practice in project development and implementation, the Commission may organise Atlantic stakeholder conferences.

## **4. TAKING STOCK OF PROGRESS**

In order to maintain momentum over the period 2014-2020, it will be important to understand how the implementation of the Action Plan is contributing to achieving the EU's wider jobs, growth and sustainability objectives. We will want to understand, for example, whether we have been able to deliver a truly predictive capacity for the major risks and changes to the dynamics of the North Atlantic's circulation system; the extent to which critical areas of the Atlantic seafloor have been mapped; whether the Action Plan has supported the development of a range of new and innovative products and services; and improved the operational and risk management environment for offshore industries. We will also want to understand the extent to which socially inclusive growth has been achieved, skills needs have been addressed and whether an ecosystem based management approach in the Atlantic area has been implemented. We will also want to be able to draw lessons that can be applied to other sea basins.

Monitoring progress should not create any new reporting requirements. Instead, existing baseline information would be used in order to build a picture of how the Atlantic area is changing as a result of implementation of the Action Plan, and other factors. The Commission will begin work rapidly with the five Atlantic Member States to define and agree a methodology for preparing this stocktaking.

As innovation and technology progress, the Action Plan may need to be adapted and further developed. The Commission will closely monitor the implementation of the Action Plan, draw lessons learned and assess progress made. It will prepare a mid-term review of the implementation of the Action Plan before the end of 2017. An independent evaluation of a sample of completed projects will feed into the review, which will be discussed with Member States and other stakeholders.

## **5. INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE ATLANTIC STRATEGY**

The Atlantic Ocean is not confined to Europe. It is a shared resource and unified system linking the continent of Europe with Africa and America. All coastal states have a common interest and responsibility for ensuring good ocean governance, including through UNCLOS<sup>12</sup>, the IMO<sup>13</sup> and the International Seabed Authority.

The economic value of the Atlantic Ocean is enormous for the countries located on its shores. The Commission believes that over time, the Action Plan could create a solid foundation for cooperation with other Atlantic nations. The potential for joint work, for example in oceanographic research and observation, is clear. There is already the prospect of real engagement from the US and Canada to establish a transatlantic research alliance, to deepen our common understanding of the Atlantic ecosystem and its potential to support the blue economy. Developing this transatlantic research alliance would take place step by step, following a stock-taking exercise and agreeing on the most promising areas for cooperation. It is possible that other Atlantic nations would also be willing to discuss engagement on either research or other issues. The Commission and Member States should jointly consider what steps can be taken to engage international partners in the phased development of the Atlantic Strategy.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse the Action Plan and the orientation set out in this Communication.

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<sup>12</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

<sup>13</sup> The International Maritime Organisation