

High-level conference - more than 1000 people gather in EP to support strong EU ocean policy

High-level conference - more than 1000 people gather in EP to support strong EU ocean policy



[1]

20/03/2019

On 19 March, more than 1000 people gathered in Brussels for this year's largest EU event on oceans. Organised by MEP Gesine Meissner and European Commissioner Karmenu Vella, the event hosted our continent's most influential advocates for healthy, safe and sustainable oceans. And with a large delegation of students and youth organisations in the room, the conference was more than an interesting recap of today's status quo. It was a plea for even more ambition, from policy makers, companies and civil society, to safeguard the most precious organism of our planet: our ocean.

Commissioner Vella set the tone of the conference: "the ocean is the genesis of life, but now it is on the front-line in the fight for survival. There is only one possible response, and that response is collective."

That "collective response" is called ocean governance, namely international cooperation on the various aspects that influence our ocean's health: fisheries policy, protection of habitats and biodiversity, development of the blue economy. The European Commission has just published its progress report [Improving International Ocean Governance](#) [2]. The conclusion is an encouraging one: if we are all aligned and don't waste time, we can still make a difference. The EU has already been acting on most of the 50 actions identified two years ago, and more actions are expected. Maria Damanaki from the Nature Conservancy recognized this achievement and called the EU the champion of ocean governance.

Making a difference is exactly what [two leaders of the international youth movement](#) [3] were asking from the EU, and they consider it should go faster. Nele Van Hoyweghen reminded everyone that the fight against climate change is “no longer a matter of saving our planet for the next generations”. Neither do we suffice with cleaning the oceans, according to Sébastien Willemart. Money talks, so investments and subsidies should steer public and private activity for the better.

President Tajani of the European Parliament shared that view, as he called for a strong R&D budget for the EU under Horizon Europe. He sees huge opportunities in “clean seas as drivers of the EU economy”. And Tiago Pitta e Cunha, CEO of the Oceano Azul Foundation confirmed that we have to start looking at nature as the capital that it really is, and make marine protection bankable.

Peter Herzig proposed a European Ocean Agency, much alike the European Space Agency. Indeed, it is often said that we already know more about the surface of Mars than about the ocean floor.

Oceanography, ocean science, is indispensable if we want to develop impactful policies. To illustrate that point, several EU-supported projects were on display outside of the hemicycle, demonstrating what science and innovation can bring to ocean protection and the blue economy. Think automated submarines, [highly advanced satellite programmes](#) [4], the “[internet of underwater things](#)” [5] ...

On the other side of the spectrum was the [stand of FARNET](#) [6], who displayed how the EU helps local communities to innovate while maintaining tradition, ensuring the viability of our coastal regions.

Summarizing the 40-odd speakers is impossible, but the enthusiasm from MEP Meissner and Commissioner Vella, when ending the debate after a 5-hour marathon, sums it up nicely. Politicians can only do so much, Ms. Meissner said, but if they do it with the kind of determination, passion and ingenuity as we’ve seen during this event, the future our blue planet is bright.

Curious to relive the debate? [Go to the event page](#) [7] and watch the webstream.

Source URL:

https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/press/high-level-conference-%E2%80%93-more-1000-people-gather-ep-support-strong-eu-ocean-policy_en

Links

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/newsroom/20190319-ep_42957_0.jpg

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/press/international-ocean-governance-looking-back-two-years-firm-action_en

[3] https://twitter.com/EU_MARE/status/1108043029187829762

[4] <http://marine.copernicus.eu/>

[5] <http://www.archeosub.eu/index.php/en/>

[6] https://twitter.com/EU_MARE/status/1107989269350699009

[7] <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20190213STO26336/future-of-the-blue-planet-parliament-conference-on-oceans>