

1st September 2026

Subject : Europe's ocean crisis must be addressed in the 2026 State of the European Union

Dear President von der Leyen,

This summer, the ocean sent Europe another unmistakable warning: [Copernicus](#) confirmed that **July 2026 saw the highest sea-surface temperature ever recorded for July across the extra-polar oceans**. This record comes only weeks after the publication of '[Marine Messages III. State, pressures and choices for the future](#)' delivered an equally alarming diagnosis: **Europe's seas are in poor condition**. Overexploitation, pollution, habitat degradation and accelerating climate change are cumulative pressures weakening the resilience of marine ecosystems. The ocean's decline is not only an environmental issue, **it's a growing risk to Europe's climate security, economy and long-term resilience**. We therefore **urge you to make the ocean a prominent part of this year's State of the European Union address**.

At the UN Ocean Conference in Nice last year, your presence sent a strong signal of European leadership. The European Ocean Pact you presented recognised that ocean health is fundamental to Europe's climate stability, food security and economic resilience. With the launch of the Ocean Eye, the scientific basis for ocean action is secured. The task now is to turn the political ambition into action and make the EU a genuine **Ocean Union**.

Europe has the rare opportunity to overhaul its ocean governance framework. **The European Ocean Act** represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change course. Europe does not lack policies, solutions, or scientific knowledge. Where measures are implemented consistently and at a sufficient scale, **nature responds**. But recovery at scale is still not happening. **We cannot afford another decade of ambitious targets followed by insufficient implementation**. Marine recovery takes time. This is why your State of the European Union address should ensure that existing commitments, such as those in the EU Biodiversity Strategy (notably establishing Marine Protected Areas covering at least 30% of EU seas with effective management measures by 2030 and strictly protecting at least 10% of EU seas) must be made legally binding and should put forward the following:

1. The **European Ocean Act must become the legislative keystone of an Ocean Union**: an overarching and enforceable framework aligning EU policies around one common objective - achieving and maintaining **Good Environmental Status of EU seas** - just as the European Climate Law provides a common direction for

climate policy. Crucially, **it should be adopted as a Regulation to ensure consistent implementation across all Member States**. Marine ecosystems do not stop at national borders, and neither should our ambition.

2. **To create coherence, the European Ocean Act must introduce a clear Ocean Mainstreaming principle – ensuring that all EU policies are assessed against their impact on ocean health:** today, decisions affecting the ocean are taken across sectors – fisheries, energy, transport – often in isolation. The result is contradiction: we protect ecosystems on paper, while funding and enabling their degradation in practice. The Ocean Act must change this, because the ocean is not a sector – it is a system. This call for an Ocean Union goes hand in hand with the call from civil society, industry and other stakeholders for Europe to [make this fossil fuel crisis its last](#) and accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels.

The choice before Europe is increasingly stark: **restore the resilience of our seas now and decarbonise the maritime sector or resign itself to managing their continued decline, with profound consequences for our climate, food security, coastal communities and economy**. Healthy seas are not an environmental luxury. They are part of Europe's natural infrastructure and a prerequisite for its long-term resilience and prosperity. **This is not only about protecting ecosystems**. It is about securing the future of coastal communities, of small-scale fishers, of all those whose livelihoods depend on a healthy ocean. Ocean protection and a thriving blue economy are not in opposition - in fact, they depend on each other. There is no long-term competitiveness in a bankrupt ocean.

We therefore call on you to reaffirm the leadership you showed in Nice, commit your Commission to an ambitious European Ocean Act, and make **building a healthy, resilient and prosperous Ocean Union** a defining objective of Europe in the years ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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