

DECLARATION OF THE MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF THE COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING IN THE ATLANTIC SEA-BASIN STRATEGY

18 October 2023, Porto,

We, the government representatives of France, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, meeting in Porto, in the presence of the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries of the European Commission:

RECALLING

1. the adoption of the Revised Atlantic Action Plan (AAP 2.0) on 27 July 2020 for a sustainable, resilient and competitive blue economy in the EU Member States Atlantic areas;
2. the European Green Deal launched by the European Commission on 12 December 2019, and related actions, particularly the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy launched in May 2020;
3. the EC Communication on a new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU, adopted on 17 May 2021;
4. the Council Conclusions on a sustainable blue economy: health, knowledge, prosperity, social equity adopted on 26 May 2021 welcoming the new Atlantic maritime strategy action plan;
5. the EU's Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy adopted on 19 November 2020, the 18 May 2022 REPowerEU Communication on Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy, the 11 March 2022 Versailles Declaration regarding energy, the EC Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector, presented on 21 February 2023;
6. the EC Communication on 'strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030' adopted on 12 May 2021;
7. the EC Communication on 'Towards a strong and sustainable EU algae sector adopted on 15 November 2022;
8. the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) based on Regulations (EU) 1380/2013 on CFP, (EU) 1379/2013 on common organisation of the markets and (EU) n° 2021/1139 508/2014 on EMFAF;
9. the EC Communication on unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions adopted on 3 May 2022;
10. the EU's Global Approach to Research and Innovation, adopted in 2021;
11. the EU's Zero Pollution Action Plan 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil', adopted on 12 May 2021;

12. the EC Communication on developing a Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean Area adopted on 21 November 2011;
13. the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance Declaration signed in Washington, D.C. on 13 July 2022 by the European Union, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Cabo Verde, Morocco, South Africa and the United States;
14. the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SGDs 6 (sanitation for all), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water) and 17 (partnerships for goals);
15. the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted on 19 December 2022;
16. the international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) adopted on 23 June 2023;
17. the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) objectives;
18. Recalling the Declaration ‘Our ocean, our future, our responsibility’ adopted at the UN Ocean Conference co-organised in 2022 by Portugal and Kenya and noting the upcoming UN Ocean Conference that will be co-organised by France and Costa Rica in 2025;
19. the IPCC sixth Assessment Report, the OSPAR Quality Status Report (Atlantic component) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive Report.

ACKNOWLEDGING

20. the long term and successful experience of cooperation among all participating countries and WELCOMING the valuable contribution brought by the Atlantic Strategy, the successful role of the successive presidencies since the adoption of the AAP 2.0, the EU-funded projects and national actions in strengthening the regional cooperation dimension and supporting the AAP 2.0 with a thematic focus in key policy areas for fostering sustainable blue economy and socio-economic recovery;
21. the progress made in the implementation of the AAP 2.0, including regional and local actors, as demonstrated by the annual progress reports;
22. the efforts and achievements of the Atlantic Strategy Committee and the valuable contributions of its standing members and observers, noting that the success depends on a multi-scale collective effort including European, national, regional and local stakeholders such as maritime clusters in the implementation of the AAP 2.0;
23. the progress made by the Thematic pillar coordinators and respective Task Forces.

HIGHLIGHTING

24. the importance of the regional dimension in the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and the key role played by the regions and different stakeholders in its implementation;
25. the balance reached in most of Atlantic fishery's stocks, that are managed under maximum sustainable yield, so making fishing a sustainable practice;
26. the impacts of the general geopolitical situation and the importance of the resilience of maritime sectors, both for post-covid recovery and for energy crisis mitigation and decarbonisation efforts (accelerated after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022) and that Russia's unjustified military aggression against Ukraine undermines international security and stability and has massively disrupted the European and global energy systems;
27. that more than ever, energy security and the fight against climate change and biodiversity decline are crucial to the future of the European Union;
28. the importance to participate in the implementation and deployment of Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters" and its Atlantic-Arctic lighthouse on ecosystems protection and restoration, e.g. by joining forces to reach the ambitious objectives on biodiversity and restoration, together with the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change and the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities for their relevant actions relating to coastal resilience and coastal cities;
29. that the Atlantic Sea Basin has a high natural potential for offshore renewable energy, in particular offshore wind energy;
30. that the area benefits from favourable wind conditions, wave and tidal resources as well as from an extensive maritime territory;
31. that the Atlantic Sea Basin is characterised by deep waters that makes it less suitable for bottom-fixed wind turbines;
32. that the Atlantic is home to innovative technologies in particular regarding floating wind, wave energy, tidal energy or a combination of these technologies but also in the aquaculture and blue biotechnologies sectors, as well as in established sectors of the Blue Economy;
33. the importance of the development of sustainable aquaculture in order to guarantee food security in the European Union;
34. the importance of a sustainable, strong, resilient and competitive blue economy in shaping an open strategic autonomy for the EU.

WELCOMING

35. the deployment and development of the new governance structure under the AAP 2.0, notably the establishment of the four interconnected and mutually reinforcing thematic pillars:
 - i. Atlantic ports as gateways and hubs for the blue economy;
 - ii. Blue skills of the future and ocean literacy;
 - iii. Marine renewable energy;
 - iv. Healthy oceans and resilient coasts.

36. the research and innovation activities implemented as part of the Galway and Belém Statements, the Washington Declaration and the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance, which cut across all thematic pillars and offer a unique opportunity to engage with international partners in fit-for-purpose marine research. **ACKNOWLEDGING** that they give an international dimension to the action plan and support its implementation by improving the understanding of the changing Atlantic Ocean, equip communities with scientific and actionable knowledge, and by developing innovative solutions.

ACKNOWLEDGING

37. that the EU's Atlantic Maritime Strategy and the AAP 2.0 identifies offshore renewable energy as a strategic area for cooperation between France, Ireland, Portugal and Spain; **RECOGNISING** that there is also a good regional cooperation in the High-Level Group for south-west Europe on interconnections in offshore renewable energy;

38. that we should build on the work already accomplished, notably under the marine renewable energy pillar of the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0, and that we will implement strategies to achieve our goals in close cooperation with the other European sea-basins; **EMPHASISING** that in doing so, we will strive for a balanced coexistence of economic and ecological needs.

RECOGNISING

39. the strategic role of national maritime spatial plans (and their review), built on an ecosystem-based management approach, to support co-existence and multi-use of the marine space and EU-funded cross border projects to mitigate and minimize conflicts and find synergies between various activities at sea with the participation of all stakeholders;

40. that the European Atlantic Member States have currently a total combined of installed capacity of 535 MW and combined non-binding goals of 25 GW for offshore renewable generation capacity to be deployed by 2030;

41. the strong potential of wave and tidal energy, its technology readiness and its capacity to grow at commercial scale;

42. that ports and other land infrastructure act as hubs and gateways in the Atlantic marine renewable energy sector;
43. that ports and other land infrastructure are key strategic service providers for fisheries and marine aquaculture and will therefore play a critical role in enabling the energy transition for these sectors;
44. that the effects of port developments, particularly on smaller ports and coastal communities and populations should be considered.

WE JOINTLY COMMIT TO:

45. steer the dialogue between the different actors and sectors to support the prosperity of people living in the coastal areas;
46. continue cooperating on the implementation of the AAP 2.0 in an integrative and transversal approach to promote complementarity between its pillars and in partnership with the European Commission, with a view to making progress towards its set goals, namely:
 - a) Developing ports as gateways for trade and energy in the Atlantic and as catalysts for business;
 - b) Boosting quality education, training and life-long learning as well as Ocean literacy;
 - c) Promoting carbon neutrality in particular through marine renewable energy;
 - d) Promoting carbon sequestration namely through regenerative aquaculture and algae;
 - e) Promotion of energy transition in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors through supporting infrastructures;
 - f) Enhancing coastal resilience and fight against marine pollution;
 - g) Improve knowledge of marine ecosystems.
47. work towards decarbonization, where ports have a major role in the sustainable development of sectors like coastal tourism, aquaculture, shipbuilding and marine renewables, notably:
 - a) To increase knowledge on new sustainable energy sources, relevant to different fleet and vessel types;
 - b) To foster vessel designs, particularly small ones, adapted to new energy sources;
 - c) To develop purpose to build port infrastructures for the deployment of offshore renewable energy and low carbon fuels;
 - d) To open and foster maritime green corridors in the EU;
 - e) To foster pilot projects implementation;
 - f) To provide inputs for European regulation in terms of energy and maritime transport, fishing and port service vessels, building on our experience and results achieved.

48. attract new talents for the Blue Economy, upskilling and reskilling workers and ensuring their interoperability in the Atlantic region, **RECOGNISING** these as cross-cutting priorities for a strong and sustainable blue economy, through:
 - a) Evaluation of Blue Schools regarding the impact in the change of perceptions, attitudes and behaviours;
 - b) Creation of digital resources to support blue education;
 - c) Creation of basic training modules on environmental impacts and ocean literacy in vocational education and training in Tertiary Education Courses.

49. acknowledge and increase our efforts to:
 - a) Engage citizens and raise social awareness about the impacts of climate change in coastlines and risk mitigation and adaptation, namely through Citizen Science;
 - b) Support cooperation on research initiatives and infrastructure to increase capacity for ocean observation in the Atlantic area.

50. pave the way for the further expansion of offshore renewable energy, **REAFFIRMING** our commitment to work together on the deployment of our offshore renewable energy potential by:
 - a) Increasing market visibility for investors on pilot and commercial farms with planning and schedule of tenders, and supporting measures;
 - b) Exploring joint cross-border renewable energy projects and identifying infrastructure needs;
 - c) Sharing expertise and knowledge on the interactions of offshore renewable installations with the marine environment and sea-users, in order to minimise environmental impacts, facilitate co-existence and shorten permitting;
 - d) Taking measures to deploy wave or tidal pilot farms in Atlantic waters before 2025, in order to meet the intermediate target of 100MW as set by the EU offshore renewable strategy;
 - e) Accelerating the development of pilot projects on multi-use of the marine nature protection, seafood production and the combination of offshore renewable technologies;
 - f) Sharing innovative practices such as the inclusion of non-price criteria related to nature protection and multi-use in the tenders for offshore renewable energy projects.

51. **CONSIDERING** climate risk management and adaptation measures are necessary to protect the coastal habitats and biodiversity, as well as vulnerable infrastructure and economic activities, we reaffirm the need to reduce marine pollution through a joint approach between the four Pillars to develop synergies by sharing the work done so far by the Pillar IV task force;

52. enhancing the international dimension of the action plan, as this is fundamental to understand the changing Atlantic Ocean and its effects on coastal communities and to boost sustainable blue economy. The international dimension of the Atlantic Action Plan should:
 - a) Create synergies between different countries and regions that share the Atlantic;

- b) Promote collaborative framework on marine sciences through initiatives such as the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance Declaration;
 - c) Share best practices complementary to the Atlantic Action Plan work.
53. considering smart specialisation strategies as enablers or facilitators to support interregional partnerships for Sustainable Blue Economy and welcoming the thematic platform set up by the European Commission for this purpose;
54. securing adequate funding by **EMPHASISING** that increased public and private investment is essential for achieving an innovative and sustainable blue economy in the Atlantic sea-basin. We strongly **CALL** for the continued and increased mobilization of available private and public funding sources in support of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, notably programmes funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds in the 2021-2027 programming period;¹
55. pave the way for the better use of living resources, and therefore **REAFFIRMING** that we will work together on promoting offshore aquaculture and its digitalisation and the important role of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the blue economy.

CALLING FOR

56. cooperation, synergies, exchanges of know-how and best practices with other Sea Basin Strategies (namely the WestMed Initiative and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea) on identified common challenges and priorities including through reflecting on a cross-sea basin policy dialogue, noting the new approach for a coordinated technical assistance covering the three Sea-basin strategies set up at the end of 2022;
57. participation in the Energy Transition Partnership of the EU fisheries and aquaculture, to enable the dialogue for the energy transition in the sector;
58. all stakeholders to engage on a voluntary basis with EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters, together with the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change and the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities for their relevant actions relating to coastal resilience and Atlantic coastal cities and join efforts to deliver on the Missions' objectives by joining with concrete actions to the Missions' Charters.

¹ including the the EMFAF, Interreg Atlantic Area Programme, requesting for embedding the priorities of the AAP2.0 into the programmes, Horizon Europe and related EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters" calls for proposal, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership European Partnerships for climate neutral, sustainable and productive Blue Economy, the Zero Emission Waterborne Transport Partnership and Blue Invest initiative, the InvestEU Blue Economy instrument, the LIFE programme and the ERDF-funded regional operational programmes in the Atlantic coastal regions

THANKING the Portuguese Presidency for its hosting and excellent organization of the first ministerial meeting on the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Atlantic Seabasin.