

Protection of marine environment: sustainable use of the seas, conservation of ecosystems

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The Council adopted Conclusions concerning a thematic strategy to protect and conserve the marine environment. This strategy aims at ensuring sustainable and healthy seas and oceans and their ecosystems, as well as the sustainable exploration of their resources. It recognises that some significant improvements in the quality status of European seas have been realised and some of the negative trends have been halted and in some cases reversed.

The Council underlines that, in order to deal with the huge variability of marine ecosystems, including sea beds, estuarine and coastal areas, marine protection policy requires full consideration of regional conditions and that it is of particular importance to apply the precautionary principle, that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should, as a priority, be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay.

It requests the Commission to propose an ambitious, clear and coherent set of objectives with a view to promoting the protection and conservation of marine ecosystems, including sea beds, estuarine and coastal areas and the sustainable use of the seas and its resources; pursue the implementation and enforcement of both existing and new legislation in an integrated manner; guide the development and implementation of the ecosystem approach within the marine strategy which integrates both the environment to be protected and the human activities which have an impact on the marine environment; provide for a coordination and streamlining of monitoring and assessment to achieve the highest synergistic effect; promote and facilitate effective coordinated and integrated actions by the relevant national and international parties (Member States, accession countries, neighbouring countries, organisations and stakeholders); invite neighbouring countries to participate in the process and develop partnerships, particularly in the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.