



Contribution from the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) to the Commission's roadmap on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the European Union

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1. The **economic value of our oceans and their resources is growing**. While our seas remain of major importance as enabler of maritime transport, we increasingly depend on them for our food, energy, raw materials and tourism. As the competition for these resources rises, it will become increasingly challenging to manage the marine space in a strategic way and use its resources in a sustainable way.
2. **As the unique interface between land and sea**, seaports are fundamental to the blue economy. Europe's ports are essential nodes in the development and operations of different blue economy sectors, from maritime transport to coastal and maritime tourism, blue and offshore energy, fishing and aquaculture, shipbuilding and -repair facilities to the maritime circular economy. Seaports are the only point where maritime economic resources meet the wider economy.

Seaports play a diverse role in blue economy sectors. The role European port managing bodies play differs from port to port and from project to project. It is important to take into consideration this diversity of port responsibilities when looking at ways to accelerate the decarbonisation of the blue economy sectors. The most common role of port managing bodies in the field of blue economy is the landlord function, where the port authority provides - through lease or concession - the land and infrastructure to blue economy operators. This can range from providing space for storage facilities for offshore wind energy to providing the infrastructure for fish markets. Increasingly, ports engage with blue economy projects as community managers. Given that ports are the place where marine resources meet production and distribution facilities in the port cluster, port managing bodies can play a key role in bringing the different stakeholders together. Based on the role of community manager, ports can become real facilitators of sustainable blue economy activities and become promoters of sustainable blue economy solutions. A good example of the facilitator role are blue accelerators. In these centres, ports create synergies between different blue economy sectors through the set-up of spaces for research and test facilities for start-ups and innovative blue economy companies. In some cases, port managing bodies will push innovation and the development of blue economy sectors through their own financial resources. The scope and importance of the investment

role can be very diverse, ranging from (co-)investing in building infrastructure to supporting the set-up of training schemes for blue economy careers or building research facilities. As mission driven entities, the role of the port can also be to become an innovator and pioneer in new technologies for the blue economy sectors, including the shipping sector. Finally, certain port managing bodies want to take up a role as operator of blue economy activities.

3. **The European Sea ports Organisation (ESPO) welcomes the new approach** on the transition to a sustainable blue economy. ESPO also supports ambition for the EU to become a standard setter and leader in the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources. European sea ports are key partners in implementing the Green Deal ambitions. It is, however, important to safeguard the competitiveness and the level playing field of the European blue economy industry, which is becoming an important job creator.
4. **European ports aim at contributing to this approach** by facilitating, enhancing and re-enforcing those blue economy sectors that by definition contribute to delivering the green deal ambitions (such as offshore energy, maritime circular economy, Carbon capture and storage (CCS)). At the same time, ports in Europe want to do what is possible within their remit to prevent and/or minimise the negative impacts of certain blue economy activities.
5. **Greening of shipping is a first priority for Europe's ports.** While shipping remains the most CO2 efficient mode of transport, it is also responsible for the largest share of supply chain emissions in the port. In accordance with the polluter pays principle, the greening of shipping is a responsibility that lies primarily with the shipping sector itself. Ports are nonetheless committed to facilitating the greening of shipping and its transition to a zero-emission future in cooperation, within the limits of their competence, with the shipping sector and the energy providers. ESPO recognises that blue economy sectors such as renewable offshore and marine energies can play a role in making shipping more sustainable.
6. With the increasing scarcity of marine resources, it is increasingly important to establish guiding principles to address **the challenge of space** in the co-existence and further development of different blue economy sectors. This challenge is particularly acute in already 'crowded' areas, such as the North Sea. **Ports therefore underline the importance of Maritime Spatial Planning** that takes into account the views of all stakeholders, takes into consideration the critical role of maritime transport and hence the primary importance of safe and secure access and navigation lanes for shipping.

About 75% of Europe's trade with the rest of the world - and more than one third of intra-European trade - is shipped through its seaports. European ports are at the crossroads of multiple supply chains and blue economy sectors. To be able to carry out all their roles, Europe's maritime transport and ports sector must be able to **count on safe maritime access lanes and corridors as well as anchorage areas for shipping**. Safety is an issue in this regard: the closer windfarms and other activities get to maritime access lines, the more likely the chance of calamities becomes. This will become increasingly important when autonomous shipping further develops.

7. The sustainable blue growth strategy must also look at the **issue of seabed cables**. Windfarms need connection to grids, but the cables can present a problem, given the important amount

of space needed by the multiple cables that have a cumulative width of anything between 20 and 50 metres. This is in particular the case when seabed cables are situated under the access lanes to and from ports. An early consultation process with the port managing bodies and relevant stakeholders must ensure a careful planning of seabed cables which also takes into account future needs in terms of port access, anchorage and potential fairway deepening. The development of integrated energy-islands, as well the European supergrid, will make this challenge even bigger. MSP should similarly address the issue of **safeguarding the sediment immersion sites and the offshore safety equipment** like weather and wave buoys.

8. The strategy must also recognise the role of ports in waterway management and oceanography. Some ports are leaders in oceanography and therefore can play a role in plugging knowledge gaps, while others are key partners in management and investigation of marine areas. This is pertinent in the context of increased biodiversity goals, which ports will be fundamental in reaching. European ports agree with the continued need for research and innovation in this area.
9. **ESPO welcomes the provision of specific EU funds for blue economy investments**, in particular for and in ports that lead innovative blue economy projects. When these new, dedicated funds for blue economy sectors are open, it is paramount that ports are eligible, given their multiple roles in blue economy activities.

European ports believe, however, that the sustainability requirements and financing priorities put forward in certain sectoral legislation should remain the basis for EU funding and financing instruments. The Trans-European Networks in the fields of transport, energy and telecommunications and the Connecting Europe Facility are the outcome of complex legislative processes. The priorities put forward in the new sustainable blue economy communication should not create a parallel framework nor another layer on top of the priorities set in such sectoral legislation. They should not overrule the established funding requirements and eligibility criteria for EU funded projects in these areas as this would increase complexity and confusion for ports and other project promoters, which are preparing and/or submitting investments projects.

10. While ESPO recognises the need for a coherent approach and management of issued related to the shared resource that is common to all blue economy sectors, **it strongly advocates for the adherence to already well-defined policies in some of the blue economy sectors** in view of avoiding overlapping or confusing policy strategies.



The European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) represents the port authorities, port associations and port administrations of the seaports of 22 Member States of the European Union and Norway at political level. ESPO has also observer members in Iceland, Israel, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. ESPO is the principal interface between the European seaport authorities and the European institutions. In addition to representing the interests of European ports, ESPO is a knowledge network which brings together professionals from the port sector and national port organisations. ESPO was created in 1993.