

OUTCOME STATEMENT

Atlantic Summit Galway 2026

THREE PRIORITIES FOR EUROPE'S OCEAN FUTURE

1

Make Ocean Knowledge a strategic investment priority for Europe

2

Strengthen and scale Atlantic partnerships and cooperation to deliver greater impact

3

Invest in the skills and leadership needed for Europe's ocean future.

THE CHALLENGE

The Atlantic is the world's second largest ocean basin and is central to Europe's environmental, economic and strategic future. It supports an immense biodiversity, regulates climate, underpins livelihoods and coastal communities, facilitates trade and connectivity, and provides significant opportunity for sustainable economic development across four continents.

The recently launched Ocean State Report from Copernicus tells us that the total amount of heat stored in the ocean reached its highest level on record in 2025 and that the ocean has become approximately 17% more acidic over the past 40 years. Climate change and human activities are driving these changes and are impacting on marine life, ecosystems and ocean processes. Potential pattern shifts in ocean currents such as the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) may have enormous consequences for weather and climate in Europe and globally.

The vastness of the ocean space also makes it highly challenging from a maritime safety and security perspective in a changing geopolitical world order. Old certainties are weakening, meaning Europe must work together with its partners to protect its people, assets, ocean interests and territories.

At the same time, immense opportunities exist in the ocean economy. In 2023 the EU ocean economy employed almost five million people and generated a gross value added of €251 billion. Sectors such as sustainable seafood production, coastal and marine tourism, and maritime transport are important sources of employment in coastal areas. The potential for offshore renewable energy in some regions is substantial, both as a growing sector and as a means to increase energy security on the continent. The overarching challenge is to enable these sectors to successfully co-exist, minimising their impacts on the marine environment, and making them equitable, safe, sustainable and climate neutral.

OCEAN KNOWLEDGE – A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE FOR EUROPE

The EU Ocean Pact sets out a vision for restoring ocean health, strengthening maritime security, improving ocean governance, supporting coastal communities and building a competitive blue economy. The forthcoming Ocean and Water Research and Innovation Strategy (an action under the Ocean Pact and Water Resilience Strategy) will set out a coordinated framework for EU Ocean and Water R&I including key priorities for Ocean Research and Innovation in the next funding period. Meanwhile, the EU Mission to Restore Ocean and Waters by 2030 has also set ambitious targets for protecting and restoring our ocean and inland water ecosystems, reducing pollution and supporting a climate-neutral blue economy.

A key message of the Atlantic Summit Galway 2026 is that delivering on the goals of the Ocean Pact and the Mission will only be possible with an advanced and well-resourced ocean knowledge system.

The ocean knowledge system comprises ocean observations (in situ and remote), data systems, data products and services, research and innovation, expertise, infrastructures, networks, partnerships and programmes. All of these components are interdependent, and to deliver real societal and economic impact, must work in a seamless and integrated way.

A strong ocean knowledge system can enable Europe to assess ecosystem health, understand and respond to climate impacts, monitor progress towards environmental targets and support effective marine management. It can also provide policymakers, regulators, industries and communities with the evidence and operational capability needed to make informed decisions, manage risk and adapt to changing conditions.

Given that vast areas of our ocean are underexplored and many of its processes are poorly understood, forward-thinking investment in ocean knowledge can also stimulate scientific discovery and build understanding of how the ocean functions, securing future societal benefits that we cannot yet anticipate.

The Atlantic Summit Galway recognised the important commitment by the EU and Canada to the OceanEye International Alliance initiative, which comprises an important part of the ocean knowledge system essential to supporting public policy objectives, environmental protection, climate action, maritime security and the competitiveness of Europe's ocean industries.

As the preparations for the next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework advance under the Irish Presidency of Council of the European Union 2026, the Summit identified a need for ocean knowledge, research and innovation to be recognised as a strategic imperative for a secure and resilient Europe.

THREE PRIORITIES FOR EUROPE'S OCEAN FUTURE

1

Make Ocean Knowledge a strategic investment priority for Europe

The next Multiannual Financial Framework, including the Horizon Europe programme (2028-2034) the European Competitiveness Fund and the National and Regional Partnership Plans, represents a critical opportunity to strengthen Europe's long-term ocean capability. Investment in marine research and innovation, ocean observation, research infrastructures, open data and international cooperation will be essential to achieving Europe's environmental, economic and strategic ambitions.

Ocean research, knowledge and innovation must, therefore, be a clear priority for Europe's next investment framework. The Summit highlighted the importance of sustained support for research that serves the public good, supports evidence-based policy-making and implementation, strengthens European competitiveness and maritime security, and accelerates the development and deployment of ocean technologies and innovation.

2

Strengthen and scale Atlantic partnerships and cooperation to deliver greater impact

The All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA) has laid strong foundations for cooperation between Atlantic states in Research and Innovation, coastal resilience, ocean observing, intergenerational capacity building and in other priority areas.

An opportunity now exists to further advance this partnership and build the ambition and capability of the Alliance to address common challenges. The Atlantic Summit identified the need to further scale the Alliance and build tangible cooperation in Atlantic Research and Innovation to address common strategic imperatives.

The Alliance is encouraged to increase efforts towards concrete implementation of a common work programme to address the established and agreed AAORIA priorities. At the governance level, there is an opportunity to engage a wider community of decision makers and stakeholders across the participating jurisdictions and to formalise institutional arrangements to enable greater impact.

3 Invest in the skills and leadership needed for Europe's ocean future

Europe's future ocean agenda will depend on a new generation of skilled ocean professionals and researchers with the interdisciplinary knowledge, capabilities and experience needed to deliver on the ambitions of the European Ocean Pact.

The Summit highlighted the importance of sustained investment in ocean skills, training, mentoring and capacity-building, alongside stronger and more clearly defined pathways for Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) to drive change and have real impact across ocean research, innovation, policy and governance.

Intergenerational approaches, including structured dialogue, mentoring and knowledge exchange, provide an effective mechanism for transferring expertise, developing future leadership and ensuring that emerging ocean professionals are equipped to help shape and deliver Europe's ocean future.

EUROPE'S OCEAN OPPORTUNITY

The Atlantic Summit Galway 2026 highlighted the importance of working together across disciplines, generations, sectors and borders to address shared ocean challenges and opportunities. Participants agreed that sustained investment in ocean knowledge, stronger international cooperation and the development of future ocean leaders will be essential if Europe is to achieve its ambitions for a sustainable, secure and competitive ocean future.

As Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026 continues, these priorities offer a clear direction for strengthening Europe's ocean research, innovation and skills agenda and to ensure that the Atlantic remains at the heart of Europe's future prosperity, resilience and sustainability.