ECONOMIST IMPACT

World Ocean Summit Europe

How to use ocean observation and data to safeguard a sustainable blue economy

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Ocean observations underpin weather forecasts, long-term climate-change predictions, fisheries management and shipping, but Europe's data remains scattered and hard to use.

Participants explored how ocean observation and data can help build a sustainable blue economy. Discussions centred on how to improve access to and interoperability of ocean data, how to incentivise and finance long-term observation systems, and how to accelerate innovation that turns scientific data into usable insights for decision-makers.

The workshop examined ways to overcome fragmentation across Europe's existing data initiatives, create stronger partnerships between public and private actors, and develop services that are responsive to the needs of policymakers, industry and investors.

Moderator

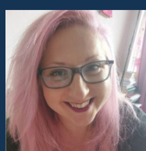
Jonathan Birdwell
Head of policy and insights,
Economist Impact

Speakers

Laurence Janssens
Chief operating officer,
HUB Ocean

Alex Rogers
Deputy director of strategic science programmes and partnerships, National Oceanography Centre, UK

Torsten Thiele
Founder,
Global Ocean Trust



Zoi Konstantinou
Policy officer at Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission (EMODnet)

Takeaways

1. Clarify—and connect—Europe's architecture. Copernicus Marine is an operational service; EuroGOOS, which is a regional body of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), a co-ordination system for gathering observations from the global ocean; EMODnet is the EU's in-situ marine-data service. Participants stressed clarifying these roles in their communications and stitching them together in practice, with the European Digital Twin Ocean (DTO) as a user-driven interface for trusted and open data.

2. Co-ordination still lags—Europe has laws, methods and initiatives, but it remains voluntary. Progress is slowed less by technology than by money, habits and uneven capacity.

3. 3) Move from portals to services. Slow download workflows should give way to standards-based application programming interfaces (APIs) that are findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR) by design, common metadata—e.g, spatio-temporal asset catalogs [STAC], International Organisation for Standardisation [ISO]-19115 and Darwin Core for biology with persistent identifiers (globally unique identifiers [GUIDs] / digital object identifiers [DOIs])—and service-based delivery.

4. Encourage firms to share data. Barriers include liability, perceived loss of competitive advantage and the fact that data collectors are not always the data owners. Practical fixes discussed included delayed-mode release, aggregation/obfuscation to protect commercial sensitivities, feedback to data providers on usage to demonstrate value, and "design for sharing" clauses in contracts so data can be made open by default.

5. Develop investor-grade metrics and long-term funding. Many data sets end when grants end, undermining trend analyses and risk models. Blended finance, blue bonds and user-pays analogies were discussed. In aviation, for example, passengers pay charges that sustain infrastructure. Alongside this, participants highlighted the need for clearer, decision-relevant indicators that link the state of nature to cash flow and risk. Examples included stock status linked to fisheries quotas, or weather and ocean forecasts used to reduce fuel costs and vessel downtime in shipping.

6. Aim for usable, near-real-time products. Fisheries are a prime use case: faster flows of SST/SSH (sea surface temperature / height), chlorophyll and catch data (with proper governance) would tighten assessments and management advice. Participants also highlighted harmful algal blooms (HAB), marine-protected-area (MPA) monitoring and coastal-hazard early warning as "no-regrets" pilots.

Recommendations

For policymakers and the European Commission

- Publish a simple guide to who does what across EMODnet, Copernicus Marine, EuroGOOS and the DTO; align messaging and guidance.
- Incorporate “shareability by design”: model contract clauses that permit open release of data generated under public procurement; require FAIR, API-first delivery and persistent identifiers.
- Guarantee ten-year funding for core ocean variables and use blended finance to prevent data deserts between projects.

For industry and data holders

- Adopt delayed-release or aggregated sharing to manage risk while increasing utility; publish clear data dictionaries and provenance.
- Report usage analytics back to data contributors so they can evidence impact internally and justify costs.

For finance and corporates

- Co-design 3–5 investor-grade indicators per sector and pilot them in disclosure and lending. For example, shipping-fuel savings vs weather and ocean forecast, aquaculture-HAB exposure vs detection latency.
- Use certification and covenants such as blue loans and bonds to nudge data provision and transparency through supply chains.

For the ocean-data community

- Standardise the plumbing: STAC/ISO-19115/Darwin Core; stable, documented APIs; GUIDs/DOIs; and validation sandboxes to assure interoperability before deployment.
- Lower the threshold to entry: natural-language interfaces that translate user questions into API calls; curated “use-case galleries” for fisheries, HABs, MPAs and coastal hazards.

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The Adelphi
1-11 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6HT
United Kingdom

events.economist.com