



EUROPEAN  
TRANSPORT  
WORKERS'  
FEDERATION

# **ETF reaction to the European Commission's European Ocean Pact**



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## **1. Introduction**

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) welcomes the European Commission's initiative to launch a European Ocean Pact, acknowledging the growing importance of the ocean as a shared space for climate action, energy transition, food provision, and sustainable transport. As the representative voice of European workers in the fisheries, maritime transport, and port sectors, the ETF supports the ambition to ensure a sustainable, inclusive, and socially fair blue economy. However, the policies that will follow the Ocean Pact must deliver more than vision. They will need to ensure genuine social and sectoral justice ensuring that those who work on the ocean, especially fishers, seafarers and port workers, are given a voice and protection in the transformation of ocean-based sectors.

## **2. Governance and stakeholder representation**

### **Maritime spatial planning and the Ocean Act**

The ETF insists that fisheries must be central to maritime spatial planning (MSP). Fishing is not only an economic activity: it provides healthy, sustainable protein essential to human life. Traditional fishing grounds must be protected from unchecked expansion of other uses, such as offshore wind farms. A structured and balanced dialogue must take place at national and sea basin level to avoid the marginalisation of fishers and ensure equal consideration of all ocean users.

### **High-level Ocean Board**

The ETF welcomes the creation of a high-level Ocean Board and expresses its readiness to represent fisheries, maritime, and port workers within this structure. The Board must not be limited to industrial or environmental stakeholders but should ensure a strong social and labour voice to address workers' interests in ocean governance.

## **3. Environmental and ecosystem-based approach**

### **Marine protected areas and the ecosystem approach**

The ETF acknowledges the role of marine protected areas (MPAs) in preserving biodiversity and welcomes the case-by-case approach to identifying compatible fishing techniques. However, decisions on access and practices within MPAs must be made in full consultation with fishers and local communities. Moreover, the ETF stresses that the ecosystem-based approach must be comprehensive: it is unjust that fisheries alone are burdened with restrictive measures while other sources of marine degradation, such as pollution from maritime transport or land-based industries, are insufficiently addressed.

### **Pollution, ETS implementation, and marine health**

The ETF supports stronger action to decrease marine pollution, including from shipping. Measures

addressing air and water discharges, plastic pellet spills, and underwater noise need proper attention. However, these measures must also be accompanied by just transition pathways for workers, including those in maritime transport, with investment in skills, training, and safety.

In this context, the ETF has consistently expressed concerns regarding the potential risks associated with cargo diversion and evasive port calls arising from the implementation of the Emission Trading System (ETS) for maritime shipping. While ETF supports the ETS as a crucial step toward reducing emissions in the maritime sector, we emphasize the pressing threat of port calls evasion, which could undermine the system's effectiveness. Such evasion may lead to increased emissions due to longer voyages and reduce the incentive for shipping companies to transition to greener fleets.

Evasive port calls could also have significant negative impacts on employment and business activities in specific EU ports, threatening their strategic role as hubs for transport, renewable energy, and connectivity. Furthermore, the possibility that shipping companies might bypass EU regulations by rerouting cargo through non-EU transshipment hubs creates competitive disadvantages for EU ports while failing to achieve the intended environmental benefits of the ETS.

For these reasons, the ETF stresses the importance of continuous monitoring of non-EU neighbouring ports to assess their transshipment traffic and determine whether further inclusion within the regulatory framework is necessary. Monitoring and regulatory adjustments are essential to detect potential evasion and prevent irreversible reconfigurations of shipping routes that could harm EU ports.

## **4. Funding, fair transition, and coastal communities**

### **Insufficient funding for fisheries**

Despite the ambition of the Ocean Pact, no new funding is foreseen for fisheries, while the sector is expected to contribute to energy transition, gear innovation, and ecosystem recovery. The ETF believes that the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) is insufficient and must be expanded in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–2034) to ensure a fair and realistic implementation of the Pact's objectives.

### **Support for coastal communities**

The ETF insists that coastal communities are at the heart of the blue economy. Investments in social infrastructure, public services, local value chains, and community resilience are crucial to ensure that the benefits of ocean policies reach local fishers, port workers, and their families.

## **5. Social dimension and working conditions**

### **A blue economy for workers**

The ETF strongly welcomes the recognition of the social dimension in the Ocean Pact and the upcoming Blue Generational Renewal Strategy. Generational renewal, female participation, and skills development and working conditions are mentioned in the Pact. The ETF is ready to contribute to the policies that will be developed to address these areas.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive social dimension must also address:

- The long-term attractiveness and sustainability of careers in fisheries and maritime transport.
- The fair recruitment, employment, and treatment of migrant fishers and seafarers across the EU fleet.
- Decent wages, social protection, and occupational health coverage for all workers.

## 6. Specific fisheries provisions

### Towards a fair and future-proof fisheries sector

The ETF appreciates the Commission's recognition of the importance of fisheries in achieving food security and sustainability.

We welcome:

- The campaign to promote EU-produced aquatic food.
- The commitment to decarbonise and modernise the EU fleet, taking into account the reality of the sector and the difficulties it is facing.
- The support for tackling non-indigenous species (NIS).
- The vision to ensure a level playing field globally for sustainable fisheries management.

However, we have reservations regarding the proposal to establish a dedicated Advisory Council for smallscale fisheries. While agreeing on the importance of this segment of the sector, the ETF believes that improve integration small-scale fishers into existing Advisory Councils is a more effective way to ensure their voice is heard without segregating their input or limiting their influence.

### Lack of a global social dimension

The ETF regrets the weak attention given to the social aspects of international fisheries governance. While we support the push for broader ratification of international conventions, the EU must use its global leverage to promote decent work and fair competition in fisheries worldwide. We urge the Commission to address this gap in the upcoming 2026 Communication on the external dimension of the CFP.

## 7. Conclusion

The ETF sees the Ocean Pact as a valuable opportunity to transition to a environmentally and socially sustainable blue economy. But this transition must be just. It must be fair to the workers who sustain maritime transport, fishing, and port services every day. We call on the European Commission to ensure that:

- Labour representation is included at all governance levels.
- Funding and support are commensurate with the scale of ambition.
- The social dimension is not only acknowledged, but mainstreamed.
- Fisheries are not treated as a problem, but as a vital part of the solution.

The ETF stands ready to contribute constructively to the implementation of the Ocean Pact, in defence of the ocean, its workers, and the communities who depend on them.