

PRESS RELEASE

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EU maritime transport: progress made, but environmental, sustainability challenges persist

Europe's maritime sector is making progress towards greater sustainability but will need to increase its efforts over the coming years to meet EU climate and environment goals aimed at reducing energy use, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions as well as better protecting biodiversity. That's according to the second edition of the European Maritime Transport Environmental Report, released today by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Maritime transport plays a crucial role in sustaining trade, economic growth, connectivity, and accessibility, while also contributing to energy security and job creation. However, **increased transport demand** for the maritime sector comes with additional environmental impacts on the atmosphere and marine ecosystems. According to the report, which gives an update on the environmental performance of the sector and an assessment of efforts to make it more sustainable, some **progress** has been made but reducing emissions remains a challenge.

Activities like shipping of cargo, containers, commercial fishing, tankers, and cruise ships, as well as port activities, remain significant contributors to a **wide range of environmental challenges**, with the whole sector accounting for 3-4% of the EU's overall **carbon dioxide (CO₂)** emissions, a share that needs to decrease. Meanwhile, **methane** gas (CH₄) emissions have at least doubled between 2018 and 2023, accounting for 26% of the sector's total methane emissions in 2022. Apart from greenhouse gas emissions, reducing **air pollutants** like sulphur and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) continues to be an issue.

Maritime transport also continues to contribute to **water pollution**, through oil spills and wastewater discharges from ships, as well as underwater noise. Marine litter from fisheries and shipping is estimated to have halved over the last decade but remains difficult to comprehensively tackle. Container loss, including those containing plastic pellets also remain an important source of sea pollution.

The report also reveals that the use of **alternative fuels** and sources of power has increased, although from a low base. However, as it currently stands, some prospective alternative fuels will need to significantly increase production to be able to meet potential demand. In addition, **harmonised international guidelines** will have to be developed and a supply of seafarers trained on new decarbonisation technologies.

Commending the report, the Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism, **Apostolos Tzitzikostas**, stated: "The new European Maritime Transport Environmental Report is a valuable guide for the future of European shipping, one that is both sustainable, competitive, and resilient. This report is also a call to action. By working together, we can ensure

that maritime transport remains a key player in our global economy, while minimizing its environmental impact and safeguarding our oceans for future generations.”

Jessika Roswall, EU Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, added: "Our waters are under pressure from climate change, biodiversity loss, mismanagement and pollution. This is why I will launch an EU Water Resilience Strategy. We need a paradigm shift on how we value water, to preserve water quality and quantity and to boost the competitive edge of our water industry. We need a ‘source to sea’ approach as activities at sea are closely linked to those on land. Now is the time for transformative change in maritime and water sectors so we can make Europe water-resilient”.

“Continued action and increased innovation are needed to accelerate the progress made towards more sustainable maritime transport in Europe – across all its operations – to reach the ambitious targets of the European Green Deal while preserving the competitiveness of the sector. Our joint report is intended to provide policymakers and citizens with a factual, evidence-based assessment of the current and future challenges to the sector’s decarbonisation journey, as well as the opportunities that digitalisation and advanced technology can bring for the green transition of maritime,” said **Maja Markovčić Kostelac**, EMSA’s Executive Director.

“The report reflects the urgent need for the maritime transport sector to increase its efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and other environmental impacts such as water pollution as well as speeding up efforts to shift to cleaner fuels, sustainable port and shipping practices to reduce its impact on marine and coastal ecosystems. New innovations and technologies and better management will help to achieve future sustainability in an affordable way, so its key now that the sector steps up its shift to green practices”, said **Leena Ylä-Mononen**, EEA Executive Director.

Achieving sustainability

New EU legislative measures, financing opportunities, and investment, can be expected to advance the decarbonisation of the sector. The EU became the first jurisdiction to set a carbon price on greenhouse gas emissions from ships with the extension of the [EU Emissions Trading System](#) (EU ETS) to maritime transport in 2024. Revenues from the ETS finance the Innovation Fund, one of the world’s largest programmes for innovative, low-carbon technologies, with more than 300 shipping-related projects already supported. At the same time, the [FuelEU Maritime Regulation](#), effective from January 2025, is incentivising low carbon fuels and power solutions with GHG intensity limits on energy used on board by ships. The FuelEU Maritime model provides the basis for the GHG fuel standard (GFS) proposed for emissions reduction at international level through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Key environmental impacts highlighted in the report

- Methane (CH₄) emissions have at least doubled between 2018 and 2023, accounting for 26% of the transport sector’s total methane emissions in 2022. This is largely attributed to the increased use of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

- **Air pollution:** Sulphur Oxide (SO_x) emissions in the EU have dropped by about 70% since 2014, largely due to the introduction of SECAs (Sulphur Emission Control Areas) in Northern Europe. The Mediterranean SECA, set to take effect on 1 May 2025, is expected to contribute further reductions together with the one upcoming in North-East Atlantic Ocean controlling both SO_x and NO_x. Meanwhile, Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x) emissions rose by an average of 10% between 2015 and 2023, making up 39% of transport-related NO_x emissions in 2022.
- **Water pollution:** Maritime transport contributes to water pollution through oil spills and operational discharges such as grey water, and water discharges from open-loop exhaust gas cleaning systems (EGCS), which are used to reduce sulphur oxides (SO_x) emissions to the atmosphere, account for 98% of permitted discharges. EGCS release contaminants into the water, highlighting the trade-off between reducing air pollution and increasing marine pollution. Discharge of grey water, driven largely by cruise ship operations, increased by 40% between 2014 and 2023.
- **Underwater noise:** New pan-European models reveal high underwater radiated noise (URN) levels in the English Channel, Strait of Gibraltar, Adriatic Sea, Dardanelles Strait, and Baltic Sea regions. Mitigation measures could reduce URN by up to 70% between 2030 and 2050.
- **Marine litter:** Marine litter from fisheries (11.2%) and shipping (1.8%) has halved over the past decade. However, challenges persist, particularly with plastic pellet pollution from lost containers.
- **Impacted seabeds:** Approximately 27% of Europe's near-shore seabed (5% facing severe effects) is impacted by maritime transport-linked activities such as port expansions, dredging and anchoring which lead to physical disturbances and habitat loss.
- **Alien species:** Shipping introduces the major part (60%) of non-indigenous species and invasive alien species (56%) in Europe. The Ballast Water Management Convention, however, led to 31% certified ships and 23% compliant systems by 2023.
- **Collision risks:** Increased shipping intensity caused a notable rise in collision risks with animals in Natura 2000 protected areas across all marine regions from 2017 to 2022.

LINK TO REPORT & FACT SHEETS

EEA: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/maritime-transport-2025>

EMSA: <http://www.emsa.europa.eu/emter>

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