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Blue Growth - shaping the next five years together

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In the 60-year-old history of European integration the Blue Growth policy is relatively young – it's been around for just 5 years. But even in its infancy it has produced several initiatives to drive the blue economy forward and make Europe's oceans, seas and coasts both healthy and productive.

A recent [report](#) [1] by the European Commission takes stock of the results obtained and looks forward to the next few years, hoping to elicit debate among citizens on the directions to take next.

Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella said: *“If sustainably managed, the oceans offer great potential for new jobs and growth in the EU and beyond. This report shows how the EU and its Member States are removing obstacles to the growth of this promising sector while safeguarding the highest environmental standards.”*

From the very outset the [Blue Growth Strategy](#) [2] chose to focus on five innovative, high-potential maritime sectors - blue energy, aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism, blue biotechnology and sea-bed mining. And from the outset it chose to shy away from new regulation: the only piece of legislation actually produced is a directive that makes cross-border maritime planning a reality in Europe - and the continent quite unique in this respect. In parallel, soft law has been equally important to reduce red tape, correct market dysfunctions, untangle market forces and fund innovation and investment.

Five years on, results are tangible. Medical science has at least 15 novel compounds obtained from the sea to treat, among others, cancer and Alzheimer's disease. The sea-floor maps we have developed are being used to forecast storms and save lives. The production value of seafood farmed in the EU is up 40% and the tourism and cruise industries are also on the rise.

Of course problems still persist. If the EU covers the funding of research quite well, taking the results out of the lab and into the market remains challenging, especially for the most innovative maritime technologies. Using the Investment Plan for Europe to mitigate investors' fears will have to be one of the next priorities.

But certainly one of the biggest merits of the Blue Growth ideas has been to move ocean issues up the international policy agenda. EU governments now agree on the importance of the blue economy.

And for the first time one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is to conserve and sustainably use the oceans. A new era may be starting for ocean management and the EU, traditionally in the front line, has chosen this moment to take the reflection forward, first with its [Ocean Governance Communication](#) [3] and now with this report. It looks at what has been achieved since 2012 and at what is still missing, so as to learn new lessons and shape, together with the public administrations and the concerned citizens, the next few years of blue growth.

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Links

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2017-128_en.pdf

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue_growth_en

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/ocean-governance_en