

Recommendation no. 61

The European Oceans Pact and the European waters of the Outermost Regions

As part of the process of drafting the European Oceans Pact, which will define a vision for a holistic approach to ocean-related policies, the Advisory Council for the Outermost Regions (CCRUP) welcomes this initiative and considers that the European Oceans Pact should support and encourage the sustainable growth of the Outermost Regions (ORs).

1- Increasing the coherence of ocean-related policies

Article 174 of the TFEU directs the European Union (EU) to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion, especially benefiting islands and ORs¹. Whereas the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), under its Article 3, establishes the principles of good governance, namely that the EU must ensure the "*appropriate involvement of stakeholders, in particular Advisory Councils, at all stages (...)*"², the CCRUP stresses the importance of advisory councils in providing impartial information to the European Commission (EC) on its matters. For example, we recall that the ORs of Mayotte and Guiana are involved in Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements.

As stated by the President of the European Commission, Mrs Ursula von der Leyen, in her mission letter to the Commissioner for Fisheries, Mr Costas Kadis³, the CCRUP has also considered it essential from the outset that the highest representatives of the European Commission visit the coastal communities of the European Union, organising dialogues on Fisheries and Oceans in order to establish a European Pact for the Oceans in a collaborative manner, ensuring the participation of all stakeholders, including small-scale and artisanal fishers, such as those from the Outermost Regions.

Hence, the CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the interested Member States that they visit our territories and communities, enabling them to form an opinion based on first-hand knowledge, and that they consult us whenever they intend to legislate or conclude agreements with other countries/territories involving our Outermost Regions.

¹ European Union. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 creating the Recovery and Resilience Facility*. Official Journal of the European Union, L57, 17-75.

² European Union. (2013). *Regulation (EU) no. 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013, on the common fisheries policy*. Official Journal of the European Union, L 354/22-61.

³ European Commission. (2024, September 17). Mission letter to Costas Kadis, Commissioner-designate for Fisheries and Oceans.

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSPs) allows for the sustainable management and use of marine areas in European Union Member States for fishing, environmental conservation and energy production activities, inter alia. However, the establishment of Maritime Protected Areas (MPAs),

despite the benefits in biodiversity conservation, raises concerns about the protection of the rights of fishermen and aquaculturists, inter alia. MPAs must be planned in a thoughtful, participatory manner, by all the parties concerned, and with robust scientific data, considering the specific aspects of artisanal fishing and coastal communities.

Hence, the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned that they should:**

- Clearly define the objectives and steps for implementing MPAs, adapted to our socioeconomic and cultural characteristics;
- Create financial mechanisms, or adapt existing mechanisms to compensate fishermen who face losses due to fishing restrictions⁴;
- Implement a reliable, continuous monitoring system of the MPAs^{5,6}.

Innovation in the blue economy, through research, digital transformation and the adaptation of technologies to the fishing sector, must be an essential driving force for the sustainable development of the ORs. However, the limited collection of appropriate scientific data makes it difficult to manage fishery resources. For example, in the Azores, although an increase in the populations of Silk fish (*Beryx sp.*) has been observed, especially of Splendid Alfonsinos (*Beryx splendens*), the quota has been reduced since 2023 due to a lack of scientific data⁷. The creation of local maritime research centres and the improvement of fishing infrastructures are essential to ensure more accurate reporting, allowing for better promotion of a sustainable blue economy.

In this regard, the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned that they should:**

- Endow our regions with financial resources for the construction of research centres dedicated to the continuous assessment of the state of stocks, in order to better manage fishing quotas.
- Improve fishing support infrastructures, allowing for better working conditions and data collection.

⁴ Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. (2021). *European Maritime and Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)* - Frequently Asked Questions.

⁵ CCRUP (Outermost Regions Advisory Council). (2024). Recommendation no. 55: Maritime Spatial Planning of the Outermost Regions..

⁶ Vitcheva, C. (2025). Response to the CCRUP on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) of the Outermost Regions (ORs). Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission.

⁷ European Commission. (2024 December) *European Commission response to CCRUP on sustainable fisheries in the EU* [REC 52].

2- Our impact on the oceans and the oceans' impact on us

The constraints in place in the Outermost Regions highlight the need to adapt responses to specific local aspects, keeping the oceans clean, healthy and productive. Likewise, it is necessary to consider the threat of climate change, for example the recent storms that hit Mayotte.

Hence, the **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission and the Member States concerned should define resilience strategies**, bearing in mind the heterogeneity of resources available in the different ORs and the different uses of the sea.

According to the European Union rules on nitrates, set out in the Nitrates Directive, [Council Directive of 12 December 1991 on the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources \(91/676/EEC\)](#), Member States should monitor the concentration of nitrates in surface and groundwater, also assessing the eutrophic status of the waters. In the 1980s and 1990s, the emergence of the Southeast Asian banana weevil (*Cosmopolites sordidus*) in *Martinique* and *Guadeloupe*, led to the excessive use of chlordecone-based insecticides, contaminating the soil, rivers, groundwater and part of the coast⁸. The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) [Directive 2008/56/EC](#), sets out a common European Union approach and objectives for the prevention, protection and conservation of the marine environment⁹; however, the initial aim of achieving the "good environmental status" of all surface and groundwater by 2015 has been extended to 2027.

Whereas data on water quality show that the levels of implementation and enforcement of these directives are still insufficient, and that the status of many water bodies in the EU has deteriorated due to overexploitation and pollution, and that excess nitrates from incorrect use in the agricultural industry pose a threat to human and ecosystem health. Considering further that the European Green Deal foresees a 50% reduction in nutrient losses by 2030, and that despite the measures adopted, progress across the EU has been slow and that between 2012 and 2019 the total area of nitrate vulnerable zones increased by 14.4%¹⁰.

⁸ CCRUP (Outermost Regions Advisory Council). (2024). Recommendation no. 47: Protection of waters in the Outermost Regions from pollution from agricultural sources.

⁹ European Union. (2008). Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive). Official Journal of the European Union, L 164, 19-40.

¹⁰ European Union. (2000). Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. Official Journal of the European Union, L 327, 1-73.

Hence, the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned as follows:**

- The review of the Directive of 12 December 1991 relating to the protection of waters from pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources, in order to prevent surpluses from flowing into the sea;
- The strengthening of water monitoring in the ORs, with a special focus on coastal and marine waters;
- The financing targeted at water infrastructure projects in the ORs and the preparation of climate change adaptation plans specific to the ORs, dedicated to water management and the prevention of flood and drought risks;
- Support for the implementation of specific projects for *Guadeloupe* and *Martinique* dedicated to decontaminating their water;
- Monitoring of the impact on waters of our territories used by third countries, particularly with regard to the contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water, which may arise from its activities;
- The monitoring of possible nuclear waste deposits in our waters.

3- Biodiversity in the Outermost Regions

The Outermost Regions (ORs) are home to around 80% of Europe's biodiversity¹¹, featuring coral reefs, seamounts, and breeding grounds for migratory species. They also provide the EU with the largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the world¹². These rich tropical, subtropical, and marine ecosystems¹³ support activities such as (artisanal, selective, and sustainable) fishing, tourism, and traditional agriculture, which ensure local employment and food security.

It should also be noted that illegal fishing, pollution, invasive algae, and climate change lead to the loss of marine habitats and cause damage to vessels (engines, trims, electrical equipment, etc.) and fishing infrastructure, directly threatening communities dependent on these ecosystems. In the Outermost Regions, we have recent examples such as the massive invasion of sargassum (notably, *Sargassum natans* and *Sargassum fluitans*) in Martinique and the destruction caused in Mayotte by cyclones and storms, with increasingly frequent and exceptionally large waves, resulting in significant economic losses and social consequences for our coastal communities.

¹¹ European Committee of the Regions. (2022, August 5). Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions - EU Forest Strategy for 2030 (2022/C 301/11). *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 301, 61–73.

¹² European Parliament. (2023). European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2023 on the assessment of the new Commission communication on outermost regions (2022/2147(INI)).

¹³ European Commission (2020). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives (COM(2020) 380 final). Brussels, 20 May 2020.

Therefore, the **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission include in the European Pact for the Oceans a specific section relating to the Outermost Regions**, allowing for positive discrimination of our waters and activities, recognising and valuing our biodiversity, which exists only thanks to sustainable fishing and aquaculture practised in the waters of the ORs, whose communities are highly dependent on them.

4- Supporting coastal and rural communities that depend on the ocean

The fishing and aquaculture sectors in the ORs play a crucial role in promoting a sustainable food system and in the development of the Bioeconomy and the circular economy. These are crucial sectors for local economies and the sociocultural heritage of the ORs. Artisanal fishing gear aligns with the FAO International Code of Conduct for Sustainable Fisheries and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially as regards the eradication of poverty and combating hunger, in addition to protecting natural resources. This form of fishing also aligns with the European Commission's priorities, particularly the "European Green Deal" and building an "Economy that works for people".

The [9th paragraph of ICCAT Recommendation 24-01](#) emphasized that “*Small-scale fisheries, including those operating in overseas territories and outermost regions of a Contracting Party, shall be given special consideration in view of their specific aspects and needs.*” However, we consider that the process of allocating fishing opportunities remains inequitable¹⁴.

The CCRUP notes a serious lack of attractiveness in the fishing profession, and a consequent ageing of professionals¹⁵.

Hence, the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned the equitable allocation of fishing quotas** for artisanal fishermen in the ORs, which allows for the improvement of their socioeconomic condition, as well as promoting the attractiveness of the profession.

There is an urgent need for the renewal of fleets in the Outermost Regions, considering that it allows for the improvement of safety and hygiene conditions on board, on the one hand, and for vessels to be more environmentally friendly, on the other.

¹⁴ Seas At Risk. (2024). *Fisheries Allocation: Good Practices in Implementing Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy*. Seas At Risk.

¹⁵ CCRUP (Outermost Regions Advisory Council). (2023). Recommendation no. 37 (EM): Fleet Renewal in the Outermost Regions - Member State Support.

Hence, **the CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned as follows:**

- Improving working conditions on board, especially safety, to attract younger generations to the profession;
- Reconsideration of the dimensions (tonnage) of small fishing vessels so that they can accommodate better working and hygiene conditions on board;
- The renewal of the fleets of the ORs should not be related with an increased fishing effort¹⁶.

Considering that part of the difficulties in renewing the fleets of the ORs is related with poor data collection, leading to a formal lack of knowledge of the state of the population units, the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission¹⁶:**

- Strengthening the necessary human and financial resources to the ORs, in order to obtain reliable data through scientific studies;
- Streamlining the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) so that fishermen from the ORs can obtain financing to quickly renew their fleets and improve fishing support infrastructures;
- Improved monitoring of the application of environmental, social and economic criteria in the establishment of fishing opportunities, by the Member States, in accordance with article 17 of the CFP, in order to achieve positive discrimination for the ORs;

5- Energy Transition in the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors

Energy is a major cost in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector and these costs that have been exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, impacting citizens and businesses across the European Union as a result of fossil fuel dependence. Hence, a large part of the fisheries and aquaculture sector has had to rely on financial support provided by EU Member States and financial instruments made available at EU level¹⁷ for the continuation of their activity. In light of the current uncertain geopolitical context, high energy prices are expected to threaten the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in the ORs.

We also remember that the ORs are abundant in wind, sun and sea, highlighting the potential for energy independence from fossil fuels, particularly in smaller regions, to try to offset the economic and social impact of the current crisis.

¹⁶ CCRUP (Outermost Regions Advisory Council). (2023). Recommendation no. 37 (EC): Fleet Renewal in the Outermost Regions - EC Support.

¹⁷ Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. (2023, 21 February). *COM/2023/100 On the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector*. European Union Publications.

Recognising the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, with the implementation of the REPowerEU plan¹⁸, within the scope of the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs), the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned:**

- The implementation of measures that contribute to providing a structural response, through reforms and investments aimed at combating energy poverty, paying special attention to the ORs¹⁹.
- The strengthening of regional cooperation between the ORs, but possibly also with neighbouring countries, as regards the implementation and use of renewable energies.

Aquaculture has the potential to transform the sustainable development of the ORs, promoting food safety, economic growth and environmental preservation. Our regions have vast marine resources that can be sustainably harnessed to drive economic and social development. Some of the main positive aspects of aquaculture in the ORs are: its ability to promote food self-sufficiency and its contribution to diversifying our economies, helping to combat unemployment and retain populations. Furthermore, the unique climatic and geographic conditions of the ORs, such as clean waters and mild temperatures, make these regions ideal for the cultivation of species of high commercial value, such as fish and shellfish.²⁰ In the SWOT Analysis of Aquaculture in the Outermost Regions²¹, the CCRUP concluded that the aquaculture sector in the different ORs has heterogeneous levels of development²².

Hence, the **CCRUP recommends to the European Commission and the Member States concerned** as follows:

- The simplification of access for fish farmers to the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF);
- The definition of action plans so as to speed up the development of aquaculture, such as professional training and qualification for the sector, in each OR;
- The inclusion in the Animal By-Products Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009) of aquaculture by-products such as agricultural fertilizers;
- Funding research into safe and efficient methods for use of aquaculture by-products;
- The promotion of information campaigns to raise public awareness of the benefits of enhancing the value of aquaculture products and by-products;

¹⁸ European Union. (2021). Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 creating the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism. Official Journal of the European Union, L57, 17-75.

¹⁹ European Union. (2023). Regulation (EU) 2023/435 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 February 2023 which amends Regulation (EU) 2021/241 as regards the REPowerEU chapters of the recovery and resilience plans and which amends Regulations (EU) no. 1303/2013, (EU) 2021/1060 and (EU) 2021/1755 and Directive 2003/87/EC. Official Journal of the European Union, L 63, 1-27.

²⁰ CCRUP (Outermost Regions Advisory Council). (2020). Knowledge of the Advisory Board Recommendations for the Outermost Regions (CCRUP) to the European Commission regarding the need to maintain support for the aquaculture sector in the Outermost Regions.

²¹ Outermost Regions' Advisory Council (CCRUP). (2021, July). SWOT Analysis of Aquaculture in the Outermost Regions .

²² CCRUP (Outermost Regions Advisory Council). (2021). Recommendation no.28: Analysis of the situation of Aquaculture in the Outermost Regions.