



Position of the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) on the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

European Ports welcome European action on climate change adaptation. As any one of the myriad current extreme weather events demonstrate, climate change is serious and already poses an existential threat to our society. While Europe as a whole occupies a privileged position compared to certain climate-affected regions, Europe's ports are particularly vulnerable to the disastrous effects of climate change. Ports experience the negative effects from global warming first-hand, from rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions to erosion.

The European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) welcomes the open consultation and blue print on the climate change adaptation strategy. European Ports support strong and accelerated action, for which the following points are of major importance:

1. Mainstream climate change adaptation into EU legislation and financial instruments

Climate change adaptation is no longer a choice, it is an obligation. As such, EU legislation must make climate change adaptation a core principle in legislation and funding. This may entail creating new programmes within existing instruments such as Horizon 2020 to gaining and implementing data and practices on adaptation. Similarly, **methodologies for evaluating projects and in impact assessments should integrate adaptation:** the cost of not adapting should be central in evaluations/assessments.

2. Strengthen the funding possibilities for adaptation infrastructure and investments

Climate change has made port infrastructure more expensive. Increased funding possibilities are therefore necessary to cover the increased financial burden of adaptation. Being both vulnerable to the effects of climate change and critical to the European economy, financial instruments should favour port infrastructure.

This applies equally at local level. Ports are often the main protection for cities when it comes to floods. The Commission should therefore **incentivise cities to co-finance the investments** needed to protect themselves and their local communities against climate change.

3. Invest in reliable data-driven climate proofing guidance

ESPO supports the push for European climate proofing guidance. Guidance should be clear and comprehensive, with specific guidance for regional waterbodies guided by a common European framework. This will benefit all stakeholders and ensure level-playing field. This will avoid burdensome costs on individual authorities, while using regional knowledge-sharing to pool the best expertise.

However, port authorities need to make decisions now. As such, **efforts should be made to translate already existing knowledge and data sets into practical tools.** Data from COPERNICUS or the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) could, for example, already provide sorely-needed forecasting information. This is particularly important for the **long-term impacts of climate change.** So far there has been insufficient data on long-term effects. For ports to remain resilient, it is critical that ports can integrate these effects into their strategies now.

4. Recognise ports as critical infrastructure

Ports keep Europe going. This was demonstrated beyond doubt during the Covid-19 pandemic and is a key lesson for future crises. Given their vulnerability, it is paramount that port infrastructure is given the maximum protection possible. **Ports must be recognised as critical infrastructure** to ensure they receive the necessary legal and financial protection.



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.