



UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE NICE, FRANCE 2025

UNOC3 Conference Side Event

Energy Transitions and Marine Environments Conflicts, Cooperation, and International Regulation

Tuesday 10 June, 08:30 - 11:00 am NYT, Virtual

**Organized by: Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour,
Maison Française d'Oxford, CNRS – UMR 8134 LATTS,
University of East Anglia, Ecole Normale Supérieure – PSL**

Background on the event

The symposium focused on the role of maritime spaces in the energy transition, considered as resources and fragile ecosystems, spaces for competition and cooperation, and complex legal arenas. The event questioned the governance and regulatory frameworks needed to support the growth of clean energy while safeguarding the marine environment in line with the SDG 14. Centered on the North Seas Energy Cooperation, where marine uses are increasingly diverse and demanding, it combined perspectives from academics with practitioner insights. The two panels focused on: the challenges of governing marine spaces and fostering international cooperation for the energy transition; and the spatial dimension of energy infrastructure developments in complex environments.

Key Issues discussed

- Marine renewable energy (MRE) infrastructure is developing fast in line with ambitious growth targets, resulting in 'rapidly industrializing' oceans'.

- With the growth of MRE, competition has been increasing over the use of marine spaces across a wide variety of activities and stakeholders' interests. Emerging activities such as mineral extraction may also trigger new conflicts, meanwhile, the necessity to protect marine biodiversity may require more stringent regulations.
- The governance framework for MRE is fragmented, across national and regional competencies and sectors (energy, fisheries, shipping...), hindering an effective and coherent approach. Deepening sea-basin cooperations could be a way forward.
- Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) has become increasingly widespread but also subject to criticisms. MSP is seen as: reinforcing existing power structures; marginalizing local communities and civil society; favoring certain types of (economic) data over other hardly quantifiable or non-scientific knowledge (i.e sense of place for instance); and often uncoordinated across different jurisdictions.
- Environmental Impact Assessments are key to managing complex and fragile marine environments, requiring extensive research and knowledge. They run the risk of becoming mere bureaucratic exercise unless they integrate a wide range of scientific and stakeholders' perspectives in a dynamic and inclusive way.

Key recommendations for action / voluntary commitments

1. Support the development of strategic environmental and socio-economic assessments which draw on a wide range of knowledge, including bespoke scientific data and research, as well as perspectives from stakeholders and local communities. This requires research funding, the development of new tools and shared data, as well as extensive dialogues.
2. Ensure that MSP is used as a dynamic policy tool to govern marine spaces in just ways. This requires giving a central role to a variety of less powerful actors and to local communities, including through meaningful and extensive consultations.
3. Explore systematically potential synergies between activities via MSP and Environmental Impact Assessments to balance different uses and reduce the impacts of activities at sea (i.e : co-use such as combining aquaculture with marine energy projects).
4. Ensure meaningful coordination across sectors and jurisdictions on local, regional and international bases. This can take the form of a greater coordination of MSP and Environmental Impact Assessments across projects and sea-basins acknowledging potential cumulative effects adopting a more holistic and integrative approach.
5. Further support the development of regional cooperations for marine infrastructure developments to ease best practices exchanges and foster dialogue among stakeholders and across borders.