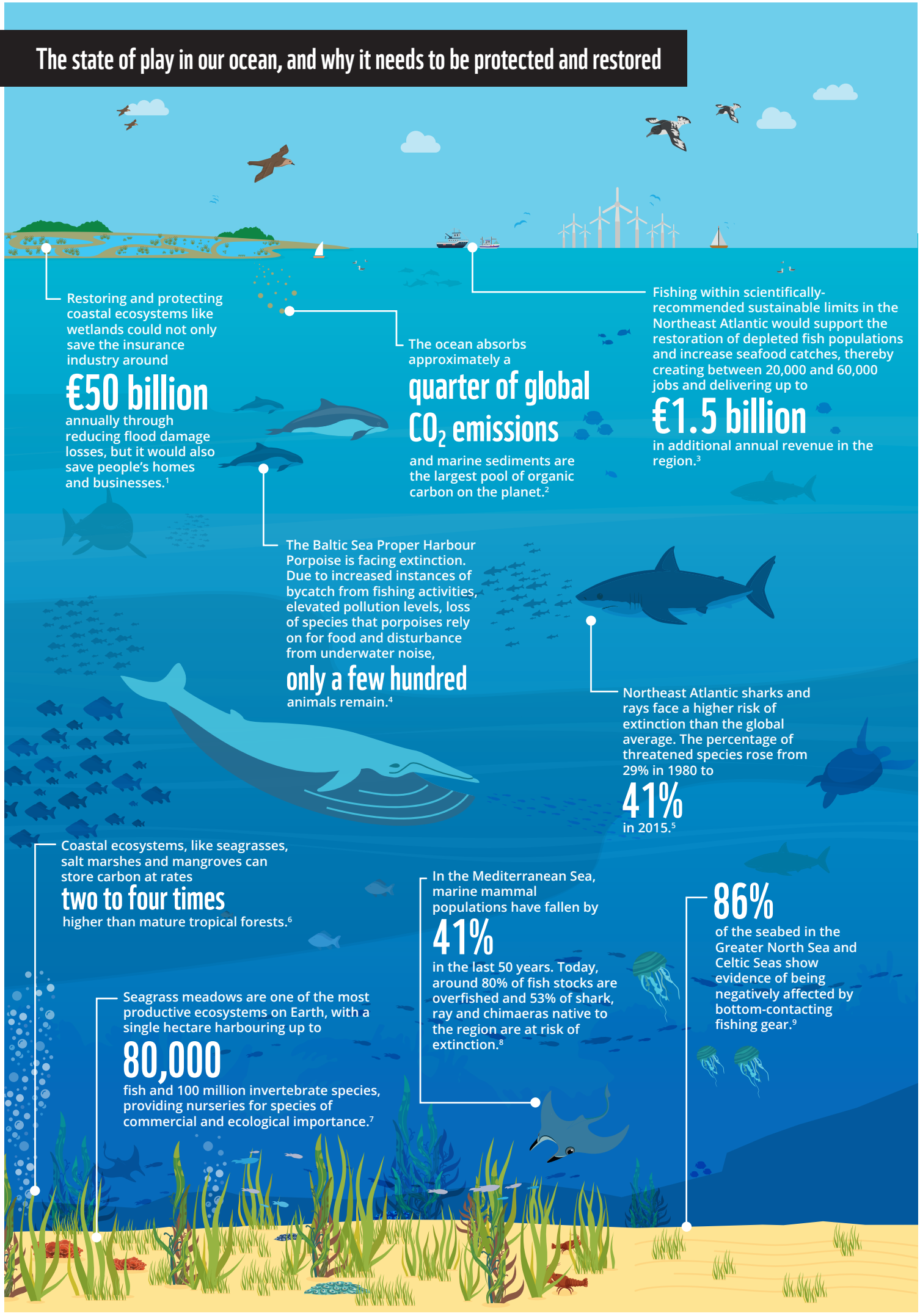
RESTORING EUROPE'S MARINE ENVIRONMENT:

HOW THE NEW EU NATURE RESTORATION LAW CAN SECURE A HEALTHY AND RESILIENT OCEAN

The state of play in our ocean, and why it needs to be protected and restored



Restoring and protecting coastal ecosystems like wetlands could not only save the insurance industry around

€50 billion

annually through reducing flood damage losses, but it would also save people's homes and businesses.[1]

The ocean absorbs approximately a

quarter of global CO_2 emissions

and marine sediments are the largest pool of organic carbon on the planet.[2]

Fishing within scientifically-recommended sustainable limits in the Northeast Atlantic would support the restoration of depleted fish populations and increase seafood catches, thereby creating between 20,000 and 60,000 jobs and delivering up to

€1.5 billion

in additional annual revenue in the region.[3]

The Baltic Sea Proper Harbour Porpoise is facing extinction. Due to increased instances of bycatch from fishing activities, elevated pollution levels, loss of species that porpoises rely on for food and disturbance from underwater noise,

only a few hundred

animals remain.[4]

Northeast Atlantic sharks and rays face a higher risk of extinction than the global average. The percentage of threatened species rose from 29% in 1980 to

41%

in 2015.[5]

Coastal ecosystems, like seagrasses, salt marshes and mangroves can store carbon at rates

two to four times

higher than mature tropical forests.[6]

Seagrass meadows are one of the most productive ecosystems on Earth, with a single hectare harbouring up to

80,000

fish and 100 million invertebrate species, providing nurseries for species of commercial and ecological importance.[7]

In the Mediterranean Sea, marine mammal populations have fallen by

41%

in the last 50 years. Today, around 80% of fish stocks are overfished and 53% of shark, ray and chimaeras native to the region are at risk of extinction.[8]

86%

of the seabed in the Greater North Sea and Celtic Seas show evidence of being negatively affected by bottom-contacting fishing gear.[9]

An EU nature restoration law to support a healthy ocean

Healthy marine and coastal areas are vital for Europe's social and economic wellbeing, providing food, employment, energy and health benefits for millions of people. Marine ecosystems also have a particularly high potential to capture and store carbon, and to prevent and reduce the impact of climate-induced disasters.

However, the escalating climate crisis, high levels of pollution, unsustainable development and overfishing have seriously degraded the health of marine ecosystems at rates unprecedented in human history, from the shallow waters to the deep sea. To bend the curve of nature loss and avert catastrophic climate change, investment in effective marine protection and restoration is urgently needed.

Europe is standing at a crossroads for ocean and climate action. As part of the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, the Green Deal and the creation of legally-binding nature restoration targets with a new law, the EU and its Member States must now take the lead to actively turn the tide of the biodiversity and climate crises, and secure a resilient blue future.

To be effective, the EU's nature restoration law needs to be ambitious and targeted. **WWF calls on the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament, together with their political parties and groups, and the Council of the European Union to support the following targets and recommendations for coastal and marine ecosystems:**

Successfully restore at least 15% of the EU marine area by 2030.

Strictly protect at least 10% of marine and coastal ecosystems, including habitats that are degraded or damaged, and those that store carbon.

Ensure restoration activities are developed in collaboration with coastal communities and local stakeholders.

Use and encourage both passive (removal of human pressure) and active (direct human interventions) restoration techniques to ensure that habitats and species recover according to their specificities and best available science.

Enhance cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional cooperation between countries and bodies at EU, global and regional level to restore transboundary marine and coastal areas as well as the high seas.

Ensure that restoration efforts and goals are set to achieve the best outcome for nature and biodiversity; at minimum, they must go beyond what is required by existing EU legislation such as the Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive to avoid duplication of pre-existing obligations and to build further on what's already in place.

Require Member States to submit restoration plans by a clear deadline. These must detail clear quantitative targets regarding location, ecosystems implicated, financial tools to be initiated and requirements for active public participation, as well as address how restoration measures will be implemented and evaluated using reliable data without impeding the effective management of protected areas.

Marine restoration in practice

Marine reserves in the northwestern Mediterranean Sea – Benefits for the environment, fishers and local communities

In just one decade following its creation in 1983, Spain's Medes Islands Marine Reserve successfully saw fish biomass (the mass of living biological organisms in a given area or ecosystem) recover by some 500% in comparison to nearby unprotected areas.[10] Despite the no-take zone (where extractive activities are prohibited) spanning only around 1 kilometre, the recovery of marine life helped boost marine ecotourism — today, the sector directly supports 200 jobs and brings €12 million to the local economy each year. The reserve has also had a spillover effect, where more fish are found outside of the no-take zone, benefiting local fishers. By 1991, the total annual profit from fishing and tourism was 13 times higher than before the reserve was established.[11]

Compared with active restoration, the ecosystem-wide approach of passive restoration can have immediate and important impacts for marine biodiversity. The results can generate enough revenue from sectors such as ecotourism to fund a reserve's management and recuperate short-term financial losses for other sectors, such as fisheries. Further, effectively-managed marine reserves are up to 12 times more profitable than unprotected areas.[12]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Native oyster reefs in southeast Ireland – A springboard for habitats, biodiversity and fisheries


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Historically, over 90 kilometres of extensive oyster reefs populated Ireland's east and southeast coastline.[13] In 1863, a single port recorded an annual harvest of 40 million oysters, but poor management, pollution and huge fishing pressure have decimated populations. With a final blow from a parasite introduced by an American oyster species in the 1980s, the native oyster population, *Ostrea edulis*, is now all but lost.[14] However, a recent local initiative, the Native Oyster Reef Restoration Ireland (NORRI),[15] is collaborating with fishers, farmers and scientists to actively restore the oyster reef along the Wicklow coast and establish it as a no-take zone, whose spillover effect would benefit local fishers.[16] Stakeholder engagement has shone a spotlight on the valuable role the native oyster plays in the community's history, culture and economy.

Oysters are strong allies in the fight for a healthy ocean. Their reef structures provide habitats for other species and protect coastlines from erosion and flooding. Additionally, a single adult oyster can filter and clean 100-240 litres of water per day,[17] improving water quality to help marine vegetation like kelp and seagrasses thrive, in turn providing further habitats for more species, coastline protection, as well as carbon sequestration. Together, oyster reefs, kelp forests and seagrasses create some of the most biologically productive areas in our ocean.[18]


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OUR MISSION IS TO STOP THE DEGRADATION OF THE PLANET'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND TO BUILD A FUTURE IN WHICH HUMANS LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE.

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