

High-Level Africa-Mediterranean-Europe Cooperation (AMEC) Policymakers Meeting Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) 11 June 2025

On June 11, the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) co-hosted with partners an Africa-Mediterranean-Europe High-Level policymakers meeting (AMEC), built upon the momentum established at the second ‘Blue Africa Summit’ held in Tangier in October 2024, and anchored by the [‘Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership’](#), a product of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance.

The meeting presented the ‘Pact for a Sustainable Blue Africa’, marking a major milestone to strengthen the tripartite cooperation between Africa, the Mediterranean and Europe. It reaffirmed the essential role of North to South and South-South cooperation, strategic blue investments, and the need to consolidate alliances to advance a healthy, productive and equitable ocean.

Participants recognised the complex challenges facing marine ecosystems, from overexploitation and unsustainable trade practices to localized pressures and the escalating consequences of climate change. As we approach the third edition of the Blue Africa Summit in October (9-10) and the first-ever Ocean COP (on the back of BBNJ entry into force by UNGA), there is an urgent need to keep positioning Africa at the forefront of ocean action. This includes accelerating efforts in research, innovation, and development to expand ocean literacy and data access, an area where Africa still faces significant gaps.

The meeting heard the importance of knowledge-sharing and collaborative action – two areas which cannot be overstated. The world needs a new model of ocean leadership—regenerative, inclusive, and forward-looking. Within this context, AMEC is uniquely positioned to catalyze such transformative leadership. More than geographic proximity, the connection between Africa and Europe—bridged by the Mediterranean—is both symbolic and strategic. This cooperation must now focus on responsible stewardship of shared ecosystems to ensure their sustainability for the communities that rely on them.

As the international community approaches a series of critical milestones—including the 2nd Africa Climate Summit, the inaugural Africa Biodiversity Summit, the Blue Africa Summit, COP30, and the 7th EU-AU Heads of State Summit, AMEC stands as a vital enabler. The call to action is clear: deepen cooperation, strengthen regional and cross-continental partnerships, and deliver measurable, impactful outcomes.

Key Takeaways:

- **Enhancing Ocean Governance through Coherence and Capacity building:** Africa’s Ocean economy is characterised by both significant challenges and immense transformative potential. However, effective governance remains hindered by sectoral fragmentation, particularly across fisheries, transport, tourism, and energy sectors, resulting in inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and competition over marine resources and space. To address these issues, the African Union (AU) and its partners are working to promote integrated policy frameworks aimed at promoting coherence. Central to this strategy is the adoption of marine spatial planning, the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach to ocean management, and the reinforcement of science-based decision-

making. Strengthening institutional capacities and fostering inclusive partnerships such as AMEC is critical to building coherent and resilient governance systems capable of unlocking the full value of Africa's marine and coastal assets.

Food security also emerged as a pressing governance issue. In countries like Morocco and Madagascar, the overexploitation of fish resources and food loss are matters of urgent concern. Achieving a balance between job creation and sustainable resource use necessitates inclusive cross-sectoral governance models that overcome institutional silos. Fisheries management, in particular, must be coordinated across government ministries to prevent power imbalances, where economically driven sectors like fisheries dominate over environmental authorities. Effective ocean governance must therefore be rooted in equitable, integrated decision-making frameworks that support both long-term sustainability and the socio-economic well-being of coastal communities.

- **Addressing Institutional and Technical Capacity Gaps:** Despite growing momentum, many African countries continue to face significant institutional and technical capacity gaps. These include limited access to reliable ocean data, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, insufficient enforcement of legal frameworks, limited national ownership of marine data and a lack of sustainable financing mechanisms. In the absence of robust observation infrastructure and comprehensive training programs, Africa is constrained in its ability to effectively understand, manage, and govern its maritime domain. Building intellectual and technological independence is essential for the continent to define and lead its own sustainable blue economy. Developing initiatives such as an **African Ocean Index** and the establishment of regional ocean forecasting systems could play a critical role in closing these gaps. Likewise, the Pact for a Sustainable Blue Africa offers a vital platform for mobilizing public and private sector engagement in support of this agenda.

A particularly urgent issue that was noted was the governance of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which continues to threaten ocean sustainability and food security due to weak regulatory frameworks and enforcement. In response, the African Union is collaborating closely with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other key stakeholders to reinforce both national and regional capacities. This includes strategic investments in ocean data systems, legal and policy reform, improved enforcement mechanisms, and coordinated capacity-building initiatives all aimed at strengthening ocean governance across the continent.

- **Advancing Science as a Strategic Priority:** One of the most pressing challenges in ocean governance is the limited availability and reliability of ocean science, particularly in Africa. Unlike Europe, which benefits from a well-established and robust ocean observation infrastructure, Africa continues to experience significant deficits in ocean data and monitoring systems. This imbalance undermines evidence-based decision-making and hinders sustainable ocean management across the continent. Recognizing this gap, the Africa-Europe Ocean Strategy Group has identified science as a foundational pillar for effective and equitable ocean governance. To bridge this divide, the partnership must prioritize the deployment of advanced ocean observation tools and the establishment of regional scientific laboratories capable of generating and disseminating high-quality data. Crucially, this effort must be accompanied by sustained investment in

scientific capacity-building to foster a new generation of researchers and ocean professionals. Strengthening Africa's scientific base will support the creation of collaborative, transregional research communities capable of addressing the unique environmental and socio-economic challenges facing Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. In doing so, science becomes not only a strategic tool but also a bridge for deeper cooperation and shared progress.

- **Strengthening regional governance** requires robust cooperation and sustained capacity-building. Advancing marine knowledge, establishing reliable monitoring systems, and fostering strong science-policy interfaces are essential components of this effort. Achieving this requires not only the training of experts and the promotion of ecosystem protection, but also ensuring that all relevant voices are included in policymaking and implementation. Crucially, this inclusivity must extend beyond scientists and policymakers to embrace indigenous peoples, local fishers, and coastal communities—the true "guardians of the blue"—whose daily lives and livelihoods are intrinsically tied to ocean resources. The forthcoming Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (2026–2035) highlights the urgency of unified regional action. As it approaches finalization, the strategy reflects a growing recognition that addressing the intersecting climate and financial crises demands macro-regional collaboration. Yet, despite the presence of influential institutional actors such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Council of Notariats of the European Union (CNUE), institutional fragmentation continues to hinder progress. To overcome this, stakeholders must be aligned around a cohesive, forward-looking vision—one that positions the Mediterranean as a dynamic, living laboratory for Africa-Europe cooperation, innovation, and sustainability.
- **Transboundary cooperation and cross-sectoral collaboration:** Achieving regenerative and inclusive ocean governance demands on strong transboundary cooperation and cross-sectoral collaboration. While governments play a central role, it is equally critical to engage the private sector, scientific institutions, and local communities. These actors serve as vital connectors—bridging grassroots realities with high-level policy frameworks—and are instrumental in transforming knowledge into meaningful, on-the-ground action.

Interdisciplinary science, including the integration of indigenous and traditional knowledge systems, is essential for designing a blue economy that is both regenerative and equitable. Understanding the interlinkages among sectors such as fisheries, coastal development, desalination, and tourism allows for more holistic and inclusive development strategies. Given the diversity in economic conditions, governance structures, and investment ecosystems across countries, adopting an interdisciplinary and context-sensitive approach is not just strategic—it is imperative.

Moving from dialogue to action requires the integration of **digital tools and inclusive governance platforms** that enable broad participation. Africa cannot address ocean governance challenges in isolation. Strengthened regional and transboundary collaboration—particularly with Mediterranean and European partners—is key to building shared roadmaps and sustainable frameworks. The Pact for a Sustainable Blue Africa represents a landmark opportunity for Africa-Europe-Mediterranean co-leadership. Rooted in shared sustainability values, the Pact must now move decisively

toward implementation. This includes ensuring that women and youth, who are often on the frontlines of the blue economy and should be meaningfully empowered and actively engaged in shaping its future.

- **Sustainable Seascape Initiatives:** Sustainable seascape initiatives, such as the Great Blue Wall, highlight the importance of embedding sustainability into the heart of coastal development strategies. These initiatives prioritize the protection and restoration of climate-vulnerable ecosystems—such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds—which are vital not only for ecological resilience but also for the livelihoods and economic security of coastal communities. The Great Blue Wall exemplifies a bold and innovative model by connecting a network of seascapes across the Western Indian Ocean. Its landscape-scale vision provides a replicable blueprint for other African nations, and its relevance extends to Europe—especially the Mediterranean—where interconnected societies and economies face shared marine challenges. This approach underscores the need for integrated regional action.

Science-policy platforms such as the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Platform on Ocean Sustainability (IPOS) should be leveraged to ensure coherence between local, national, and global ocean policies. Likewise, Marine Protected Area (MPA) networks serve as foundational tools for conservation and sustainable use. Beyond preserving biodiversity, MPAs act as centers for technical training, peer-to-peer learning, and regional cooperation—creating communities of practice that are central to implementing the EU-Africa Ocean Roadmap. They offer tangible examples of scalable, collaborative marine governance.

Advancing Africa's blue economy also requires **innovative financing mechanisms and technology transfer**. Tools such as ocean debt swaps, blue carbon credit markets, and inclusive business models must be harnessed to attract investment, foster innovation, and accelerate the continent's transition to a resilient and equitable ocean-based economy.

- **Youth integration:** Youth must be recognized not merely as passive recipients but as active leaders and changemakers in the blue economy. In many African coastal regions, young people represent between 70% and 96% of the workforce, yet they occupy only 25% of formal employment. This disparity underscores the urgent need to invest in education, skills development, and meaningful employment opportunities tailored to the blue economy. The experience of Seychelles offers a compelling model. Through strategic investments exceeding \$750,000 in youth and coastal communities, the country has achieved tangible results: over 28 young professionals have completed blue economy internships, more than 70 marine-focused enterprises have been launched, and upwards of 40 community-led conservation projects are now active. These outcomes clearly demonstrate that when youth are given resources, trust, and leadership roles, they drive innovation and deliver measurable impact. To build on this momentum, it is essential to expand blue education pathways, secure dignified employment for young people, and scale youth-led initiatives across Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. Local successes must be nurtured into regional movements that inspire continental and global transformation. Youth are not simply the leaders of tomorrow they are already shaping the ocean economy of today.

Speakers included:

- **HE. Moses Vilakati**, Commissioner for Agriculture, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment
- **Mahatante Tsimanaoraty Paubert**, Minister of Fisheries and the Blue Economy, Government of Madagascar
- **Oliver Poivre d'Arvor**, Special Envoy of the President of the Republic for the United Nations Ocean Conference, Ambassador of France for the Ocean and Poles
- **Pascal Lamy**, Co-chair of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF)
- **Gabriella Gonthier**, Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and acting Senior International Cooperation Officer at the Seychelles Department of Blue Economy
- **Abdelmalek Alaoui**, President of the Moroccan Institute for Strategic Intelligence
- **David Obura**, Founding Director Coastal Oceans Research and Development – Indian Ocean (CORDIO) East Africa
- **Abdullah Laouine**, Former UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Environment Development
- **Patricia Ricard**, President of the Paul Richard Oceanographic Institute
- **Robin Degron**, Director of Plan Bleu, UN Environment
- **Miguel Bernal**, Executive Secretary of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) of the FAO
- **Carole Martinez**, Project Manager at MedPan
- **Valérie Verdier**, President of IRD
- **Rym Benzina**, President of La Saison Bleue