

# More than 100 nations take action to save oceans from human harm

Envoys at Brest summit sign up to measures to tackle fight against illegal fishing and cut pollution



France's president, Emmanuel Macron, talks with the Egyptian president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, at the One Ocean summit in France. Photograph: Ludovic Marin/EPA

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Representatives from more than 100 countries have committed to measures aimed at preserving the ocean from human harm, including stepping up the fight against illegal fishing, cutting plastic pollution and better protecting international waters.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, hosting the high-level session **of the One Ocean summit** on Friday, said 2022 was “a decisive year, and we should take here, in Brest, clear and firm commitments.”

The US climate envoy, John Kerry, said it was “the ocean that makes life on Earth possible, produces more than half of the oxygen we breathe – and even that is at risk. The ocean and climate are inextricably linked. They’re one and the same.”

The 27 EU states and 16 others agreed to pursue a global agreement by the end of the year to regulate the sustainable use of the high seas – waters lying outside any one country’s jurisdiction – and preserve their biodiversity.

“We are so close, but we need to push [to get the treaty signed in 2022],” the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, told the summit. The hope is for a fourth and final round of UN negotiations to reach agreement in New York in March.

Peggy Kalas, of the High Seas Alliance, said the announcement was “a timely and important commitment to protect our global commons”. But François Chartier, of Greenpeace France, said activists “expect concrete measures on conservation mechanisms and governance”.

While 30 more countries also signed up to the so-called 30x30 coalition, which launched in January 2021 and aims to **protect 30% of the world’s land and sea** by 2030, “clarifications are lacking on the level of protection for marine areas covered”, Chartier said.

France said it had exceeded the goal of classifying 30% of the land and marine spaces under its jurisdiction as protected areas after the creation of the world’s second largest marine protected area, around its southern and Antarctic lands.

The US said it would support opening talks at the UN for an international deal on plastic pollution, throwing its weight behind the EU27 and about 10 other countries.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) joined the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the French, German, Italian and Spanish development banks in a “clean oceans initiative” to reduce the 9m tonnes of plastic that end up in the ocean each year, pledging €4bn of finance by 2025.

Half a dozen more countries joined a “plastics economy global commitment” backed by the UN environment programme to help governments and businesses

transition to a circular economy aimed at recycling or reusing 100% of all plastics.

In an effort to further curb illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which accounts for almost a fifth of global catches, six more countries committed to ratifying the International Maritime Organization's Cape Town agreement setting safety standards for fishing boats.

Two more said they would ratify an agreement controlling fishing activities at ports where catches were landed, and several EU member states agreed to deploy their navies in overseas operations to step up surveillance of illegal fishing.

Meanwhile, 22 European shipowners committed to new targets to cut underwater noise, emissions, residues and oil discharge, 18 ports around the world undertook to reduce dockside emissions, and Mediterranean countries together with the EU said they aimed to turn the Mediterranean into a low sulphur emission zone by 2025.

France and Columbia announced a global “blue carbon” coalition to help finance the restoration of coastal ecosystems such as salt marshes, seagrass beds and mangroves that are capable of absorbing and storing large quantities of carbon.

French officials said the summit, attended in person or virtually by heads of state and government from 41 countries, marked the starting point of a series of key international meetings focused on the oceans, including the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June and Cop27 in Egypt in the autumn.

# World leaders descend on France for ocean summit as Macron puts spotlight on seas

**As One Ocean event in Brest aims to deliver ‘blue diplomacy’ in areas from pollution to overfishing, activists warn against ‘bluwashing’**



The port of Brest in Brittany, where heads of state, big shipping firms, NGOs and scientists will meet for the One Ocean summit. Photograph: Sen Li/Getty

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Up to 40 world leaders are due to make “ambitious and concrete commitments” towards combating illegal fishing, decarbonising shipping and reducing plastic pollution at what is billed as the first high-level summit dedicated to the ocean.

**One Ocean summit**, which opens on Wednesday in the French port of Brest, aims to mobilise “unprecedented international political engagement” for a wide range of pressing maritime issues, said its chief organiser, Olivier Poivre d’Arvor.



Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, the chief organiser of the One Ocean summit. Photograph: Dominique Charriau/WireImage

“It is essential,” Poivre d’Arvor said. “The climate has its Cop process but there is no equivalent for the ocean, at a time when man’s relationship with the marine world has become more and more toxic, and global heating is causing extreme change.”

Convened by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, as a highlight of France’s six-month **EU presidency**, the three-day summit will also focus on efforts to improve governance of the high seas and coordinating international scientific research.

Poivre d’Arvor, France’s ambassador for the north and south poles and marine issues, noted that the ocean covers more than 70% of the Earth’s surface, is a vital climate regulator, rich in resources, key to trade and an essential link between nations.

“But it’s routinely left aside in major summits, and is now under serious threat from a whole range of different pressures. So this initiative is about raising international ambition and getting concrete, measurable commitments to tangible action,” he said.

Poivre d'Arvor, a keen sailor who recently published *Voyage en Mers Françaises* (Travels in France's Seas), said France was the world's second-biggest sea power after the US, with exclusive economic zones totalling more than 11m sq km.

“There aren't many countries that have legitimacy on this, but France is one of them,” he said. “There is a role for ‘blue diplomacy’ in a host of areas, from piracy to pollution to overfishing and **carbon storage**. I think that's what interests the president.”

Poivre d'Arvor said more than 55 countries would be represented in the Brittany port, with 18 or 19 heads of state and government attending in person and about the same number taking part by live video link or sending recorded messages.

The summit will also bring together big shipping companies such as Maersk, CMA CGM and Hapag-Lloyd, which account for nearly 55% of the world's maritime freight, as well as leading scientists, non-governmental organisations (NGO), policymakers and international bodies.

“The principle is that those that are attending are coming with commitments,” Poivre d'Arvor said. “The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will announce EU-wide commitments. This is not about debating, it's about doing.”

The first two days of the summit are devoted to 30 public workshops and forums on topics including marine science, the Mediterranean, sustainable shipping, green ports, and cities at risk from rising sea levels, involving about 300 researchers, entrepreneurs and representatives of international organisations including the UN.

The high-level summit on Friday morning will involve heads of state and government from all five continents, Poivre d'Arvor said, including leaders of several major world economies, although he would not be drawn on names.

NGOs and campaigners have said the summit must deliver in several key areas if it is not to be seen as an exercise in “blue-washing”. Many, including Greenpeace, have said the most pressing problem is governance of the high seas – waters outside of national economic exclusion zones, which cover about half the globe.

Here, the main goal is to protect biodiversity and marine ecosystems and make progress on some kind of legal order before a UN international conference in **New York in March 2022**. Campaigners have said they expect to see the summit produce “ambitious targets and solid progress” towards that meeting.

Deep-sea exploration – below 200 metres – is another controversial topic, with mining companies, in particular, starting to show an interest in rare minerals, including nickel and cobalt, beneath parts of the ocean floor.

France abstained from voting on a call at last September’s **IUCN world conservation congress** for a moratorium on deep-sea mining and Macron has since said he favours more deep-sea exploration. The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition has said France must **formally back the mining moratorium**, likening biodiversity at the bottom of the ocean to that in tropical rainforests.

Credible pledges to place 30% of the world’s marine habitats in protected zones – compared with the **current 7.7%** – by 2030 is another international target campaigners want reinforced at the summit, as are concrete steps to tackle overfishing, a politically sensitive subject that some fear may not even be raised by the heads of state.



Barely 15% of the world’s coastal regions remain ecologically intact, study says

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Nineteen NGOs including the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, Sea Shepherd, Greenpeace, the High Seas Alliance Environmental Justice Foundation wrote to the French newspaper [Le Monde on Monday](#) to demand “major political announcements that will allow significant progress for the health of the global ocean”.

They called on delegates to “express their full support for the conclusion of a strong, ambitious and legally binding treaty for international waters in 2022”, as well as for a political decision to relaunch consultations with Russia and China and measurable progress on overfishing.

“Decision-makers at the summit have a real political opportunity to raise the importance of the ocean’s health in international policymaking,” the signatories wrote. “The time is no longer for words and observations; the solutions exist, and all that is missing is the political will to put them in place.”