

EU Commissioner Karmenu Vella

Bringing Climate Change and Maritime Sectors Centre Stage

The EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella is focused on ocean energy which the European Commission see as hugely promising, with the ability to replicate the successes of offshore wind.



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EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

European Commission is engaged in global Ocean Governance

Two years ago, the Commission announced that it wanted to take a closer look at the ocean energy sector, and made clear that they believed the sector has a long-term future. Last year, an international public consultation was carried out, providing the Commission with information from which they can decide on their actions to improve the way oceans are maintained.

The European Commission have outlined one key priority, and that is to stimulate investment, create jobs and set Europe on a path to greater prosperity. Commissioner Vella believes that oceans can play a vital role in this by investing in a sustainable economy through them.

In his speech in February of this year, Karmenu Vella talked about the offshore wind sector and how this is a good example of investing in a new type of energy. He discussed how the industry grew from virtually nothing to its current size in a mere 15 years, strengthening his point by talking about the decrease in the costs of electricity from offshore wind which have come down rapidly, quoting around 25% between 2010-15.

Offshore wind farms created more than 70,000 new jobs during both the building and maintenance of them. In the first half of 2015, European projects worth €7.1 billion got the green light.

The European Commission recognise that there are challenges they need to tackle in the form of population growth, global competition, maritime security threats just to name a few.

There is a belief that the current framework for international ocean governance may not be as effective as it needs to be which means it may be failing to ensure any sustainability of the management of oceans and their resources.

The long-term strategy known as 'Blue Growth'

Blue Growth is a strategy looking to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors. Oceans are drivers for the European economy, and the Commission believe they have potential for innovation and growth.

It's estimated that the marine and maritime sectors represent around 5.4 million jobs, generating a gross added value of nearly €500 billion a year, and Karmenu Vella believes that further growth is possible.

The Blue Growth strategy consists of three areas, which are:

1. Develop sectors that have a high potential for sustainable jobs and growth such as Aquaculture, Coastal Tourism, Marine Biotechnology, Ocean Energy and Seabed Mining
2. Essential components to provide knowledge, legal certainty and security in what is known as the 'blue' economy. This will include marine knowledge to improve access to information, maritime spatial planning to ensure an efficient and sustainable management of activities and integrated maritime surveillance to give authorities a clearer understanding of what is happening at sea.
3. Strategies to ensure tailor made measures are used to foster cooperation between countries.



A boost for fisheries, aquaculture and maritime projects in the UK

Fisheries and maritime projects in the UK are currently receiving support in the way of funds from the EU's Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Around €243 million is available until 2020.

A chunk of the overall fund will go towards helping the UK's transition of fleet to sustainable and discard-free fisheries. Funds are also being used to support innovation, onshore and offshore infrastructure and to ensure natural resources are used efficiently.

There are six key priorities for the EMFF. The first priority is to ensure the right balance is struck between fishing capacity and natural resources, fishing more selectively and preventing wasting fish that has been caught unintentionally.

The second priority is to make the industry more competitive with a focus on quality, health & safety alongside eco-friendly production as well as providing consumers with trustworthy products that are highly nutritious.

The third priority is to make improvements in data collection, scientific knowledge, control and enforcement of legislation regarding fisheries.

The EMFF's fourth priority is to ensure there is improved market organisation, intelligence and information for consumers in the seafood market.

Fifth on the EMFF's list of priorities is to help coastal and inland fisheries and aquaculture communities to gain value from the fish that is caught, as well as ensuring their economies are diverse enough to succeed in other maritime fields.

The final priority for the EMFF is to work on improving marine knowledge, planning for activities at sea, the cooperation on maritime surveillance as well as the management of sea basins with their specific needs.

Commissioner Vella welcomes Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on oceans

The IPCC has agreed to produce a special report on climate change and oceans, and the frozen bodies of water. At present, climate change has already started to affect oceans. Sea-levels are rising as a result of melting ice with higher temperatures having an impact on ecosystems including the distribution of fish stocks, with increasing acid threatening species like shellfish and corals. This includes those being bred for human consumption.

Commissioner Vella believes this is an important step in tackling climate change. He said *"This is a very positive development towards the mitigation of the negative effects of climate change on our oceans. It is in line with the efforts the European Commission is undertaking to improve ocean governance."*

The coral bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef is perhaps one of the most recent warning signs with oceans producing 50% of oxygen, absorbing more than 90% of heat between 1971 and 2010 and around 30% of carbon emissions for the entire world, oceans are a vital asset in the climate system, according to the Commission.

The strategy and timeline for the IPCC has been agreed, with special reports being prepared in the next few years. A special report will be issued in 2018 on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels along with related global greenhouse gas emissions.

The IPCC will also produce two more special reports; one on climate change and oceans, and frozen bodies of water and another on climate change, certification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in ecosystems.

Global Climate Change and Ocean Governance at the heart of Karmenu Vella's priorities

As can be evidenced, the Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries is making huge strides to tackling two of the most important issues facing the ocean. Climate change is being brought to the surface with the cooperation of the IPCC and ocean governance and the 'Blue Growth' long term strategy puts the factors affecting the maritime sectors centre stage, ready for the Commission to work on addressing and eradicating them.

The Commission will want to work on these issues sooner rather than later, with Karmenu Vella working towards a stronger, more economic and safer maritime industry.

Sources of Information

- http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/mare/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=30659&subweb=342&lang=en
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