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EOOS Steering Group Response to the European Ocean Act Call for Evidence

The **European Ocean Observing System (EOOS)** provides a European coordination framework for ocean observation, designed to support the effective implementation of European Union (EU) marine, climate and environmental policies. By fostering alignment between national observing systems, European research infrastructures and policy needs, EOOS helps address persistent fragmentation, inefficiencies, and sustainability gaps in ocean observation. Through its Steering Group, EOOS brings together operational, scientific and policy communities to provide strategic advice, promote coherence across sea basins, and strengthen ocean observation as a public good and a strategic asset for the EU.

In the context of intensifying ocean use, accelerating climate impacts, and biodiversity loss, a shift from fragmented approaches towards a coherent, long-term framework for ocean observation governance at the EU and sea-basin level has become increasingly urgent. The EOOS Steering Group welcomes the proposed European Ocean Act as a cornerstone of the European Ocean Pact and a timely response to long-standing structural challenges in European ocean governance and ocean observation. These challenges, consistently identified across European operational, scientific, and policy communities, include fragmentation of mandates across and within Member States, limited coordination of ocean observing activities, insufficient long-term sustainability of observing systems, and weak alignment between policy needs and observation planning.

The Ocean Act is a necessary response to issues that cannot be effectively addressed by Member States acting alone. Stronger EU-level coordination is essential to overcome fragmentation, reduce inefficiencies and duplication, and ensure that ocean observation can reliably underpin the effective implementation of EU environmental, climate, maritime, and blue economy policies, as well as the EU Missions.

Ocean observation as a strategic EU asset for public benefit

Ocean observation must be recognised as a public good. Sustained, integrated ocean observing systems provide essential services for citizens, public authorities, and the economy, supporting environmental protection, climate adaptation and mitigation, maritime safety, innovation, and competitiveness. Despite this, most in situ observing networks in Europe continue to rely on short-term, project-based funding, even where legal obligations exist. This undermines long-term continuity, limits system optimisation, and weakens the attractiveness of careers in ocean observation, particularly for early-career professionals.

Evidence collected by the EOOS Steering Group organisations over nearly two decades, including recent inputs from organisations directly involved in European marine research infrastructures and national and regional observing systems, shows that these structural weaknesses persist. Reported challenges include fragmented governance arrangements, loss of long-term time series due to discontinuation of observing platforms, shortages of

skilled technical staff, insufficient maintenance funding, and limited mechanisms to systematically align observation priorities with evolving policy and user needs.

Comparisons with atmospheric observing systems further underline the issue. Meteorological observation operates within treaty-based frameworks with clear mandates and sustained public funding, enabling continuity and coordination. Ocean observation, by contrast, largely depends on voluntary or short-term arrangements, despite delivering essential public benefits.

EU added value and subsidiarity

The EOOS Steering Group strongly supports the Commission's assessment that EU-level action provides clear added value. Ocean processes, impacts, and observing infrastructures are inherently transboundary and operate at sea-basin, European, and global scales. A coherent EU framework can improve efficiency, reduce duplication, identify gaps, and strengthen Europe's global leadership in ocean observation, technology, and knowledge provision, while complementing, rather than replacing, national responsibilities.

Integrated, sustained, and fit-for-purpose national ocean observing systems in Member States form the foundation of European coordination and, conversely, depend on that coordination to function effectively. Ocean observation is not a self-organising system; it requires structured governance, strategic prioritisation and intelligent coordination across policy domains, sectors, communities, and disciplines, sustainably supported by the EU to provide ongoing added value.

Commission-Member State Forum for ocean observation

By strengthening the governance and coordination framework for ocean observation, the European Ocean Act can help consolidate fragmented efforts into a more strategic and sustainable European capability, supporting environmental objectives, economic activities and Europe's international role.

An institutionalised Commission-Member State Forum for ocean observation, as envisaged in the Call for Evidence, is recognised as the right way forward by the EOOS Steering Group. Such a Forum is essential to achieving a coherent European ocean observing system and to strengthening Europe's contribution to the Global Ocean Observing System coordinated by UNESCO-IOC. In addition to its immediate coordination functions, the Forum could support the gradual development of a more structured governance framework for ocean observation, facilitating improved alignment of priorities, resources, and actions across policies, sectors, communities, and sea basins. This would also provide a suitable context to give greater attention to the identification and prioritisation of ocean observing infrastructures that are critical for the continuity of policy-relevant data and services, thereby reducing vulnerabilities associated with the loss of key capacities supporting monitoring, early warning, marine spatial planning, and climate adaptation.

The Forum should provide a structured space for joint strategic planning, priority-setting, coordination, and sustained funding of ocean observation across sea basins, while ensuring systematic engagement with operational communities and relevant stakeholders. It should recognise the multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary nature of ocean observation governance, including climate, biodiversity, biogeochemical, and socio-economic dimensions, and support a cumulative, ecosystem-based approach as well as ocean services beyond individual sectoral management.

Key functions should include:

- Facilitating coordination and alignment between EU ocean, climate and environmental policies, the EU Missions, and societal needs;
- Analysing gaps, performance, and associated economic and environmental benefits in existing and for planned observing systems;
- Supporting standardisation, digitalisation, and simplification of reporting and data formats;
- Strengthening links with EU digital ocean and information services, including Copernicus Marine, EMODnet, and the Digital Twin of the Ocean;
- Enabling better coordination of transnational and pan-European observing networks, while respecting Member State responsibility for coastal systems.

Governance, funding and implementation

The ambition of the Ocean Act must be matched by adequate and sustained resources. European ocean observation coordination, including any supporting structures, requires dedicated and sustained funding. The European Commission, together with Member States, should combine efforts towards co-funding systematic global and pan-European observing networks, European coordination, and related research and innovation activities.

There needs to be clear linkages between the existing European coordination structures and national coordination mechanisms. Member States should provide regular information on the status of ocean observing activities and future plans, and receive coordinated European-level priority-setting and guidance for implementing transnational and global observing priorities.

Ocean observing infrastructures are strong strategic European assets, yet their critical importance and impact need to be systematically and regularly assessed. We recommend establishing a formal mechanism to identify, prioritise, and safeguard infrastructures whose loss would undermine policy monitoring, early warning, and surveying capacities, recognising them as essential for marine spatial planning, blue economic development, environmental assessment, climate resilience, and security.

Broader policy integration and societal dimension

The EOOS Steering Group underlines the importance of embedding ocean observation within a holistic, source-to-sea, and Earth-system approach. This includes stronger links

between maritime spatial planning, blue economy, climate change, biodiversity protection, pollution control, and land-sea interactions, as well as coherence with other relevant EU policies. An effective and forward-looking European Ocean Act must go beyond procedural simplification to address long-standing structural constraints, empowering Europe to plan, coordinate, and sustain a resilient in situ observing system across all policies, sectors, and sea basins. Central to this success is the establishment of an operational in situ marine knowledge value chain from observations to services like EMODnet and CMEMS, is crucial for the successful implementation of the Act and the empowerment of Member States in meeting their Maritime Spatial Planning and wider policy obligations.

Improved understanding of cumulative impacts, multi-use of marine space, and climate-driven changes is essential for future governance and security. Regular integration of new scientific knowledge, emerging sectors and uses, and climate impacts should be enabled within the governance framework. Reinforcing links with society through ocean literacy, stakeholder engagement and attractive, inclusive career pathways is critical for building long-term societal ownership, trust, and resilience of Europe's ocean knowledge system.

By resolving long-standing structural constraints, the European Ocean Act will empower the building of a seamlessly coordinated and resilient observing system, ensuring Europe possesses the sustained capacity to plan, coordinate and maintain the in-situ ocean observation system necessary across all policies, sectors and sea basins for a secure, sustainable, and thriving maritime future.