

Why is Ocean Literacy Key to a Sustainable Blue Economy?

Understanding how the ocean influences us and how we influence the ocean is essential to daily decisions we make for a sustainable future.

Theme

EU4Ocean Platform



'Ocean Literacy in Action' conference on 8 March 2024
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Organisations, professionals from diverse sectors, youth and schools across Europe are joining forces to develop new initiatives for a sustainable ocean. The private sector has an important role to play and much to gain.

- Launched in 2020, the EU4Ocean Coalition brings together over 1,000 members across Europe.
- Organisations, experts and clusters from a wide diversity of sectors have joined the Coalition.
- Recent conferences and workshops have highlighted how ocean literacy and the blue economy can support each other to the benefit of sustainability and people working in the blue economy.

Trends and challenges in the blue economy

The blue economy is growing rapidly, and with it, the demand for a skilled workforce that understands the importance of sustainability and ocean health. Promoting sustainable practices in the marine environment is crucial to ensure the replenishment of fish stocks, waste management from ships, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and pollution from coastal and maritime activities.

Ocean literacy plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the ocean and its resources. By raising awareness, individuals and communities are encouraged to adopt behaviours that minimise harm and contribute to its preservation.

Knowing and understanding the ocean's influence on us, and our influence on the ocean is crucial to living and acting sustainably. This is the essence of ocean literacy.

[UNESCO Ocean Literacy Portal](#) 

In the private sector, this can range from reducing single-use plastic consumption and opting for alternative eco-friendly options, to supporting sustainable seafood choices and opting for alternative fuels, renewable energy sources and energy optimisation.

Ocean literacy has the power to significantly impact different actors of society, particularly through the involvement of key stakeholders in the blue economy.

Ocean literacy is not just nice to have, it is crucial to have because it can be part of a transition for a young person to get interested and skilled into the ocean-related industry."

Philip Easthill, Secretary-General of European Boating Industry ('Ocean Literacy in Action' conference on 8 March 2024)

Although it is clear that the maritime sectors will require skilled workers to secure employment in the blue economy, there is still a significant gap between what the

industry expects and what current education and training programs offer.

The European Commission - Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries has launched a one-year study to analyse the blue economy industry needs as regard skills, existing academic/training programmes, and consequent gaps, so as to help inform a better policy response at EU level and provide very valuable information to Member States.

The European Union (EU) supports cooperation projects between business and education through the “Blue careers for a sustainable blue economy” calls for proposals under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund. Since 2016, 26 projects have been funded to help develop the next generation of blue skills, with a total EU contribution of €18.5 million. There are projects that aim to address this gap, such as [Next BlueGeneration](#)  and specialised activities for capacity building and skill development (e.g. [AZTI's Summer School on Marine Research](#)  and the [Blue Skills initiative](#)  implemented by Italy's National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics - OGS).

Ocean literacy skills in the maritime sector are crucial in addressing the human-induced threats faced by the ocean and meeting global sustainability goals. Required skills range from digital and green technologies to project management, problem-solving skills and innovation in sustainable practices. Blue skills encompass a combination of knowledge, abilities and experiences to develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient industry. These can include good practices related to water and waste management, efficient consumption of energy and materials in operations, along with the ability to develop strategies and innovate for green solutions for the ocean.

While knowledge is crucial for improving the understanding about the ocean, it is also important for companies to consider other factors such as attitudes, behaviours and emotions, when promoting action-oriented training. As for certain groups of maritime workers, enhancing knowledge alone is not enough to achieve ocean-friendly behaviour. Other ways of ensuring their employees' engagement with ocean sustainability seem appropriate.

So, how can organisations in the blue economy and beyond get involved in ocean literacy? With a fast-growing international ocean literacy movement and the development of the vibrant EU4Ocean Coalition in Europe, it has become easy for organisations and professionals to not only get involved in ocean literacy but, very importantly, cooperate to resolve key challenges they face.

The EU4Ocean Coalition is the European hub for ocean literacy

The [EU4Ocean Coalition](#)  is an initiative funded by the European Commission. Founded in 2020 and managed by a consortium of partners across Europe, the EU4Ocean Coalition today brings together over 1,000 members across its three communities: the **EU4Ocean Platform** for organisations, businesses, and professionals

from a wide diversity of sectors; the **Youth4Ocean Forum** for young people from 16 to 30 years old; and the **Network of European Blue Schools**.

The EU4Ocean Coalition brings together members of all ages with a wide range of expertise and experience across Europe (Source: European Atlas of the Seas)

The scope of EU4Ocean is ambitious, combining European Union wide activities and campaigns with actions at sea basin level in the Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic-North Ocean, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. Together, members of the EU4Ocean Platform, the Youth4Ocean Forum and the Network of European Blue Schools strengthen ocean literacy in Europe and develop collective, multidisciplinary, multicultural and intergenerational solutions to challenges we face.



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The EU4Ocean Coalition is a bottom-up, inclusive initiative aimed at bringing together all European citizens to be ambassadors for the ocean.

Members of the EU4Ocean Coalition can share ideas, build partnerships and collaborate to ensure a more coordinated approach to ocean literacy in Europe and develop concrete activities that create real awareness, engagement and momentum across society for action and change.

The EU4Ocean Platform comprises a wide diversity of stakeholders spanning the areas of marine research, science-policy, blue economy industry and the private sector, civil society, arts, education, youth and media. The civil society sector is the sector currently most represented in the EU4Ocean Platform followed by the private sector, academia/research and the education sector. Members of the private sector include consultancies, networks, industry associations and centres of competence. Represented blue economy activities comprise boating and marinas, aquaculture and algae, fisheries, bioeconomy, energy as well as underwater technologies and ICT solutions. Clusters covering a diversity of blue economy activities and projects have also joined the EU4Ocean Platform.

As the EU4Ocean Platform continues to grow, there is strong willingness to further diversify membership and include more private sector organisations beyond the traditional marine/maritime sectors. With this in mind, the EU4Ocean Coalition has organised multiple events and activities that have focused on the interlinkages between ocean literacy and the Sustainable Blue Economy as well as ocean literacy and Corporate Social (and Environmental) Responsibility (CSR^[1]).

Examples include:

- Workshops organised in the framework of European Maritime Day (EMD): 'Reaching a sustainable ocean: the role of ocean literacy in linking science with blue sectors, education and society (EMD 2023) and 'How can Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) host and support ocean literacy for all? (EMD 2024);
- A survey on CSR and Ocean Literacy;
- A panel discussion on " " at the conference 'Ocean Literacy in Action' in the framework of the European Ocean Days 2024;
- A year-long series of monthly webinars 'Where Ocean Literacy meets EU Business', started with the [first episode](#)  on 17 July 2024, to open up the conversation around CSR, the presence of sustainability in corporate culture and the broader topic of environmental stewardship. The webinars address a broad range of blue economy and other sectors, including cross-cutting themes.

So, why do organisations active in the blue economy join the EU4Ocean Platform?

EU4Ocean and the Private Sector: A Partnership for Sustainability

Sustainability is high on **TransEurope Marinas'** agenda. The [TransEurope Marinas](#) network joined the EU4Ocean Platform with this goal in mind. According to Melanie Symes, the results have been highly gratifying, having encountered inspiring Young Ocean Advocates and dedicated professionals.

"Benefitting from our participation in EU4Ocean workshops, webinars and informal exchanges, we have been able to establish collaborations with groups from oceanographers to start-ups and begin developing our role in ocean stewardship."

Melanie
Symes,
TransEurope
Marinas

For the **European Boating Industry (EBI)**, the association representing the boating and nautical tourism industry and one of the 76 founding members of the EU4Ocean Platform, membership has been very valuable in three areas. Firstly, it allows for a clear framework to show the value of water sports and boating to wider societal and political challenges, such as the link between getting people on the water and their physical and mental health, awareness of the environment and awareness of Europe's maritime heritage. In addition, there is also a link between growing interest in boating that benefits the sector through "grow boating" initiatives that is supported by building awareness of the ocean in early life. Also, as the industry establishes the skill set of its employees of the future and competes with other sectors, ocean literate and environmentally aware employees can be won over. The industry also contributes to growing ocean literacy in connection with its boat shows, which are important platforms in the industry. Examples of the link-up between such platforms for businesses and B2C include boot Düsseldorf ([ocean tribute award](#) ) and [love your ocean](#) ) and the [Genoa International Boat Show](#) .

The **Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Blue Economy** joined the EU4Ocean Platform to enhance networking opportunities, enabling collaboration with diverse stakeholders committed to ocean conservation and environmental education, particularly in ocean sciences and the blue economy.

Mounir Ghribi, Director of International Cooperation and Research Promotion at Italy's National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics (OGS) and Director of the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Blue Economy at the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), shared that in 2022, OGS had the opportunity to participate in the European Maritime Day event in Ravenna (Italy) through the EU4Ocean initiative. This event provided a valuable platform for OGS to showcase the Blue Skills initiative and its activities focused on ocean literacy, including the [Fish&Ships game](#) . Additionally, EU4Ocean helped promote OGS's capacity-building and skill development training programs, which significantly boosted the institute's visibility.

According to Diana Rico, who joined EMUNI as a Junior Researcher, collaboration between different stakeholders of the Coalition allows looking into the future of the sustainable blue economy, promoting sustainable development and ocean literacy to educate and empower society, academia and industry about the importance of preserving marine ecosystems.

With other members of the EU4Ocean Platform, we share knowledge and best practices, fostering innovation and sustainable approaches within the community of ocean advocates."

Diana Rico, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Blue Economy

Join the EU4Ocean Platform to connect, network and cooperate for a sustainable ocean

Organisations and professionals can join the EU4Ocean Platform which gathers over 195 members across Europe, from the blue economy sectors, academia and research, civil society, sports, media, arts and culture, and continuously welcomes new members.

Members can get involved in EU4Ocean in many different ways, from contributing to events, sharing knowledge and experience or co-developing new initiatives to joining the [Youth4Ocean Forum Mentoring Programme](#) and supporting [European Blue schools](#).

Applications to become a member of the EU4Ocean Platform can be submitted online on the dedicated website. If you would like to know more about the EU4Ocean Platform activities or the application process, please contact the EU4Ocean Platform Facilitator at info@eu4ocean-platform.eu [↗](#)

Join now!

EU4Ocean is all about cooperation. This article was co-written by EU4Ocean Coalition partners and EU4Ocean Platform members. Co-Authors include Melanie Symes (TransEurope Marinas), Philip Easthill (European Boating Industry), Ruth Higgins (EurOcean), Sara Granchinho (EurOcean), Flavia Rolli (OGS), Mounir Ghribi (OGS and Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Blue Economy), Diana Rico (Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Blue Economy), Evelyn Paredes (European Marine Science Educators Association), Olga Mashkina (ACTeon), Pierre Strosser (ACTeon), Farhat Nascimento Bajwa (ACTeon) and Nathalie Van Isacker (EU4Ocean Platform facilitator, Seascape Belgium).

[1] On 5 January 2023, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) entered into force, requiring larger companies to be more accountable for their environmental and social impacts. While the directive does not apply to smaller companies, it inspired a new wave of reflection around the subject of CSR for many in the private sector.

