



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
Transformative Ocean Science

Venice 2026

POLICY BRIEF

Transformative Ocean Science

for the Ocean Pact

Scientific priorities for the EU Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy

300+ scientists · 23 countries · Venice, 24–27 March 2026

This brief presents key scientific messages and policy recommendations to inform the EU Ocean R&I Strategy under development by the European Commission (RTD). It will also contribute to the high-level conference “Riding the Wave: Advancing the EU Ocean Pact through Science, Innovation and Cooperation” (Ayia Napa, Cyprus, 11–12 May 2026, held under the Cyprus EU Presidency).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three messages. Six actions.

In March 2026, more than 300 ocean scientists from 23 countries gathered in Venice for four productive days of collaboration to develop this brief.

Their collective message for the EU Ocean R&I Strategy is unambiguous: the European Union stands at an exciting opportunity for transformation and has a unique chance to position itself as a world leader in Ocean Science.

The Ocean is fundamental to life on Earth, yet much of it remains largely unexplored and poorly understood. Advancing our knowledge of the Ocean is becoming increasingly urgent to confront biodiversity loss, mitigate climate change, and address the escalating impacts of human activities on marine ecosystems. Such understanding is also critical for identifying bioactive compounds with significant medical and industrial applications, as well as for unlocking the vast reservoir of “functional dark matter” represented by unknown marine gene functions. Despite this immense potential, the scientific capacity needed both to harness these opportunities and to implement the Ocean Pact remains underfunded, fragmented, and inadequately supported mainly because the ocean observational adequacy that is a pre-condition for everything else depends too much on intermittent funding sources.

Consequently, the participants of the symposium all agreed that: *‘The global ocean observing system must be considered critical infrastructure – equivalent in strategic status to satellite navigation or meteorological services – and all recommendations and priority actions in this policy brief depends on its adequacy’.*

Three strategic messages from the scientists:

1. Change the narrative: position Ocean Science firmly within society and policy - reverse ocean blindness, break institutional rigidity, shift from exploiting the ocean to valuing and coexisting with it.
2. Make transformation the method, not just the goal: systemic reform of how ocean science is funded, organised, and connected to innovation is a prerequisite for effective Ocean Pact delivery.
3. There is no transformation without inclusion: integrate diverse knowledge systems, strengthen the science policy interface, enable transdisciplinary co-production, ensure responsible science, open data, equitable access, and empower new generations as co-designers and active participants in the system.

Six priority actions for the Strategy:

1. Develop EU mechanisms that ensure long-term, predictable national contributions to integrated European Ocean Observing Systems spanning space to seafloor, safeguarding in situ observation and experimental capacity without relying solely on variable co-funding percentages. Secure multi-decadal co-funding from the EU and consolidate the commitment of EU Member States to integrate European Ocean Observing Systems, guarantee in situ exploration, observation and experimental capacity (e.g. research vessels, multi-platform systems, and mesocosms to study marine ecosystems under controlled conditions), supporting ecosystem-based approaches to ocean management, and strengthen the focus on collecting observation data on chemical (20-25% of observations) and biological parameters (10-15% of observations), shifting away from the predominant focus on physical ocean observations (65% of observations); strengthen Digital Twin platforms, and establish a European Ocean Observing Forum.

2. Establish a European Ocean Agency as a permanent, trusted broker between science, policy, and society — identified as a key takeaway of the Symposium.
3. Implement long-term funding frameworks that bridge curiosity-driven and applied research, aligned with mission-oriented objectives and the new EU Ocean Strategy. Ensure a coherent funding architecture spanning early-stage exploratory grants to large-scale collaborative initiatives.
4. Foster an integrated EU ocean innovation pipeline — bridging testbeds, risk-tolerant financing and frontier explorations — to drive technological progress.
5. Leave no one behind by embedding inclusion as a core research principle: integrate diverse knowledge systems from the onset, counteract the digital divide, and ensure equitable access to ocean data, tools, and infrastructures. Empower early-career researchers and the next generation as structural participants through leadership, underrepresented groups, developing nations, and Global South partners.
6. Build public trust in ocean science among citizens, policymakers, and key stakeholders by demonstrating the ocean’s environmental, economic, societal, and cultural value. Position narrative change, ocean literacy and broad engagement as strategic drivers across all levels of education; strengthen science communication and make the ocean’s contributions more visible and tangible to scientists, industry, decision-makers, and the wider public.

CONTEXT

A window that will not stay open

The global Ocean Economy has doubled in value over the past 25 years and is now comparable to the world’s fifth largest economy (www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-ocean-economy-to-2050_a9096fb1-en.html). However, European blue growth has remained limited (~1.7% compared to global leaders) and the sector continues to rely heavily on fossil fuels and extractive practices.

While the European Union promotes a cooperative, science-based, and multilateral approach, it must significantly strengthen investment, coordination, and global leadership in ocean science and innovation to fully capture this opportunity.

With the European Ocean Pact adopted in 2025, the launch of OceanEye in March 2026, and the Ocean R&I Strategy under development, the European Commission has established one of the most coherent frameworks for ocean strategy in its history. The Venice Symposium was deliberately convened to contribute directly to this process, with the Scientific Committee mandated to provide input to the Commission.

At the same time, geopolitical shifts are making the European Union’s choices more urgent and more consequential. Ocean science continues to face fragmented, underfunded systems, alongside an overemphasis on short-term applied research at the expense of truly transformative science.

Countries are retreating from long-standing international scientific commitments and key components of the global ocean observing system are in decline. Zhu et al. (2026, Nat. Clim. Ch., in press) provide the first rigorous assessment of what retreat means operationally: removing just 20% of GOOS data degrades annual ocean heating estimates by 33%; at 80% data loss, the global ocean warming signal becomes statistically indistinguishable from noise. Most critically, US observations represent ~53% of global data volume, and their withdrawal alone produces a 163% increase in monitoring error — worse than randomly losing 80% of all global data, because spatial distribution matters as much as volume. The EU currently contributes ~12% of global ocean temperature profiles collectively, and no European nation operates at a truly global scale (Venice Symposium plenary, Speich 2026). The window for coordinated and strategic action is still open — but it will not remain so forever.

STRATEGIC MESSAGE 1

I. Change the narrative

Transformative ocean science demands a paradigm shift in our relationship with the ocean: from resource exploitation to regenerative stewardship.

The ocean remains largely invisible to society – and insufficiently embedded in the policy and economic decisions that determine its future.

The ocean is central to life on Earth, not only as a provider of resources and ecosystem services, but as a living system with intrinsic value, fundamental to planetary stability and the resilience of biodiversity. The ocean plays a crucial role in regulating Earth's climate, absorbing around 90% of excess climate heat and roughly 30% of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. Yet, despite its fundamental importance—including its key influence on precipitation patterns on land such as heavy rains and prolonged droughts—its full societal value remains overlooked in public consciousness, education, and cross-sectoral policy. Beyond climate regulation, the ocean directly underpins human health, safety, wellbeing, and economic opportunity – through food and nutrition, renewable energy, recreation and mental health, transport, construction materials, and cultural services. For billions of people, the ocean is already a primary source of food and nutrition – a role that will become more critical as the global population grows. Marine ecosystems also contain vast genetic resources: the discovery of bioactive compounds relevant to medical applications, together with a “functional dark matter” of millions of undiscovered gene sequences with unknown functions, represents a largely untapped scientific and economic frontier with potential scientific and economic value. The persistent fragmentation of how these interdependent benefits are understood and governed limits society's ability to manage trade-offs, harness synergies, and safeguard ocean contributions for the future. Overcoming "ocean blindness" is therefore a prerequisite for implementing the Ocean Pact and ensuring a sustainable future.

This requires structural and transformative solutions, not better communication alone.

Participants in the symposium stressed that the ocean's economic, societal, cultural, security and environmental value must be made visible and actionable to policymakers, industry, academia, and citizens alike. Narrative change, from environmental concern to shared responsibility, must be embedded through structural measures: integrating ocean literacy across all education systems, recognising science communication as a core professional activity for researchers, and opening research infrastructures and marine stations as living laboratories for society while considering the specificities and vulnerabilities of various geographical (coastal) regions including the polar regions.

Transformative change requires academia as well as the governance system to evolve. Institutional inertia, short-term funding cycles and disciplinary silos often work against the boundary-crossing approaches that the Ocean Pact's implementation requires. Changing the narrative therefore also means changing the conditions under which knowledge is produced. Lastly, transformative change is needed to address critical knowledge gaps¹ a few of which are listed as illustrative examples below:

- Observation gaps in marine biodiversity (mostly undescribed) and links between genetic data to the corresponding ecological functions (47 million genes are catalogued, but their function and their links to biological functions and cycles are largely unknown);
- Addressing in situ observation data gap by increasing the collection and analysis of biological data as they are currently too sparse to e.g. calibrate ecosystem and carbon models;
- Ocean pollution monitoring to understand and assess cumulative effects of persistent pollution from (micro)plastics, PFAS and other persistent chemicals;
- Insufficient understanding of the combined effects of sea level rise, ocean heat content and acidification and deoxygenation;
- Energy-scapes – the missing bridge from warming to metabolism and productivity;
- Under sampling of deep-sea ecosystems, seamounts (biodiversity hotspots) and coastal zones;
- Insufficient understanding of compound events like flooding, saltwater intrusions, sea-level rise and extreme weather and climate events;
- Insufficient understanding of heat & carbon pathways;
- Improved observations to address unresolved aspects of ocean modelling such as sub-mesoscale mixing governing air-sea fluxes etc.
- Advancing the knowledge needed to sustainably use ocean resources – particularly food, through low-trophic aquaculture, and energy – always balancing innovation and social benefits with ecosystem integrity.
- Advancing ethical and socio-economic dimensions of the ocean through quantitative approaches to all fields of ocean science, supporting intersectional approaches to ocean research, assessment of the social impacts of the blue economy, and ethical frameworks that account for intergenerational justice.

¹ This list is not exhaustive, although it reflects some of the most important knowledge gaps that emerged from the symposium discussions

- Inspiring the next generation of explorers and training the EU and the world's next generation professional workforce are critical needs for the planet's future.

STRATEGIC MESSAGE 2

II. Make the method transformative, not just the goal

Incremental change is no longer enough. Transformation cannot remain an aspiration — it must become the operating principle for how ocean science is funded, organised and connected to innovation. Incremental advances remain essential, but they must be deliberately embedded within a transformative long-term vision.

Transformative ocean science requires a scale of ambition sufficient to justify global coordination.

Major scientific breakthroughs depend on visionary leadership, international partnerships and a shared sense of purpose. Successful endeavours have combined scientific ambition with global coordination and long-term commitment.

Ocean science now requires not incremental project justification, but a compelling articulation of value that aligns scientific excellence with economic relevance, societal benefit, and geopolitical priorities. This demands a research ecosystem where unconventional thinking and scientific intuition can be developed and connected to crucial knowledge advancements as well as societal and economic challenges. This also requires open science practices, inclusive data governance, and equitable access to knowledge.

Such a system can bridge the gap between discovery and societal value. Success depends on aligning demand-pull (from government mandates and societal needs) with supply-push (facilitated by science diplomacy and international collaboration). The challenge is not a lack of ideas, but the ability to frame them as compelling narratives that justify the necessary scale of investment.

Ocean ecosystem restoration is one concrete domain where this scale of ambition must be applied. Effective restoration requires a holistic, ecosystem-based approach with science, policy and governance as central pillars. Protection alone is no longer sufficient, and active and effective restoration must be embedded within a restoration continuum, integrating pollution control, ecosystem protection, climate resilient planning and a sustainable blue economy. This requires in-depth knowledge of ecosystem functioning, adaptive governance and long-term monitoring.

The European Ocean Pact reflects this vision. Effective action will depend on overcoming fragmented, siloed policy and governance across local, regional, European and global levels, securing adequate financing, improving policy coherence, and strengthening international influence.

A robust, sustained European ocean observing system is the cornerstone of understanding Earth's vitality.

At present, the global ocean observing system covers only 65% of required physical observations, just 27% of marine habitat biodiversity, and far fewer biological and biogeochemical variables (www.ocean-ops.org/reportcard2024). Approximately 70% of European observations still depend on short-term project funding², undermining continuity, optimisation, and long-term value. Since AI, Digital Twins, biogeochemical models, coastal adaptation, and ocean literacy all depend on knowing what the ocean is doing, we have a unique opportunity to make ocean observations an integral part of our 'critical' earth observation infrastructure as it is already the case with weather observations and weather forecasts that depend on those. In parallel, insufficient and fragmented investment in the development, testing, and optimisation of new observing technologies – including more cost-effective sensors, platforms, and methodologies – limits the system's ability to scale and adapt. Together, these gaps constrain fundamental understanding, model accuracy, Digital Twin performance, and the delivery of policy-relevant knowledge on the hydrosphere, ocean stratification and thermohaline circulations.

Critically, observing systems designed for fundamental research and those for operational services require different governance systems, funding guarantees, and performance metrics; conflating the two weakens both.

² European Ocean Observing System. (2024). Gaps of the European Ocean Observing and Forecasting System(Deliverable D1.9). EuroGOOS/GEOMAR.

Coastal ocean observation still lacks harmonised tools, interoperable methodologies, and scalable innovation needed to significantly improve monitoring efficiency. This is particularly critical in the coastal zone, where citizen science offers one of the greatest opportunities to generate high-frequency, spatially extensive, and societally relevant data that can complement formal observing systems.

This calls for integrated, high-resolution observing systems connecting land, coastal and deep sea, and atmosphere, while incorporating human and social dimensions. Coastal systems also provide a unique opportunity to engage civil society and mobilise multiple sectors in the co-design and implementation of solutions, making them a critical entry point for the Ocean Pact.

Common misconceptions must be addressed. Ocean observing systems are not ‘too expensive’ — if done right, they are a high-return public investment that reduces long-term risk and costs. They serve not only science but (climate) security, resilience, and economic development implying the need for a more comprehensive and accurate evaluation of the costs and benefits of observations, which should be jointly addressed by economists and observers. Nor does sufficient data already exist; major gaps remain, particularly in biological and biogeochemical observations.

Establishing a strong EU Ocean Observing Forum is therefore critical. Such a Forum should bring together Member States and the Commission to:

- (1) demonstrate that ocean data are a public good, essential for societal needs;
- (2) integrate ocean observing system governance (including implementing bodies);
- (3) systematically identify and prioritise observation gaps, especially in biological and socio-ecosystem data;
- (4) steer strategic funding toward closing those gaps.

The EU Digital Twin of the Ocean responds to four key challenges: closing knowledge gaps, overcoming disciplinary fragmentation, supporting evidence-based policy and decision-making, and strengthening citizen engagement. It is only as reliable as the data feeding it — an insufficient observing system means an inefficient and less powerful Digital Twin of the Ocean.

Scaling the Digital Twin globally will require science diplomacy and solutions to data sovereignty challenges that current governance frameworks are not yet fully equipped to address.

A coherent innovation architecture must span three pillars: fundamental research, mission-driven science, and deployment.

Fundamental curiosity-driven research is the engine of transformative discovery and must be protected, not weakened in the name of relevance and impact. Mission-driven research translates knowledge into actionable responses to Ocean Pact challenges. Both are essential and mutually reinforcing.

At the same time, the innovation-to-deployment pipeline remains fragmented and faces a structural “valley of death” between imagination, research and implementation. Limited risk-tolerant financing, weak commercialisation pathways, and insufficient access to testbeds and verification infrastructures continue to constrain the scaling of ocean solutions.

Governance fragmentation remains a major systemic obstacle. Weak coordination among Member States, EU institutions, and international partners; duplication of research infrastructures; insufficient alignment between scientific outputs and policy priorities; and the absence of robust legal and ocean governance frameworks all significantly reduce overall impact. In particular, the lack of regulatory clarity and strategic oversight over private investment hampers the development of a competitive European ocean industry. Together, these structural shortcomings limit Europe’s capacity to translate marine knowledge, innovation, and investment into coherent long-term leadership.

Effective governance requires shared responsibility, alliance-based coordination mechanisms, monitoring dashboards, better integration of fleets and infrastructures, and long-term system-building beyond short-term projects. In addition, this fragmentation is further reinforced by the fact that Member States retain sovereignty over their territorial waters. This makes coordinated action particularly challenging and highlights the need for governance models that enable integration while respecting national competences.

No permanent institution currently exists to perform this brokering role across science, policy, and society at the European scale. This gap further supports the need to explore a standing institutional mechanism capable of integrating research, operational capacities and policy at the European scale.

Beyond institutional structures, reforming research evaluation is equally critical. Current systems reward disciplinary publications over transdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, and science communication. Yet, these are not peripheral activities: they are central to transformative science.

Embedding these practices across ocean research strengthens the relevance, legitimacy, and impact of science, and is essential for addressing complex, interconnected ocean challenges.

Transdisciplinarity is not merely a methodological choice but an ethical obligation. Ethical considerations must be central, not only to ensure research integrity and protect research subjects, but also to embed social responsibility into ocean science and technology. Trust in science depends on researchers embracing responsibility and accountability, and the Ocean R&I Strategy should enable this in how research is funded, evaluated, and rewarded.

STRATEGIC MESSAGE 3

III. There is no transformation without inclusion

“Only an inclusive ocean science system will be capable of delivering real-world impact. Inclusiveness is not just a value — it is a research approach and a precondition for effectiveness. Without it, knowledge remains unused, policies remain disconnected, and transformation remains incomplete.”

Inclusion means, above all: leave no one behind.

This is a question of equity: who frames ocean knowledge, who generates it, who has access to it, who benefits from it, and who is left out?

Diverse knowledge systems — including indigenous-, local- and traditional knowledge— as well as social science and the humanities are not add-ons to natural science research. They are scientifically valuable and ethically necessary for understanding marine environments, long-term ecological change, and sustainable resource use.

Integration from the problem-definition stage does not compromise rigour; it is an epistemological shift.

Underrepresented and marginalized communities, developing nations and the Global South partners have contributed least to ocean degradation while bearing disproportionate consequences. Ocean science must not perpetuate systems of inequality and marginalisation.

Inclusion as a research approach also requires rethinking authorship and contribution systems that continue to reward “discovery hero” narratives at the expense of fieldwork, community engagement, and data stewardship. Reform is overdue.

Responsible ocean science demands equity, not just access.

Emerging technologies – including artificial intelligence – are transforming ocean discovery. Boosting the development and deployment of improved sensor technologies and observation instruments like gliders/underwater drones and moorings, would greatly improve ocean observations and help to address underdeveloped and unresolved aspects of ocean modelling. Only responsible use of these technologies can deliver real-world impact for all.

The digital divide is real; closing it is both an equity obligation and a scientific necessity. FAIR data principles are a crucial element of an inclusive ocean science system, but they must be embedded within an equitable knowledge system to ensure ocean data are open and usable by policymakers, coastal communities, citizens, and the private sector.

Strengthening ocean science capacity in developing nations and the Global South, ensuring equitable access to data and technologies, and building fair co-production frameworks with non-EU partners are essential components of a credible EU ocean strategy.

New generations must be structural participants, not invited stakeholders.

Early-career researchers and the next generation of marine professionals must be integrated into research design, implementation, governance and policy processes from the outset.

This requires formal pathways for participation in governance mechanisms, shared leadership, and career stability that enables long-term commitment rather than perpetual grant-hunting. At the same time, stronger, more targeted investment is needed to build an education and training system that is equipped to address Ocean Science challenges and tackle “persistent problems”. EU-wide transdisciplinary PhD programmes should foster integration of knowledge domains (natural, physical and social sciences), link research to policy and commercial enterprise while firmly embedding ethics, research co-design and

societal impact. Strengthened European marine education networks and mobility programmes will support future marine science professionals in acquiring specialist knowledge in priority areas, building competencies in data science and developing emerging technologies (including AI) and develop leadership, entrepreneurship and other transversal skills. Through intergenerational knowledge sharing and exchanges, they will be empowered to work across the science-policy interface to bring about transformative change in Ocean Science.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU OCEAN R&I STRATEGY

Six specific actions

The six actions proposed here translate the three strategic messages into concrete recommendations for the European Commission and Member States to strengthen the European Ocean research and innovation ecosystem.

1 Commit to observational needs through binding co-funding. Establish multi-year Member State co-funding commitments for core ocean observation spanning space to subseafloor, framing EOOS and OceanEye as critical strategic infrastructures. Establish an EU Ocean Observing Forum to align ocean data delivery with societal needs and recognise ocean observations as a strategic public good; systematically map biological and biogeochemical observation gaps, and stimulate coordinated long-term investment, innovation, and policy prioritisation across Europe’s fragmented observing landscape.

2 Explore the establishment of a European Ocean Agency. Launch a feasibility study for a permanent institutional broker connecting science, policy, and societal needs, inspired by models such as the European Space Agency (ESA) and/or the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF)³. Possible binding operational mandate: data governance and observing system coordination; science-policy translation; cross-ministerial coordination; regional sea basin collaboration across all sea basins; sustained engagement with coastal communities. Its role would be to act as an alliance coordinator and system integrator – strengthening long-term joint system-building across national programmes, fleets, and infrastructures. In addition to its role in coordination and science-policy integration, the EOA would enhance Europe’s strategic positioning at the global level, not only as a leader in ocean science, but as a provider of operational, policy-relevant marine information and services. It would strengthen Europe’s capacity to deliver sustained, decision-supporting information, in a manner comparable to existing frameworks such as Copernicus or national meteorological services.

3 Introduce multi-decadal funding and protect fundamental science. Create a dedicated funding stream on 10–20 year timelines with milestones defined by scientific progress rather than short project cycles thus acknowledging the importance of sustained long-term ocean observations as part of our critical observation infrastructure. Protect curiosity-driven fundamental research alongside mission-driven applied science; both are essential and mutually reinforcing. Forty-two percent of Symposium participants identified simplified long-term funding as the single most important institutional action.

4 Build an integrated ocean innovation pipeline, supported by science diplomacy. For example, the Neptune mission, a global exploration mission, intends to foster disruptive scientific and technical discovery along the entire ocean column and the seafloor, promote ocean-specific testbed and verification facilities; introduce risk-tolerant financing to bridge the valley of death between discovery and deployment; and create simplified regulatory sandboxes for shared research infrastructures and testing sites to boost ocean technology development. Scale the European Digital Twin of the Ocean towards a global science–policy platform, while addressing data sovereignty challenges through proactive science diplomacy; position Europe as a global leader in ocean innovation through a coherent pipeline linking research, experimentation and deployment.

³ The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) is an intergovernmental organisation providing global weather predictions, meteorological data, and research. It operates a supercomputer facility, supports Copernicus services, and collaborates on the EU’s Destination Earth initiative.

5

Leave no one behind. Adopt inclusive and responsible science as a research approach. Integrate diverse and underrepresented knowledge systems – including social sciences, humanities, indigenous, local and traditional knowledge – from the design stage of funded research. Remove the digital divide by mandating equitable access to ocean data, tools, and technologies that are genuinely usable by communities, developing nations, and non-expert stakeholders. Make early-career researchers and the next generation of ocean professionals structural participants in the research and governance system by creating formal pathways for participation in decision-making bodies, shared leadership models, and career structures that support long-term engagement rather than perpetual short-term contracts. Strengthen ocean science capacity in the Global South and non-EU partner countries, through fair, long-term co-production frameworks, shared infrastructures, and reciprocal mobility. Reform research evaluation criteria to reward co-design, open data stewardship, community engagement, and transdisciplinary collaboration alongside scientific excellence.

6

Invest in narrative change, ocean literacy, education and wider engagement as core drivers. Position narrative change and ocean literacy as strategic drivers across all levels of education, strengthen science communication, and make the ocean's contributions more visible and tangible to scientists, industry, decision-makers, and the wider public; embed ocean literacy and broader engagement at all educational levels; fund science communication, art-science collaborations, and intergenerational ocean dialogues as recognised professional activities; fund the development of ocean skills e.g. via EU-wide ocean science doctoral programmes; open research infrastructures as living labs for citizens and communities; make the ocean's economic, societal, cultural, and biotechnological value visible to policymakers, industry, and the public. Changing the narrative is a strategic investment in the political conditions needed for Ocean Pact delivery.

NEXT STEPS

From Venice to the Ocean R&I Strategy and beyond

The Venice Symposium generated a substantial body of material: six parallel working groups, four sessions each, more than 500 written post-it contributions, and full transcripts of four days of keynotes and roundtable discussions including contributions from senior European Commission representatives (DG RTD and DG MARE). This policy brief distils the most policy-relevant findings from that process for immediate input into the Ocean R&I Strategy.

This policy brief will be delivered to the Cyprus Presidency event for input into the Ocean R&I Strategy. The Symposium proceedings in support of the Ocean Pact implementation are in preparation by the Scientific Committee and will be delivered to the European Commission by the end of May 2026. They will provide detailed scientific grounding for these recommendations, including a synthesis of working group outputs across all four thematic questions, and a structured contribution to the Commission's call for evidence on the Strategy.

A second edition of the Symposium is being considered for 2028, potentially with an explicit mandate to assess progress against commitments and recommendations made now – and identify what has advanced, what has stalled and why.

We have a genuine, time-sensitive opportunity to drive a systemic shift in how the ocean is understood, studied and governed. That shift will require changing the narrative, making transformation the operating norm and ensuring no one is left behind. The window is open. The task now is implementation.

Drafted by M. Sprovieri, E. Gissi, and K. Schroeder (CNR-ISMAR) with contributions from the scientific committee, symposium speakers and participants



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
Transformative Ocean Science

*A creative and inclusive forum bringing together
science and policy to shape the future of Europe
ocean research and innovation.*