Brussels, 9 February 2026

EuroGOOS Response to the European Ocean Act Call for Evidence

EuroGOOS overall position

EuroGOOS welcomes the European Ocean Act as a cornerstone of the European Ocean Pact and as a timely response to structural challenges that have persisted in European ocean governance and the knowledge and observation base that underpins effective policy implementation. These challenges include fragmentation across and within European nations, limited coordination of mandates, challenging cross-national ocean observing and monitoring campaign planning, and lack of long-term sustainability, knowledge transfer, and capacity development arising from project-based approaches. Consistently identified by the EuroGOOS community, these issues are critical to improving the knowledge base and the effective implementation of environmental and climate policies and the EU Missions, the Maritime Spatial Planning, innovation, and sustainable blue economy.

EuroGOOS considers the European Ocean Act a necessary response to challenges that cannot be effectively addressed by Member States acting alone. By strengthening EU-level coordination, embedding ocean observation within a coherent governance framework, and ensuring close interaction with operational and scientific communities, the Act can enhance Europe's capacity to respond to societal, environmental, and economic challenges caused by climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Supporting our environmental knowledge systems and essential services for citizens and economy, ocean observing must be recognised as a public good, requiring sustainable funding to support its long-term, collective function in delivering its benefits.

By reinforcing links with society, supporting ocean literacy, and contributing to more attractive, inclusive, and long-term careers in ocean observation, the Act can also help strengthen societal ownership and resilience of Europe's ocean knowledge system.

EuroGOOS role

EuroGOOS was established in 1994 as the European component of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), an international initiative coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. It brings together 48 member organisations from 19 European countries, including national agencies, public research institutes, universities and specialised operational oceanographic organisations engaged in ocean observing, modelling, and forecasting.

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In addition to its member organisations, EuroGOOS engages a wider operational community of over 140 organisations through five Regional Ocean Observing Systems, observing platform networks, working groups, and communities of practice. In partnership with key European partners, EuroGOOS has been fostering the European Ocean Observing System (EOOS) Framework.

As a science-driven, independent organisation, EuroGOOS has continuously gathered operational, governance, and funding evidence across Europe, while delivering unique coordination support to European nations and oceanographic communities and supporting ocean literacy and outreach to strengthen societal relevance and policy uptake.

Evidence from EuroGOOS studies

The need for a system-level approach to ocean observation in Europe has been identified for nearly two decades [1,2,3]. Since then, substantial progress has been achieved in data integration and service delivery through initiatives like SeaDataNet, EMODnet, and Copernicus. These investments have significantly improved access to marine data and downstream services at European level, with recognised global relevance.

However, our evidence consistently indicates that the advances in downstream services have not resolved the upstream governance and sustainability challenges. Our studies show that more than half of marine monitoring and nearly two thirds of ocean observing activities lack access to long-term funding, even where legal requirements exist under EU legislation[4]. Most in situ observing networks continue to rely on short-term research funding, limiting stability, integration, and long-term planning, and limited opportunities for early-career professionals.

Comparisons with atmospheric observing systems illustrate the importance of institutional arrangements[5]. Meteorological observing operates within treaty-based frameworks with clear mandates and sustained public funding, enabling long-term continuity and coordination. Ocean observing, by contrast, still largely depends on short-term and voluntary arrangements, despite delivering essential public good, underpinning maritime safety and security, weather forecasting, climate change impact assessments, marine environmental protection, early warning and risk reduction, and the sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture.

The 10th EuroGOOS International Conference emphasised that ocean services are underpinned by sustained observations and that their continuity relies as much on human capacity as on infrastructure[6]. It highlighted the need for a holistic Earth-system approach integrating other environmental and socio-economic domains, strengthened skills and career pathways, and adequately resourced ocean literacy and stakeholder engagement to ensure policy relevance and uptake.

These conclusions are consistent with the Vigo Declaration (2023)[7], which asserted that achieving climate neutrality, reducing pollution, and restoring nature is not possible without ocean knowledge,

[1] EMB-EuroGOOS Vision Document (2008)
[2] EMODnet Impact Assessment (SEC(2010) 998 final)
[3] EuroGOOS Policy Brief (2016)
[4] Lara-Lopez et al, 2021 (funded by the EuroSea Horizon Europe project No 862626)
[5] Buch et al, 2019. EEA/IDM/15/026/LOT1
[6] Proceedings of the 10th EuroGOOS International Conference (2023) DOI: http://hdl.handle.net/10793/1883
[7] Vigo Declaration: Speaking with One Voice to achieve the One Ocean we want (2023)

and called for integrated land-sea policies, sustained and better coordinated ocean observation, and strengthened ocean literacy and citizen engagement.

Evidence collected by EuroGOOS in 2026, based on inputs from members directly involved in European Marine Research Infrastructures and national and regional observing systems, further confirms that the structural challenges identified in earlier assessments have persisted.

EuroGOOS members report:

- Lack of long-term funding stability and reliance on finite, project-based funding models;
- Fragmentation of mandates at both EU and national level, with overlapping or conflicting responsibilities;
- Loss of historic observing platforms and systems underpinning multi-decadal time series, with associated impacts on long-term data sets;
- Limited mechanisms to systematically align observing priorities with evolving policy needs and user requirements, constraining the policy relevance and strategic optimisation of observing efforts;
- Limited coordination and absence of dedicated funding for the maintenance of observing infrastructure; and
- Shortages of experienced technical staff and insufficient mechanisms to integrate, train, and retain Early Career Ocean Professionals, resulting in loss of institutional knowledge and operational capacity.

Taken together, this evidence points to a clear set of system requirements, including:

- Stable, long-term funding mechanisms aligned with the sustained nature of ocean observing;
- Clearer and more coherent allocation of mandates across EU and national levels;
- Protection and continuity of core observing platforms and long-term time series;
- Structured processes to align observing priorities with policy objectives and user needs;
- Coordinated approaches and dedicated resources for the long-term operation and maintenance of observing infrastructures; and
- Strengthened mechanisms for skills development, knowledge transfer, and the integration of Early Career Ocean Professionals to ensure long-term system capacity.

Addressing these requirements cannot be achieved through fragmented or short-term measures alone. The evidence points to a structurally fragile system in which continuity, efficiency, and responsiveness are constrained not by lack of effort, but by governance and funding arrangements misaligned with policy needs and the requirements of sustained operational service delivery. This also limits the capacity of ocean observing systems to engage effectively with society, to support ocean literacy, and to inspire trust and understanding of ocean-related policies. EuroGOOS therefore calls for an enabling EU-level framework capable of providing long-term orientation, coordination, and continuity, while respecting subsidiarity and existing national responsibilities.

Furthermore, our community stresses that climate, biodiversity, and biogeochemical processes are intrinsically interlinked and cannot be addressed in isolation. Their societal and socio-economic impacts reinforce the need for comprehensive, evidence-based governance arrangements supported by sustained, integrated ocean observing systems capable of capturing cross-domain interactions and cumulative impacts over time.

EU added value and the role of the European Ocean Act

EuroGOOS sees a clear added value in establishing a Commission-Member State forum for ocean observation envisaged in the Ocean Act to provide a structured space for coordination, prioritisation, and shared strategic planning.

Such a forum should:

- Recognise multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary nature of the ocean observing governance and operation;
- Ensure uptake of scientific, technological, capacity, and user requirements in the European ocean observing coordination efforts through the existing networks and mechanisms;
- Facilitate alignment between European ocean, climate, and environmental policies, the EU Missions, and societal engagement objectives;
- Ensure science-driven and impact-oriented prioritisation of ocean observing, taking into account regional diversity, transboundary impacts, and policy-relevant knowledge needs;
- Help streamline and simplify ocean-related reporting, planning, and conducting in situ observation campaigns.

Any future coordination forum will require access to impartial, system-level expertise rooted in regional and operational realities to ensure that its outcomes are informed by governance and funding arrangements, technological developments, data value chains, and user needs. Such expertise already exists in European coordination mechanisms operating across sea basins and observing platforms, including those coordinated through EuroGOOS and its regional systems and task teams. This includes contributing to the operational implementation of the European Digital Twin of the Ocean through enriching data quality and availability, strengthening skills development, and fostering cross-disciplinary and cross-generational exchanges across observing infrastructures, data systems, and governance processes.