

# An Ocean of Collaboration: The European Marine Restoration Working Group

eMRWG Long Term Networking and Replication Strategy  
as part of Deliverable 5.5, HEU CLIMAREST



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CLIMAREST







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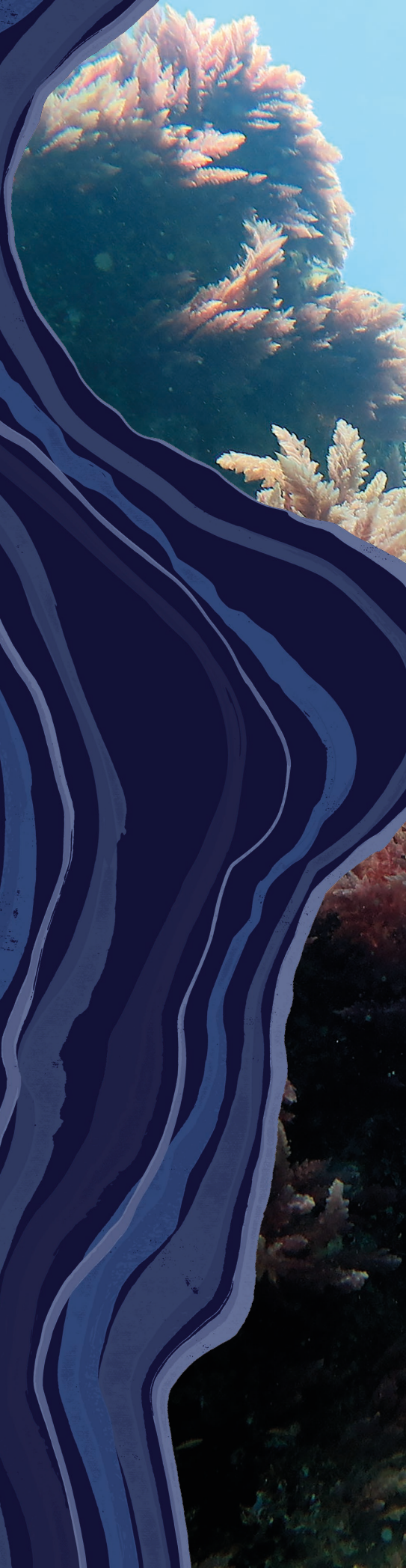
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01.

Forward







This Long-Term Networking Strategy establishes the need for and a structured framework to guide the role of the Marine Restoration Working Group (MRWG) in advancing marine ecosystem restoration during the first five years since its inception.

Developed in light of key policy developments, including the Nature Restoration Regulation, the strategy identifies actions to enhance capacity, ensure feasibility, and strengthen mechanisms for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the dissemination of best practice.

By situating the Marine Restoration Working Group within a wider “network of networks” both in Europe (under the oversight of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER-Europe)) and globally (under the oversight of the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER)), the strategy contributes to the effective alignment of regional and global efforts, thereby accelerating marine restoration outcomes and supporting the long-term objective of healthy, resilient marine ecosystems, in accordance with the UN Ocean Decade 2030.



02.

# Introduction







The Society for Ecological Restoration recognises the urgent need to restore marine habitats, protect biodiversity, and promote sustainable practices, in alignment with global and regional efforts. These include international initiatives such as the United Nations (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, as well as European Union (EU) frameworks such as the Nature Restoration Regulation, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Common Fisheries Policy, the Green Deal, Mission Restore Our Ocean and Waters by 2030, and the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Through these coordinated actions, the Society seeks to contribute to the restoration and conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems worldwide.

Supported by policy and funding including the LIFE programme, Horizon Europe, European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), and Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030, key objectives for restoration include:

- ▶ To achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) of European marine waters as defined by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).
- ▶ To restore degraded marine habitats thereby supporting the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
- ▶ To enhance resilience to climate change through nature-based solutions.
- ▶ To support the Blue Economy by ensuring the sustainability of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.

### Box 1 - What is Ecosystem Restoration?

Ecosystem Restoration is defined by the United Nations (UN) Decade on Ecosystem Restoration as:

*"The process of halting and reversing degradation, resulting in improved ecosystem services and recovered biodiversity. Ecosystem restoration encompasses a wide continuum of practices, depending on local conditions and societal choice."*

In line with the Society for Ecological Restoration, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration emphasises that restoration is not solely about returning ecosystems to their original state, but also about enhancing the functionality and capacity of those ecosystems to meet societal needs. Restoration could involve a range of activities, depending on what is most appropriate in the local context, and with consideration to long term climatic change.

Under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, marine restoration is a major priority and recognised at EU and international level as essential for meeting climate goals, protecting biodiversity and sustaining ocean-dependent economies.

As a cornerstone of the European Green Deal, which aims to halt biodiversity loss and enhance climate resilience, the Nature Restoration Law, which came into force on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2024, mandates the restoration of all degraded ecosystems across the European Union, including marine environments. Key provisions for marine ecosystems include the restoration of 30% of habitats by 2030 (the "30 by 30 target"), prioritisation of Natura 2000 sites to ensure the recovery of critical marine habitats, binding National Restoration Plans detailing specific restoration measures, timelines and funding strategies tailored to national contexts, and integration with other policies to promote holistic management of marine ecosystems.





## Box 2 - Standards Based Restoration

According to the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), standards-based ecological restoration refers to “the practice of implementing restoration projects guided by a set of internationally recognised principles and standards. These standards provide a structured framework for planning, executing, and evaluating restoration efforts, ensuring they are effective, scientifically grounded, and socially responsible”.

Comprehensive guidance on restoration practices are outlined in the Society for Ecological Restoration's International Principles and Standards for Ecosystem Restoration. The standards emphasise the importance of reference native ecosystems, consideration of ongoing climatic and environmental change, and equitable engagement of all stakeholders to assist natural recovery processes towards full recovery. Key components of standards-based restoration include:

1. Setting **clear measurable objectives** and effective planning includes assessment of the ecological context of a site identified for restoration, and determination of necessary actions to achieve the desired outcomes.
2. **Implementation** of appropriate actions based on an established plan, with **continuous monitoring**, and **adaptation** if necessary to meet the set objectives.
3. **Evaluation** of restoration actions to determine project success in comparison to social and ecological objectives.

Standards-based restoration ensures consistency in high-quality outcomes from diverse projects, builds trust among stakeholders (including funders, regulators and local ecological knowledge holders) resulting in enhanced credibility, improved outcomes and global coordination of restoration efforts.

A commitment to best practices and measurable results also enhances accountability in restoration actions, and ensures that the time and resources invested in restoration projects are well spent. Furthermore, adoption of standardised approaches facilitates knowledge sharing and capacity building across projects and regions thereby enabling practitioners to effectively address complex restoration challenges.

Marine restoration initiatives are rapidly expanding in scale and ambition, yet efforts often remain fragmented, with knowledge, expertise, and resources dispersed across regions and sectors. The European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration thus identifies a clear and pressing need for a dedicated network of marine ecosystem restoration practitioners.

Establishing a cohesive network would enable practitioners to share best practice, align methodologies, and develop common standards, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing duplication of effort. Much like a mycelial network that underpins the resilience of a forest, such a system of connections would provide the foundation for collaboration, innovation, and mutual support. By linking diverse actors – from researchers and practitioners to policymakers and local communities – the network would not only strengthen regional capacity but also ensure that lessons learned are transferred globally, ultimately accelerating progress towards healthier, more resilient marine ecosystems.

03.

# Context







## Network Mapping

### Current State of Play

Prior to the establishment of the Marine Restoration Working Group, a number of prominent marine-related networks were already active across Europe, many of which play an important role in bridging the gap between policy and practice. Furthermore, organisations such as the [Native Oyster Restoration Alliance \(NORA\)](#), the [UK & Ireland Native Oyster Network](#), [Wetlands International \(Europe\)](#) and the newly established [European Seagrass Restoration Alliance \(ESRA\)](#)<sup>1</sup> facilitate networking among practitioners with specialised expertise in particular ecosystems.

At the international level, alliances including the [All-Atlantic Research and Innovation Alliance](#), the World Seagrass Alliance, the Global Seagrass Nursery Network, the [Global Mangrove Alliance](#), the [Locally Managed Marine Areas Network](#), [Coral Reef Resilience Network](#), and the [Kelp Forest Alliance](#) similarly support practitioners through knowledge sharing and capacity building.

National restoration networks—for example, the Italian, Portuguese, Mexican and Spanish Restoration Networks—also maintain strong links with these groups. Despite these efforts, prior to the establishment of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restorations' Marine Restoration Working Group, there was **no overarching network dedicated specifically to marine restoration** in Europe or globally, highlighting a gap in coordinated marine restoration collaboration across ecosystems.

The current marine restoration network seascape (see Box 4) presents a well-established and interconnected network of international, European, and national actors that collectively underpin efforts to restore and sustainably manage marine and coastal ecosystems. At the international level, key organisations such as the Ocean & Climate Platform, the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, IPBES, ICES, and the Ocean Best Practices System provide the scientific, policy, and technical foundations for coordinated action. Within Europe, a robust network of platforms—including the European Marine Board, EuroMarine, DG Environment's Marine Expert Group, EuroGOOS, and Biodiversa+—supports alignment between research, policy, and implementation, enabling knowledge exchange, capacity building, and innovation. Complementary initiatives such as the European Aquaculture Society, the MPA Networking Platform (Blue4All), NetworkNature, and the Coastal and Marine Union (EUCC) strengthen cross-sector collaboration and promote best practices in marine management. National and regional networks, including JPI Oceans, the PEER Network, and ReNo, extend these linkages to Member States, translating European priorities into applied restoration programmes. In the United Kingdom, Ocean and Coastal Futures and ReMeMaRe exemplify strong national coordination and knowledge-sharing in restoration and habitat recovery. Beyond Europe, partnerships such as the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association and NAMPAN reinforce global connectivity and knowledge exchange. Together, these structures form an integrated and multi-level network that provides a strong foundation for coordinated strategic action, supporting the implementation of marine restoration objectives across policy, science, and practice.

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1. Please note that Project Seagrass lists Seagrass Networks on their website:  
<https://www.projectseagrass.org/homepage-2/seagrass-networks/>

## Box 4 – Network mapping / Summary of Current State of Play

This list was compiled with input from the CLIMAREST Consortium during a Consortium Meeting in May 2025, and validated by the Marine Restoration Working Group in their meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025.



### International

**Ocean & Climate Platform:** an international network that brings together organisations involved in ocean and climate issues, aiming to promote scientific expertise and advocate for better consideration of the ocean in climate negotiations.

**Ocean Best Practices System:** provides technological advances and community approaches for all ocean methods to better understand and sustain our oceans.

**International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Center for Mediterranean Cooperation:** facilitates collaboration among scientists, governments, and civil society to implement the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the Global Biodiversity Framework; focuses on practical recommendations for marine restoration in the Mediterranean region.



### Europe Wide

**DG Environment Marine Expert Group:** invitation-only group established by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) to provide expertise and guidance on marine environmental issues; serves as a platform for dialogue between the Commission and marine stakeholders, bringing together experts from various sectors, including science, policy, industry, and conservation.

**EuroMarine Network:** a European marine research network that creates, facilitates, and funds training, networking, and research opportunities to address emerging issues in marine sciences.

**EuroGOOS:** coordinates European oceanographic agencies, research centres, and companies to provide operational ocean services, data integration, and forecasting to support sustainable marine management.

**European Marine Board (EMB):** a long-standing, independent, pan-European platform that brings together leading marine science organizations to provide strategic guidance on marine research and policy; facilitates collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of forward-looking science advice to support sustainable ocean governance, backed by the EMB Secretariat.

**European Aquaculture Society:** a non-profit international association dedicated to fostering the sustainable development of European aquaculture, connects scientists, industry professionals, policymakers, students, and retirees and offering networking and communications opportunities centered on knowledge exchange and collaboration across research and industry sectors.

**European Marine Board Early Career Ocean Professionals' Network:** A network designed to strengthen communication among early career ocean professionals in Europe, connecting them with policymakers and ocean leaders to enhance their influence in marine science and policy.

**NetworkNature** connects nature-based solution projects and practitioners across Europe, promoting knowledge exchange, collaboration, and investment in nature-based solutions.



### Selected EU member States

**Joint Programming Initiative Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans (JPI Oceans):** a network of researchers, funding agencies and governmental organisations from 15 EU Member States and multiple associated countries with a primary objective to facilitate collaboration in order to tackle major marine and maritime challenges through joint research and innovation efforts; actively involved in restoration of marine ecosystems, research into marine ecosystem health and Marine Spatial Planning.



### UK Based

**Ocean and Coastal Futures:** OCF Marine Restoration Webinars are a series of webinars happening over 2025 to share knowledge and understanding about MER in the UK and Ireland; supported by the Esmé Fairbairn Foundation and supplemented with frequent conferences including on blue finance, bringing together experts and stakeholders with an interest in conservation and restoration of the coastal and maritime waters of the United Kingdom and Ireland.



### Other

**Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association:** supports key regional science networks including WIOMPAN (marine protected areas for shared learning and solving of local management issues), WiMS (to assess gender inequality by fostering connection, collective voice and action among marine scientists), and WIO-ECSN (connecting early-career marine scientists in the area).



**Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)**: strengthens the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services, providing policymakers with global and regional assessments, tools, and guidance for sustainable development.

**The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES)**: promotes scientific cooperation and provides advice on the sustainable use and restoration of marine ecosystems; hosts several working groups focused on marine ecosystems, conservation, and restoration including Resilience and Marine Ecosystem Services (WGRMES) and Marine Protected Areas (WGMPAS) and has hosted a workshop focused on Ecosystem Restoration (WKREST, March 2025).

**Biodiversa+**: a European biodiversity research partnership that funds and coordinates science to support biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions; plays a role in the advancement of effective restoration across Europe by supporting interdisciplinary research, developing monitoring tools and informing policy aligned with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030; hosts the **BiodivRestore Knowledge Hub** with two task forces focusing on the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation and advancement of the Research and Innovation agenda.

**MPA Networking Platform – Blue4All**: hosted on BlueBioMatch, this platform fosters collaboration, knowledge exchange, and conservation efforts among Marine Protected Area (MPA) managers, stakeholders, and local communities.

**Mission Ocean, Seas and Waters Implementation Support Platform (MIP)**: an EU initiative providing a comprehensive service portal for stakeholders, offering tools, contacts, knowledge, matchmaking, financing, and support for the successful execution of the EU Mission 'Restore our ocean and waters by 2030'.

**Mission Ocean Communication and Support Actions (CSAs)**: could also be regarded as networking and communication platforms, e.g. BlueMissionAA, PREP4BLUE, BlueMissionMed, BlueMissionBanos etc. as well as international collaborative CSAs such as OKEANO.

**Coastal and Marine Union (EUCC)**: advances best practices by shaping policies, engaging experts, offering advice, and leading targeted initiatives with a focus on promoting coastal and marine management that balances biodiversity conservation with sustainable development, protecting landscapes, cultural heritage, and coastal communities in the face of climate change.

**ALTER-Net (A Long-Term Biodiversity, Ecosystem and Awareness Research Network)**: aims to foster the European Science-Policy Interface on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, integrating natural and social science research and is a pan-European network of 33 research institutes across 21 countries; host an annual summer school, and facilitate a number of support structures and mechanisms to share knowledge, funding and research opportunities across Europe.

**The Partnership for European Environmental Research (PEER) Network**: a network of seven European environmental research centres aiming to foster innovative interdisciplinary research and cross-cutting approaches in support of national and EU policymakers, industry, and society; PEER member institutes engage in training, research cooperation, and policy support.

**ReNo (Restoration of Damaged Ecosystems in Nordic Countries)**: a multidisciplinary network of scientists, practitioners, policymakers, and entrepreneurs working on ecological restoration; conducts national assessments, analyses natural and socio-economic processes, and develops frameworks for evaluating restoration projects.

**ReMeMaRe (pronounced “re-memory”)**: run by the Estuarine & Coastal Sciences Association, strives to reverse historic declines in seagrass meadows, saltmarshes, and native oyster reefs, with a mission to restore at least 15% of these coastal habitats along the English coast by 2043, equivalent to ~55 km<sup>2</sup> of saltmarsh and ~6 km<sup>2</sup> of seagrass, plus oyster reef interventions across multiple locations.

**North American Marine Protected Areas Network (NAMPAN)**: connects MPA managers, experts, and resource agencies across Canada, the United States of America, and Mexico, with a purpose to improve marine conservation across diverse seascapes—ranging from coral reefs to Arctic ice—by enhancing collaboration, knowledge sharing, and partnerships. NAMPAN aims to strengthen conservation of biodiversity in marine habitats through a shared, cross-border network and public awareness efforts.

# SWOT Analysis

## Current State of Play

### What are the strengths and weaknesses of currently available networks?

Understanding the effectiveness of marine restoration efforts often depends on the networks that support collaboration, knowledge sharing, and resource mobilisation. However, these networks have both strengths and weaknesses that influence their impact. By examining these aspects, we can build on the existing strengths and address the weaknesses to enhance the Marine Restoration Working Group, making it a more effective and cohesive platform for advancing marine restoration efforts.

This scoping work has highlighted the need for a united and dedicated forum to advance both the policy and practice of marine ecosystem restoration, ultimately leading to the creation of the Marine Restoration Working Group as a unique body with a singular focus on marine ecosystem restoration.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Expert networking	Lack of strategic coordination with similar and relevant working groups or networks
Competence building	Access barriers due to funding or lack of information
Most currently working under well-established policies such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)	Slow implementation of policies with poor bridges to policymakers
Many have scientific or industry focus	Organisations or networks with voluntary participation means that time is a limiting factor to contributions
Focus on climate change resilience	Scant “true” expert engagement
Focus on public awareness and stakeholders’ engagement	Lack of clarity as to the equity and inclusivity of experts who are engaged (i.e. are all habitats represented?)
	“The same voices are heard again and again” Underlying level of competition results in slow or unmeaningful progress.

**Table 1:** The strengths and weaknesses of known marine related working groups or networks in Europe, as collated through the CLIMAREST Consortium (May 2025) and the Marine Restoration Working Group (September 2025).

Marine-focused networking groups play a crucial role in connecting researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community stakeholders. Current marine-focused networks in Europe provide platforms for dialogue, competence building and the exchange of scientific and industry expertise, often operating in alignment with policy frameworks such as the MSFD and CFP.

However, their capacity to deliver meaningful restoration outcomes is constrained by several structural limitations. Many operate in relative isolation, with limited strategic coordination across groups working on related themes, resulting in duplication of effort and missed opportunities for collaboration.

Participation is often voluntary or based on selected or vetted experts, which restricts the time and resources individuals can commit and can lead to uneven contributions and variable momentum. Expert engagement is not always comprehensive, with certain habitats or regions underrepresented and discussions frequently dominated by the same voices. Questions of equity and inclusivity are not consistently addressed, raising concerns about the breadth and diversity of perspectives incorporated. Access can also be hindered by funding constraints or a lack of transparency in how opportunities are communicated, creating barriers for new participants and underrepresented communities.

These networks further face challenges in bridging science and policy, with the implementation of recommendations often slow and engagement with policymakers inequitable and inconsistent. Underlying, unspoken competition between organisations or networks inhibits collaboration, slowing progress and reducing the potential for transformative action in marine ecosystem restoration.



OPPORTUNITIES	
New partnerships and collaborations with a practitioner led focus, common voice to advance science and policy	Networking between stakeholders across Europe
Develop a database on gaps in restoration knowledge and understanding, foster international, multi-habitat knowledge exchange	Supported by existing organisations (SER-Europe & SER) with specialists in advancing the policy and practices of ecosystem restoration
Focus is on Marine Ecosystems (not as part of a group with a wider focus)	Assist in the mobilisation of funding for marine restoration
Translate standards of practice specific to marine environments to build access equity	Foster joint-projects with implementation and up/out/deep-scaling possibilities
Encourage youth participation and engagement and assist in increasing ocean literacy	Facilitate the field-testing of tools or methodologies assessed in a non-partisan way to enable restoration practitioners to show results
Promote excellence in practice	Engage with advising on the drafting of National Restoration Plans, provide advice to EC on drafted plans
Promote continuity for restoration initiatives	Policy advocacy and influence through recommendations, build lobbying power
Capacity building via workshops and training	Capacity building and knowledge transfer
Coordinated "one-stop-shop" for guidelines, literature and practitioner-to-practitioner support	Policy influences through SERE
Standards based restoration	Ability to independently scientifically evaluate methodology
Quality standardisation, set shared expert definitions and standards	Mission driven, cross-sector, Europe-wide collaboration, with a strong core membership

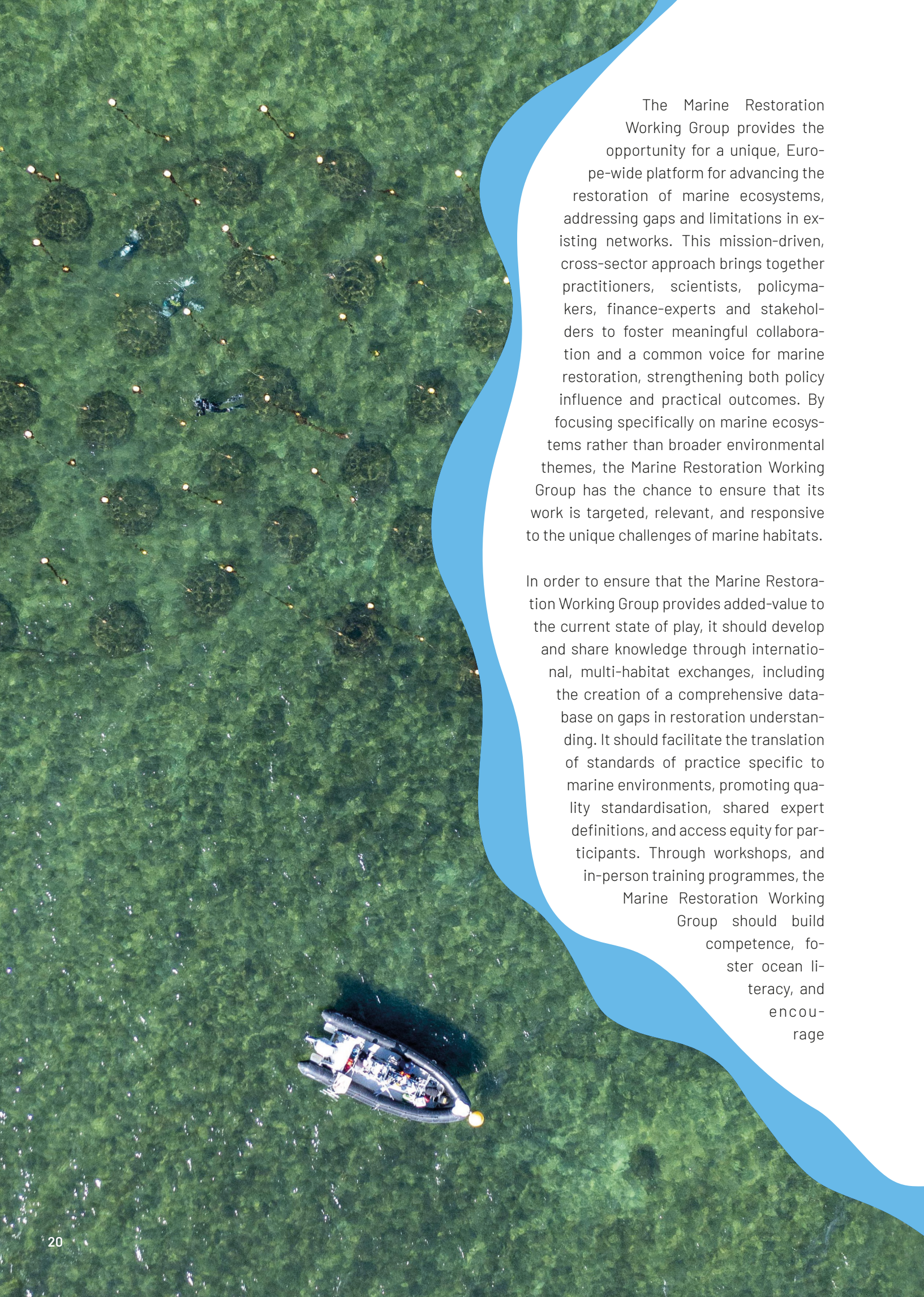


THREATS	
Governance change	Some stakeholders are overrepresented, and some are underrepresented
Changes in policy priority, lack of policy support for MER	
<b>Lack of funding including for experts and leadership to properly dedicate time to revise and refine input.</b>	Some habitats are overrepresented, and some are underrepresented (ensure that at least the 7 habitats identified in the NRR are represented)
Lack of visibility in EU (including by policy makers), low awareness of the group in broader society, “PR-power”, “not having a voice at the table”	Lack of a clear mechanism to gauge the capacity of newcomers to the group
“Competition” from other networking bodies who want to “out-manouvere” the MRWG	Group becoming too “academic” or “research” focused - ensure wide participation, requires a focus on practitioners
<b>Lack of volunteer time or engagement</b>	Risk of duplicating work already done by others
Staff turnover and capacity issues	
Competing priorities or mandates	Lack of collaboration between other similar working groups
Some Member States that have coastlines are not yet represented in the WG	Lack of a “value-added” (what is the niche?)

**Table 2:** The opportunities and risks of the Marine Restoration Working Group, as collated from the CLIMAREST Consortium (May 2025) and the Marine Restoration Working Group (September 2025)





An aerial photograph of a vibrant green marine ecosystem, likely a seagrass bed. Several divers are visible swimming among the seagrass. A small inflatable boat with a yellow buoy is positioned at the bottom of the frame. The image is partially obscured by a white wavy shape on the right side, which contains text.

The Marine Restoration Working Group provides the opportunity for a unique, Europe-wide platform for advancing the restoration of marine ecosystems, addressing gaps and limitations in existing networks. This mission-driven, cross-sector approach brings together practitioners, scientists, policymakers, finance-experts and stakeholders to foster meaningful collaboration and a common voice for marine restoration, strengthening both policy influence and practical outcomes. By focusing specifically on marine ecosystems rather than broader environmental themes, the Marine Restoration Working Group has the chance to ensure that its work is targeted, relevant, and responsive to the unique challenges of marine habitats.

In order to ensure that the Marine Restoration Working Group provides added-value to the current state of play, it should develop and share knowledge through international, multi-habitat exchanges, including the creation of a comprehensive database on gaps in restoration understanding. It should facilitate the translation of standards of practice specific to marine environments, promoting quality standardisation, shared expert definitions, and access equity for participants. Through workshops, and in-person training programmes, the Marine Restoration Working Group should build competence, foster ocean literacy, and encourage



participation from underrepresented groups, ensuring the sustainability of expertise and leadership in the sector.

The Marine Restoration Working Group should function as a coordinated “one-stop shop” for guidelines, literature, and practitioner-to-practitioner support, enabling continuity of restoration initiatives and promoting excellence in practice. There are opportunities for the working group to facilitate upscaled field-testing of methodologies in a non-partisan way, support independent scientific evaluation of approaches, and encourage joint projects with implementation and scaling potential, helping to convert knowledge into tangible restoration outcomes. The Marine Restoration Working Group should also coordinate the mobilisation of funding, strengthen networking across stakeholders, and leverage the expertise of established organisations such as SER-Europe and SER to advance policy and practice.

The Marine Restoration Working Group does however, face several potential threats that could limit its effectiveness and future impact. These were most commonly identified as changes in governance or policy priorities, including a lack of sustained high-level support for marine ecosystem restoration, and limited funding coupled with insufficient time for experts and leadership to dedicate to refining input, which could constrain both strategic and operational capacity. Visibility and recognition within the EU, among policy-makers, and in broader society were also flagged as critical-risks; without a strong voice at the table, the Marine Restoration Working Group risks low awareness and limited policy influence.

Competition from other networking bodies with an interest in controlling the marine restoration narrative, coupled with underrepresentation (habitats, Member States, stakeholders) and low volunteer engagement, may further challenge the group’s ability to maintain cohesion and momentum. Staff turnover at the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, group leadership capacity issues, and competing priorities could disrupt continuity. As the group forms, there may be an absence of clear mechanisms to assess the capacity of newcomers, combined with a risk of the group becoming overly academic or research-focused, which could limit practitioner participation and practical relevance. Additional risks include duplicating work already undertaken by others, lack of collaboration with similar working groups, and unclear value-added or niche positioning within the wider marine restoration landscape. Addressing these challenges proactively will be essential for the Marine Restoration Working Group to maintain its strategic relevance, credibility, and capacity to deliver meaningful restoration outcomes across Europe.

Through coordinated action, the Marine Restoration Working Group therefore has the opportunity to address the weaknesses of existing networks —limited inter-network coordination/collaboration, unequal/ inequitable participation, and slow translation of science into policy — while providing a platform for sustained collaboration, innovation, and influence. Its focus on strategic, standards-based restoration, combined with capacity building, policy advocacy, and cross-European networking, positions the Marine Restoration Working Group as a central hub that not only consolidates expertise but actively drives the implementation, scaling, and impact of marine restoration efforts across the continent.

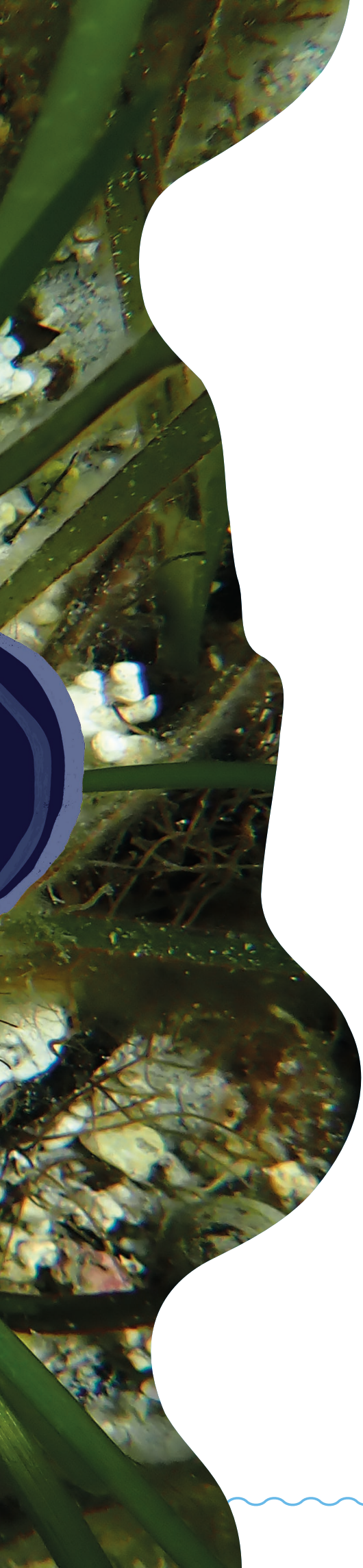
The establishment of the Marine Restoration Working Group are thus a meaningful step towards safeguarding marine ecosystems along the European Seas. As a network of experts from a diverse range of backgrounds, including scientists and practitioners, economists and policy-makers, they will play a critical role in advocating for progressive marine restoration standards, and foster collaborations between policy and practice to drive forward the Nature Restoration Regulation.

04.

# Creating an European- Focused Marine Restoration Working Group







The Marine Restoration Working Group was established on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024, under the authority of the Board of Directors of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration.

In line with the vision and mission of the Society for Ecological Restoration, the Marine Restoration Working Group aims to advance the science, policy and practice of marine ecosystem restoration to sustain biodiversity, improve resilience in a changing climate and re-establish ecologically healthy relationship between nature and communities who rely on the marine space and its resources.

## Thematic Focus and Objectives

Covering restoration policy, processes and practices specifically related to marine ecosystems, the Marine Restoration Working Group draws from expert knowledge and understanding obtained from a number of EU-funded projects including CLIMAREST (Coastal Climate Resilience and Marine Restoration Tools for the Arctic – Atlantic basin) and REDRESS (Restoration of deep-sea habitats to rebuild European Seas) to drive forward the implementation of best practice in the field of marine ecosystem restoration.

In alignment with all working groups under the umbrella of the Society for Ecological Restoration, the Marine Restoration Working Group will continue to do this by:

- ▶ Facilitating and organising events/workshops to exchange information and ideas
- ▶ Contributing to the scientific and technical expert network of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration with focus on marine ecosystems
- ▶ Providing technical expertise and assisting on policy, scientific and technical issues regarding to marine ecosystem restoration in Europe
- ▶ Promoting and supporting the upscaling and replication of restoration efforts across Europe
- ▶ Contributing to the Restoration Resource Centre of the Society for Ecological Restoration

The Marine Restoration Working Group will work to ensure that marine ecosystem restoration is recognised and utilised as a fundamental component of European biodiversity and sustainable development programmes, and that future projects are designed and implemented effectively.



# MAKING WAVES

-- how the MRWG came to be



Figure 1: A diagram to illustrate the steps leading to the establishment of the Marine Restoration Working Group.

The Marine Restoration Working Group held its first (online) meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

Participants agreed in this meeting on the following ambitious objectives:

1. Publish a co-authored position paper on Marine Ecosystem Restoration that integrates lessons learned from ongoing global restoration efforts, identifying common principles that align with the format of the national restoration plans and relevant legislation.
2. Adapt the Principles and Standards for Ecosystem Restoration, as published by the Society for Ecological Restoration to the marine space, identifying specific restoration actions and documenting practical examples of the implementation of the SER 5\* System, aiming to provide concrete recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of marine restoration efforts.
3. Facilitate the exchange of knowledge on the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) across European Member States, with a focus on the preparation of National Restoration Plans (and a blue restoration plan), inviting key speakers from member states to present relevant information and best practices.
4. Conduct an inventory of existing marine restoration guidelines and interventions across European Member States to prioritise effective marine restoration strategies, assessing the current seascape of restoration practices, identifying gaps in knowledge and evaluating existing or proposed mechanisms for prioritisation.
5. Contribute to a comprehensive economic assessment framework for marine restoration, evaluating the costs, benefits, funding and financing mechanisms, integrating insights and findings from cross-basin, EU funded, restoration projects including CLIMAREST and REDRESS, with an aim to provide recommendations for stakeholders to enhance funding strategies and investment in marine restoration interventions.

In addition, from Autumn 2025, the Marine Restoration Working Group accepted the responsibility for providing regular reviews and content updates to the Marine Restoration Toolbox, which is an output of the CLIMAREST project, and which will be transferred to the Restoration Resource Centre of the Society for Ecological Restoration in October 2025.

### **Box 3 - The Marine Restoration Toolbox**

The Marine Restoration Toolbox is an online platform aimed at marine restoration practitioners, government representatives and researchers, who are searching for scientifically validated methodologies, blueprints, guidelines and resources which will assist them in their restoration actions. Structured on the principles outlined in the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration Standards for Ecosystem Restoration, to which the Society for Ecological Restoration contributed, it will also host a virtual laboratory where tools and code can be accessed and manipulated to provide greater insight into restoration actions before or during their undertaking.



In pursuit of the aforementioned objectives, the Marine Restoration Working Group will undertake the following activities:

- ▶ Organise training and networking events including seminars, webinars, workshops, field work in ongoing restoration projects
- ▶ Produce, publish and disseminate scientific and communication materials
- ▶ Cooperate with multiple existing networks with a similar or related focus
- ▶ Contribute to public policy discussions
- ▶ Represent the Society for Ecological Restoration by appointment at public and institutional events on matters directly relating to the scope of the working group.

## Governance Model

The Board of Directors of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration is the higher decision-making body in relation to working groups concerning its position statements or other relevant public announcements issued by the Marine Restoration Working Group thereof, as part of their activities. Therefore, positions, statements or other relevant public documents developed by the Marine Restoration Working Group can be formally endorsed by the Board of Directors and henceforth become the official position of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration. In this case, the working group can present a position on behalf of the European Chapter for the Society for Ecological Restoration, otherwise, it will be made clear that the position, statement or announcement reflects the opinion and expertise of the working group members, and not that of the entire organisation.

Further information on the governance of the Marine Restoration Working Groups, as per standard procedure for the Society for Ecological Restoration can be found in the Terms of Reference for the Marine Restoration Working Group, as approved by the Board of Directors on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024 and by the Marine Restoration Working Group on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

## Membership, Engagement and Collaborations

At present, the Marine Restoration Working Group has reached full capacity with 75 members, representing 55 entities across 12 European member states. The membership spans academia, research institutes, and NGOs, and collectively covers seven key marine habitats: oyster reefs, seagrass meadows, saltmarshes, coral reefs, kelp forests, deep-sea ecosystems, and urban marine environments. The group also benefits from direct representation from the European Seagrass Restoration Alliance, the Native Oyster Restoration Alliance, and the UK/Ireland Native Oyster Network and, through the Society for Ecological Restoration, to international habitat-specific alliances.

The Marine Restoration Working Group is built around a core membership of experts actively engaged in both coastal and deep-sea restoration across Europe. This foundation is complemented by additional marine specialists whose membership was assented following the inaugural meeting. Given current resource constraints, the group is unable to expand further at this time; however, exceptions will be made through invi-

tation if new expertise is deemed strategically valuable to advancing the group’s objectives. Extant standard procedures ensure that access to and membership of the Marine Restoration Working Group is equitable and inclusive.

Looking ahead, it is a strategic priority of the Society for Ecological Restoration to establish a global working group dedicated to marine restoration. The European Chapters’ Marine Restoration Working Group provides a strong foundation and a proven model for this expansion. A well-managed global network would create an unparalleled platform for collaboration, bringing together regional expertise, facilitating knowledge transfer, and ensuring that best practices are shared across diverse ecological, cultural, and regulatory contexts. Such a network would also enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of restoration efforts, work positively towards a seascape restoration approach, reduce duplication of effort, and strengthen the scientific and policy frameworks underpinning marine conservation worldwide. Moreover, it would provide a unified voice capable of influencing international policy, mobilising resources at scale, and accelerating the pace of ecosystem recovery in line with global biodiversity and climate targets. In short, the establishment of a coordinated, global marine restoration network is essential to ensure that restoration science and practice can meet the challenges of a rapidly changing ocean.



Figure 2: Membership overview of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration's Marine Restoration Working Group (MRWG), correct at the time of writing.

The group is currently split into 5 Task Forces, which cover each of the aforementioned objectives.



Figure 3: Task Force Objectives and Leadership 2024-2025 (note that objectives are likely to be renewed in 2025)

Members of the Marine Restoration Working Group are invited to a general meeting via Google Meet four times a year, with Task Forces meeting regularly and providing feedback and next steps at the general meetings.

Quarterly General Meetings follow the same format, with time reserved for Peer-to-Peer Learning and knowledge exchange, feedback from participation at other related expert group meetings, such as those of DG Environment’s Marine Expert Group, and a pitch from project representatives to foster collaboration. Since its inauguration, the Marine Restoration Working Group has received Peer-to-Peer learning on governance of marine ecosystem restoration (Oliver Wilson, Marine Institute, Blue Mission AA) and large scale financing of marine ecosystem restoration (Stephen Hart, European Investment Bank).

If funding allows, the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration hopes to host annual in-person meetings for the Marine Restoration Working Group at a coastal location in Europe pertinent to the group.

## Recognition by the European Commission Directorate General for Environment (DG Environment)

The inaugural meeting of the Marine Restoration Working Group, held on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024, was opened by Vedran Nikolic (European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit), who had been working closely with the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, along with his colleague, Florian Cleays, who attended the 2024 European Conference on Ecological Restoration in Tartu, Estonia.



In his presentation, Vedran emphasised the urgent need for a reinforced approach to upscaling of marine ecosystem restoration and provided a detailed review of the Nature Restoration Law (NRL) and relevant legislation and directives applicable to the Marine Restoration Working Group. He noted that baseline conditions are expected to shift, reinforcing the need for adaptive strategies and sustained engagement, and emphasised the need for standardisation and science based restoration methodologies and monitoring. Further, he highlighted the significance of the group's future work and offered Commission support of its activities and objectives.

Vedran outlined potential areas where the MRWG could support the European Commission, particularly in shaping and contributing to National Restoration Plans and reducing knowledge gaps, through representative membership on the DG Environment Marine Expert Group. Challenges in marine restoration were also acknowledged, including habitat mapping and assessment, mitigation of pressures, active restoration measures, scaling of efforts, and securing funding. In this context, Vedran strongly encouraged the Marine Restoration Working Group and the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration to engage proactively with Commission initiatives, underlining that the group's recognition and involvement are critical to advancing the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation.

## Note on the DG Environment Marine Expert Group

The DG Environment Marine Expert Group is an advisory body established by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV), specifically within the Nature Conservation Unit. Chaired by Vedran Nikolic, the group provides expert guidance on the implementation of European nature conservation policies, with a particular focus on marine ecosystems. It facilitates dialogue among European Member States, regional seas conventions, and stakeholders to ensure effective coordination of marine conservation measures, including the establishment and management of Marine Protected Areas.

The MEG plays a critical role in supporting the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR). The NRR sets legally binding targets for ecosystem restoration across the EU, including marine habitats, requiring Member States to achieve "good ecological condition" through targeted restoration measures. It contributes scientific and technical expertise to help ensure these measures are evidence-based, feasible, and aligned with broader European marine policies. Its work is particularly relevant for mapping, monitoring, and restoring marine habitats, and it assists the European Commission and Member States minimise knowledge gaps and implement effective restoration actions.

By providing this expertise, the MEG underpins the European Commission's efforts to achieve the NRR's objectives in marine environments, making the recognition and involvement of groups such as the Marine Restoration Working Group (MRWG) especially important for advancing large-scale restoration initiatives.





Figure 4: The Mission Restore Our Oceans and Waters Lighthouses, focusing restoration efforts regionally

## Mission Ocean Charter Action

The EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030,” is a flagship initiative under Horizon Europe aimed at protecting and restoring the health of Europe’s marine and freshwater ecosystems by 2030. The Mission focuses on three core objectives: protecting and restoring marine and freshwater biodiversity in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030; preventing and eliminating pollution in accordance with the EU Action Plan Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil; and promoting a sustainable, carbon-neutral, and circular blue economy consistent with the European Climate Law and the Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy. The



Mission is implemented through area-based “lighthouses” across Europe’s seas and river basins, serving as demonstrators and scaling platforms for restoration solutions.

A central component of the Mission is the Mission Charter, a non-binding framework that invites public and private entities—including Member States, regions, cities, and stakeholders—to pledge concrete actions that support the Mission’s objectives. By becoming a signatory, organisations commit to aligning their efforts with the Mission’s goals, thereby contributing to a coordinated European approach to marine and freshwater restoration.

For the Marine Restoration Working Group, being a Charter signatory was strategically important. It demonstrates alignment with EU-wide objectives and enhances visibility and credibility as a key actor in marine restoration. Charter membership also facilitates access to funding, resources, and partnership opportunities, while strengthening collaboration with a broad network of stakeholders across Europe.

As a [Charter signatory](#), the Marine Restoration Working Group has committed to advancing the science, practices, and policies of marine ecosystem restoration, with a particular focus on sustaining biodiversity, improving ecosystem resilience in a changing climate, and re-establishing ecologically healthy relationships between nature and coastal communities. The group is also developing marine restoration standards and methodologies to address knowledge gaps and promote best practices.

Through these commitments, the Marine Restoration Working Group has committed to contributing scientific and technical expertise to support the implementation of the Mission’s objectives, playing a pivotal role in advancing large-scale restoration initiatives across European seas.

## Funding Feasibility Statement

Each output outlined in this strategy document, and all future decided objectives are contingent on securing adequate funding. The Marine Restoration Working Group will actively pursue opportunities through European and national public funding mechanisms, private sector partnerships and philanthropic organisations. Furthermore, multi-network collaboration will be encouraged to share costs and enhance scalability, ensuring the sustainability of output from the working group. The success of this networking strategy is also dependent on the continued engagement of affiliated networks and stakeholders external to the working group.

By the end of the strategy period (five years, 2025-2030), the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration aims to have established a robust, connected and influential network that advances marine ecosystem restoration in Europe and beyond.

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05.

# Strategic Vision 2030







# Five Year Strategic Networking Policy Plan

The Marine Restoration Working Group has built a five year strategic networking roadmap, with the understanding that these actions will be carried out only if funding is feasible.

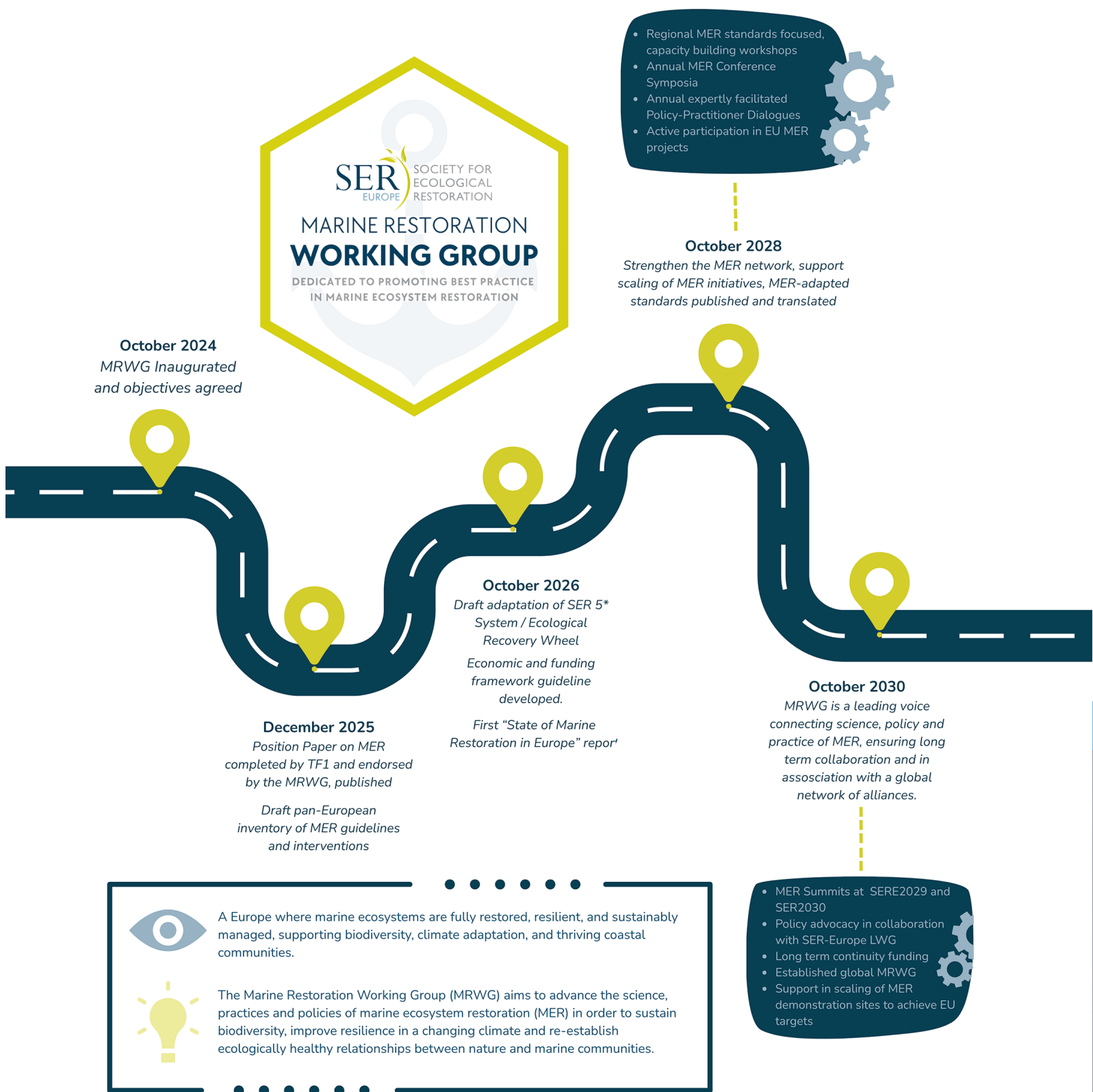


Figure 5: The Vision and Mission of SER-Europe's Marine Restoration Working Group and a 5 year roadmap of its objectives.

## Year 1 - Building a Foundation (Ends November 2025)

### GOALS

Establish the Marine Restoration Working Group using existing frameworks set out by the Society for Ecological Restoration, and raise awareness of the group in Europe and internationally, creating a concrete network for knowledge exchange.

### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Raise awareness about the Marine Restoration Working Group among the marine restoration community and other relevant networks, thereby establishing the Marine Restoration Working Group as a resource of expertise which can help in the compilation of National Restoration Plans in line with the Nature Restoration Regulation.
- ▶ Compile a database of marine restoration experts across Europe, and identify gaps in knowledge base (e.g. ecosystem, region, methodology) to structure future capacity development
- ▶ Collaborate and engage with at least 3 existing relevant or associated networks to share insights and provide mutual contributions to shared actions.
- ▶ Establish connections between the Mission Communication and Support Actions, Lighthouses and associated collaboratives, communicating on the objectives of the Marine Restoration Working Group.





#### Box 4 - Current Participation in European and International Events

To date, the Marine Restoration Working Group or a representative thereof have/has participated in the following events:

##### August 2024

- ▶ Society for Ecological Restoration, European Chapter Conference (Tartu, Estonia)- launch

##### March 2025

- ▶ European Ocean Days as part of Mission: Restore our Oceans and Waters by 2030 (Brussels, Belgium)
- ▶ ICES WKREST Workshop on Ecosystem Restoration(Online)
- ▶ REST-COAST Coastal restoration with Seagrass Meadows: Science to Application(Online)
- ▶ Ramón Margalef Summer Colloquia (Barcelona, Spain)
- ▶ European Marine Board Webinar: From Coastal Waters to the Deep Sea - Marine Life Under Environmental Change(Online)
- ▶ Webinar on 10 Key Principles for Effective National Restoration Plans from the World Wildlife Fund(Online)
- ▶ Maritime Transport and the European Oceans Pact Policy Event (Brussels, Belgium)
- ▶ BioAgora Marine Cluster Conference (Brussels, Belgium)

##### October 2025

- ▶ Society for Ecological Restoration International Conference (Denver, USA)
- ▶ EU Algae Awareness Summit (Berlin, Germany)

##### November 2025

- ▶ EU-Wide Implementation Support Event on Developing National Restoration Plans under the EU NRR - Marine Ecosystems (Dublin, Ireland)
- ▶ Native Oyster Restoration Alliance Conference 6 (Cartagena, Spain)

##### January 2025

- ▶ Ocean and Coastal Futures Conference (Online)(incl. Ongoing webinar series)

##### April 2025

- ▶ European Seagrass Restoration Alliance Workshop II (Arcachon, France)
- ▶ ICES & BlueMission AA Joint Webinar on Marine Ecosystem Restoration(Online)

##### June 2025

- ▶ Zoological Society of London Seascape Symposium (London, United Kingdom)
- ▶ One Ocean Science Congress (Nice, France)
- ▶ UN Ocean Decade Conference (Nice, France)
- ▶ MARE People and the Sea Conference (Amsterdam, Netherlands)

##### July 2025

- ▶ International Temperate Reefs Symposium (Brest, France)
- ▶ 58<sup>th</sup> European Marine Biology Symposium (Bodo, Norway)
- ▶ International Conference on Marine Conservation (ICMC) (London, United Kingdom)
- ▶ September 2025
- ▶ ICES Annual Science Conference (Klaipeda, Lithuania)

## Box 5: Building a Brand

The Marine Restoration Working Group has been established with a strong brand that is consistent and readily associated with that of the Society for Ecological Restoration and which reflects the expertise, values and unique voice of the working group.

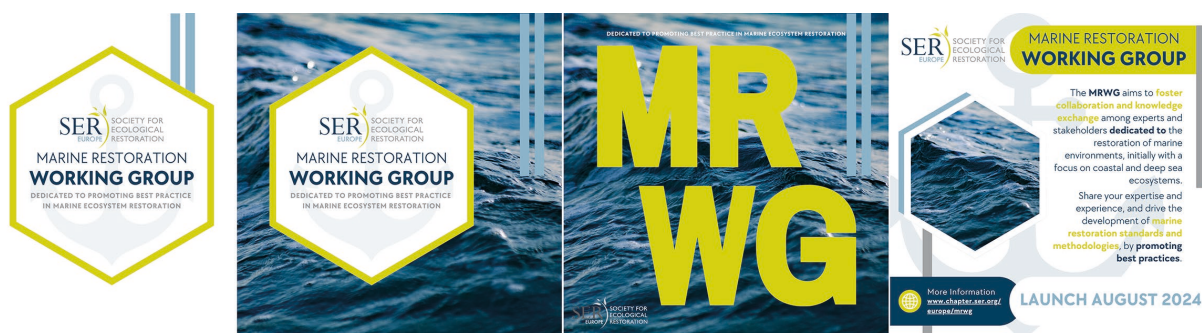


Figure 6: Examples of the SER-Europe Marine Restoration Working Group Brand

All members of the working group are actively encouraged to share the outputs to target connections, for example conferences, professional associations and participation in other working groups or networks.

Slide decks with standardised infographics, logos and licensed photos have been created for the use of the leadership team and representatives of the Marine Restoration Working Group at outreach events.

In 2026, the Leadership team will work to formalise an outreach and communications strategy for the Marine Restoration Working Group which focuses on the specific objectives and opportunities for its members and affiliates.

### ACTIONS

- ▶ Quarterly meetings of the Marine Restoration Working Group, with smaller Task Forces assigned to help meet the agreed objectives.
- ▶ Raise the profile of the Marine Restoration Working Group on the European and international stage by participating in conferences, symposia and events
- ▶ Set up the Marine Restoration Working Group page on the European Chapter for Ecological Restoration's website ([www.ser-europe.org](http://www.ser-europe.org)), and establish a professional social network via LinkedIn.

**Box 6 - Upcoming Events in which the Marine Restoration Working Group wishes to / will participate / be represented**

**January 2026**

- ▶ Ocean and Coastal Futures Conference (London, United Kingdom)

**March 2026**

- ▶ European Ocean Days (Brussels, Belgium)
- ▶ European Citizen Science Association (ECSA)(Oulu, Finland)
- ▶ World Ocean Summit (Montreal, Canada)

**May 2026**

- ▶ European Maritime Days (Limassol, Cyprus)
- ▶ 6<sup>th</sup> Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) Europe Conference (Prague, Czechia)
- ▶ EuroGOOS International Conference (Larnaca, Cyprus)

**October 2026**

- ▶ Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of the Parties (COP) 17(Yerevan, Armenia)

**February 2026**

- ▶ Ocean Sciences Meeting (OSM 2026) (Glasgow, Scotland)

**April 2026**

- ▶ National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration (Omaha, Nebraska, USA)

**August 2026**

- ▶ ICES ASC 2026(Brest)
- ▶ SER-Europe Conference 2026(Brest)
- ▶ Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association (ECSA) Conference (Brussels, Belgium)

**November 2026**

- ▶ World Conference on Marine Biodiversity (WCMB)(Bruges, Belgium)

**TBC**

- ▶ 6<sup>th</sup> International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC)(Location TBC)
- ▶ 59<sup>th</sup> European Marine Biology Symposium (Date and Location TBC)
- ▶ World Seagrass Conference (Abu Dhabi, Date TBC)
- ▶ EuroOCEAN 2026 (Date and Location TBC)



## Year 3 - Expanding Connections with a European Focus (Ends November 2028)

### GOALS

Strengthening the Marine Restoration Network, extend connections within Europe and support the scaling of marine restoration efforts in the European context.

### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Regularly participate in local, regional, national and international events including workshops, symposia, and conferences.
- ▶ Establish cross-sector collaborations
- ▶ Engage policy makers in the work and outputs of the Marine Restoration Working Group
- ▶ Collaborate with European research projects to further establish standards-based best practice in the marine restoration space
- ▶ Facilitate opportunities for professional development.

### ACTIONS

- ▶ Organise one workshop or special session in line with the European Chapter for Ecological Restoration Conference, in Brest 2026
- ▶ Facilitate regional workshops to address region-specific challenges and solutions
- ▶ Participate in regional and national workshops, symposia and events and share outcomes through reports published on the website
- ▶ Participate in policy roundtables on marine ecosystem restoration
- ▶ Use the Marine Restoration Working Group as a means to boost funding applications and continue to network and encourage cross-EU collaboration in marine ecosystem restoration through joint project proposals
- ▶ Publish at least 1 position paper
- ▶ Publish Principles and Standards for Ecosystem Restoration adapted to the marine space, as approved by the Society for Ecological Restoration.

## Year 5 – Cementing Policy Influence (Ends November 2030)

### GOALS

Cement the position of the Marine Restoration Working Group as a leading voice in connecting the science, policy and practice of marine ecosystem restoration, ensuring long-term collaboration across Europe and in association with a global network as coordinated by the Society for Ecological Restoration.

### OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Host a Marine Restoration Summit
- ▶ Facilitate and encourage policy advocacy and integration in collaboration with the Legal Working Group of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration.
- ▶ Focus on developing long term funding mechanisms to ensure that the Marine Restoration Working Group can continue to grow beyond the European Union Mission Restore our Oceans and Waters objectives of 2030.

### ACTIONS

- ▶ A summit to be organised and held as part of the Society for Ecological Restoration Conference in 2029 and as part of the European Chapter Conference in 2030, bringing together leading experts, policymakers and stakeholders from across Europe (and globally) to exchange knowledge, shape policy and highlight major steps forward in upscaling marine restoration.
- ▶ Active and regular participation in major European conferences that focus on bridging policy and practice
- ▶ Promote the inclusion of standards based restoration, climate adaptation and resilience measures within marine ecosystem restoration project proposals

The implementation of such a strategy requires intention and consistency. The establishment of the Marine Restoration Working Group is an integral part of the long-term strategy for the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, and will continue to feature in upcoming strategy reviews. The network is **necessary** to share knowledge, understanding and experience, to develop standards and best practices to guide future marine restoration actions and in order to provide a pool of experts who can be consulted in the development of the National Restoration Plans as required by the Nature Restoration Regulation. With objectives set and agreed

upon annually by the working group, and a communal goal to make a positive contribution, the working group has already developed a clear vision and mission of purpose. Furthermore, the leadership team and working group co-ordinators will nurture the network to offer value, support and encourage engagement over time. Regular meetings, division into task forces, and annual in-person meetings will help build good relationships.

The long-term networking strategy developed jointly under the EU-Funded, Mission Ocean projects CLIMAREST and REDRESS — centred on the establishment of a pan-European Marine Restoration Working Group — directly reinforces the priorities and direction set by the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration. By fostering a durable, cross-border platform for collaboration, these projects align with SER-Europe's commitment to advancing standards-based, science-driven marine restoration through credible networks and flagship initiatives. This approach not only supports the harmonisation of best practices and the scaling of interventions across diverse European marine environments, but also strengthens the capacity and partnerships that SER-Europe identifies as essential for achieving EU restoration targets. In this way, these projects contribute to establishing the long-term resilience of Europe's marine ecosystems while embedding its outcomes within an established continental strategy for ecological restoration.





# Risk Assessment and Mitigation

This Long-Term Networking Strategy will remain in effect for as long as the Marine Restoration Working Group,

Risk	Conflicting or competing priorities, agendas or levels of commitment, with a potential to derail collaboration, or slow response to emerging opportunities and urgent restoration needs.	Long term funding may be uncertain or may not align with networking timelines, thereby threatening continuity. <sup>2</sup>	Miscommunication across diverse regions, languages or technical backgrounds may cause confusion or inefficiencies.	Inconsistent access to digital tools or lack of technical skill can hinder participation, especially as the Marine Restoration Working Group expects to expand globally.	Waning of engagement over time, especially in long-term projects with unclear short-term reward.
Notes / Current Measures	The Marine Restoration Working Group is a voluntary working group acting under the European Chapter for the Society of Ecological Restoration. Insufficient volunteer time and engagement risks sustenance of contributions.	Limited funding for co-ordination, leadership, expert-engagement, and core-activities that are central to the functioning of the group will impede its outputs, actions and reach.	Currently, the MRWG uses english as the common working language. Whilst participants come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, English is used as the primary language for meetings, documentation and communications to provide consistency. All communications are both shared in written format and in-person where appropriate to ensure clarity.  The MRWG holds regular online meetings to provide opportunities to share knowledge, build capacity and collaborate on shared objectives.  The MRWG has sought to assemble a mix of practitioners, scientists, policymakers, funding experts and stakeholders, to ensure that a mix of perspectives are represented.	The MRWG maintains coordinated online resources including member database, documents and resources, to ensure information is accessible.  Meetings, webinars and online workshops are conducted using the Google Meet platform that are broadly available and user friendly.  There is support for newcomers including mentoring and structured onboarding to help less-experienced members familiarise themselves with the digital systems and working group procedures.  Recognising the varying levels of access (and time constraints), the MRWG offers multiple ways to engage with outputs, including asynchronous contributions and written submissions.	The Marine Restoration Working Group is a diverse group of enthusiastic and dedicated professionals with an interest in marine ecosystem restoration.  Rotating leadership roles spread responsibility and give members a sense of ownership to encourage sustained involvement.
Further Mitigation Measures	Early engagement and clear communication whereby stakeholders have been involved from the outset, goals and objectives have been shared and set and agreed upon collaboratively, and expectations have been set to align visions.  The MRWG will continue to maintain flexibility to response to urgent restoration needs, in parallel to setting annual objectives with agreed timelines.	Diversify funding sources by seeking support from a mix of publicly available grants, philanthropic funds, and private-sector sponsorships (if approved).  Clearly demonstrate the benefits of collaboration to funders using success stories and demonstrable outcomes to justify investment.  Coordinate with the Society for Ecological Restoration to identify potential business partners whose contributions could finance the activities of the Marine Restoration Working Group.	Clear communication protocols have been established (all communication via email and LinkedIn member-only group, Agendas and Meeting Minutes and all documentation is available via the shared Google Drive folder to reduce ambiguity and miscommunication and centralise information.  The MRWG seeks funding to enable in person workshops to provide opportunities to push outcomes forward in a meaningful, relevant and timely manner.	Signpost to access and training to support equitable participation.  Use low-tech, inclusive platforms that are user-friendly and widely accessible and which work in low-bandwidth environments.	Celebrate milestones frequently, share successes at group meetings to boost morale and maintain enthusiasm.

2. At the time of writing, the activities of the Marine Restoration Working Group are funded until 31<sup>st</sup> January 2028. The Marine Restoration Working Group Leadership team is working to seek funding from marine-related projects in order to support the positions of the coordinator, and further funding to support the actions of the working group and its activities.

under the jurisdiction of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, is in existence. Such a collaboration involves various stakeholders, including researchers, NGOs, practitioners, government bodies, funding bodies, which introduces certain risks. These, along with approved mitigations are identified below.

Governance and challenges in decision-making can cause delays and conflict.	<p>Changes in policy priorities can lead to a deemed lack of need for the WG or its priorities.</p> <p>Changes in governance structures and policy priorities, including a lack of policy support for marine ecosystem restoration at an EU-level could undermine the efforts of the MRWG.</p>	Lack of visibility / PR influence / “public profile” and under-awareness among EU policymakers and broader society / a “voice at the table”	Underrepresentation from some coastal/ marine Member States, habitats or stakeholders; combined with the risk of the group becoming too academic or research-focused.	Lack of collaboration between “competing” networks who seek to outmaneuver the MRWG and do not see its value, combined with risk of duplication of work.
The Marine Restoration Working Group, as with all working groups associated with the Society for Ecological Restoration or any of its Chapters is governed by the same framework of roles and protocols. This can be found in the Terms of Reference for the working group which is approved by the Chapter Board of Directors and the group itself.	<p>The MRWG actively mitigates the risk posed by changes in policy priorities or governance through strategic alignment and engagement.</p> <p>Its activities are structured around established EU frameworks, ensuring continued relevance.</p> <p>The group maintains a strong voice in policy discussions by actively participating in the DG Environment Marine Expert Group, and contributing recommendations to the European Commission.</p>	<p>The MRWG has worked hard in its inaugural year to attend as many EU and International events as possible, raising awareness and forming strong partnerships with other similar networks. It has developed a clear brand, and communications strategy.</p> <p>The MRWG was invited soon after its conception to join the DG Environment Marine Expert Group, thereby securing its influence at the EU-policy level. Furthermore, the MRWG sits alongside other WGs which work together with other expert groups at the EU-level, thereby increasing its voice with policymakers and stakeholders for the benefit of its members.</p>	<p>At the time of writing, the group currently has 75 members, which represent 55 entities across Europe (NGOs, research, SMEs, finance and +++) and 7 habitats including oyster reefs, seagrass meadows, macroalgal forests and cold water corals.</p> <p>The entry and capacity assessment processes are clearly stated in the Terms of Reference, which are shared with all members of the group.</p>	<p>The MRWG has attended or been represented at over 20 European and International events since its inauguration, both in person and online.</p> <p>Existing related networks have been mapped and steps taken to engage meaningfully, and clarify complementarity.</p> <p>A calendar of relevant events has been created to enable members to share their participation and to enable leadership to engage their participation more effectively. The strength of the MRWG comes in the diversity of its membership across Europe.</p>
Facilitate inclusive decision making methods, for example participatory planning and transparent voting systems.	<p>The MRWG will maintain regular engagement with policymakers and implementors at the European, national and local levels through their membership and collaborations with similar networks.</p> <p>The MRWG will ensure its work is aligned with EU strategy to facilitate uptake and engagement with outputs.</p> <p>The MRWG will continue to build long term alliances and policy champions and work in collaboration with other Working Groups within SER-Europe to ensure that outputs are meaningful and valuable in the policy realm.</p>	<p>The MRWG will formalise its communications and outreach strategy in 2026, and ensure that it continues to raise visibility through events, media and partnerships.</p> <p>The MRWG will continue to participate in the DG Environment Marine Expert Group, and seek collaboration with other networks in Europe and globally.</p> <p>Priorities from the SER-Europe “Marine Strategy” will be incorporated into all future SER-Europe Strategy documents, and reported on annually in the SER-Europe Annual Report, which widely disseminates SER-Europe activities and progress, including of its Working Groups.</p>	<p>The MRWG will target outreach to underrepresented Member States, habitats and stakeholder groups.</p> <p>The MRWG will seek to actively balance representation across the 7 key habitats as identified in the NRR.</p> <p>The Leadership group will work to create a simplified process which transparently communicates the entry, access and capacity assessment processes when funding becomes available to allow for the next phased increase in membership.</p>	The MRWG will seek to formalise partnerships, especially with the ICES network, and continue to communicate its unique value proposition.

**Table 3:** Risks, current measures and future mitigation strategies for the Marine Restoration Working Group

# Monitoring Process

Ongoing monitoring is essential to ensure the Marine Restoration Working Group remains aligned with its strategic goals, enabling timely course corrections and informed decision-making to enhance long-term impact. The following methods have been identified to monitor the activities and impact of the group:

## 1. Impact and Progress Report

A structured report, first compiled in 2026 and annually thereafter for the lifetime of the group, produced using a standardised template to ensure consistency, that documents milestones, challenges, lessons learned and progress towards achieving annual objectives. This helps ensure that stakeholders (including the Society for Ecological Restoration, the Board of Directors of the European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, the members of the Marine Restoration Working Group, interested parties and the public) are informed and provides a basis for adaptive management.

## 2. Participatory Evaluation Outputs

such as summary reports, position papers, recommendations grounded in community experience, and technical papers will be structured to inform and align with external policy processes, particularly with reference to requests for input from the European Commission. The Marine Restoration Working Group is thereby well-positioned to respond to public consultations, policy white papers, strategy reviews and funding and regulatory framework updates. The subsequent elevation of the role of the working group as a thought leader in marine restoration, will mean that the Marine Restoration Working Group remains a valued contributor to EU-wide policy dialogues, shaping policy in ways that reflect the realities of field implementation. Furthermore:

- a. Evaluations provide accountability and strategic reflection, involving diverse voices from across the community of experts.
- b. Publications capture and disseminate findings, lessons learned and highlight innovative approaches to broader audiences including scientists, practitioners, funding bodies and policy-implementors.
- c. Peer-reviewed and grey literature enhances the legitimacy of the Marine Restoration Working Group and attracts collaboration.

## 3. Dedicated website

as part of [www.ser-europe.org](http://www.ser-europe.org). This public-facing, regularly updated page serves as a central repository to share updates via a centralized "Resources" tab, host resources and engage stakeholders. It provides a space to publish reports, updates and case-studies in real time and keeps stakeholders and the public involved in the activities of the Marine Restoration Working Group.









06.

# Conclusions



The Marine Restoration Working Group provides a unique, Europe-wide platform for advancing marine ecosystem restoration, uniting practitioners, scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders to foster collaboration, a shared voice, and coordinated action. By focusing specifically on marine habitats, the Marine Restoration Working Group ensures its work is targeted, relevant, and responsive to diverse restoration challenges.

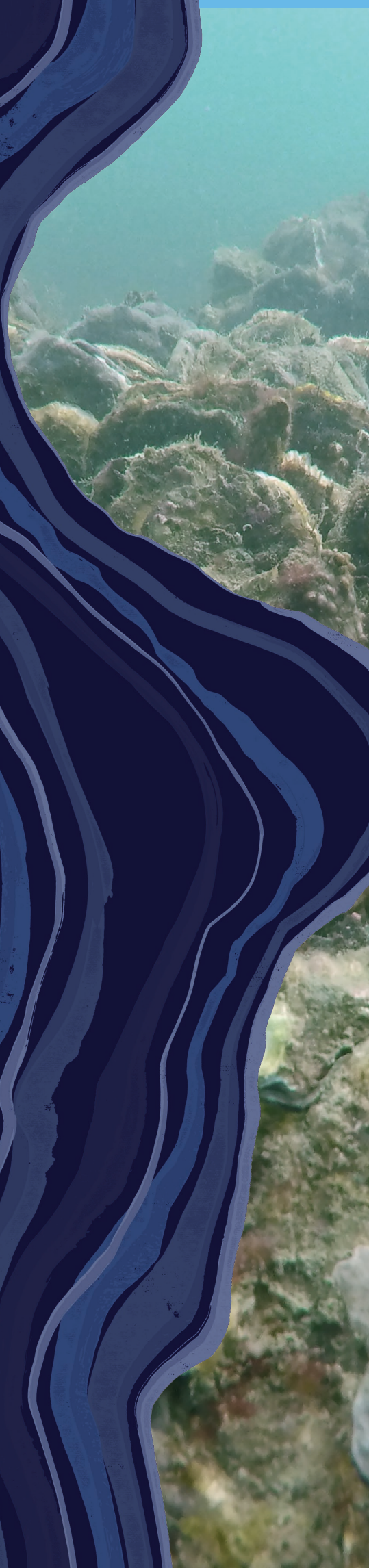
Through international knowledge exchange, standards-based guidance, capacity building, and practitioner support, the Marine Restoration Working Group can translate expertise into tangible, scalable restoration outcomes. Leveraging partnerships with established organisations, it strengthens policy influence, mobilises funding, and consolidates networking across stakeholders.

While challenges exist—including changing policy priorities, funding constraints, uneven representation, and competition from other networks—proactive, inclusive governance and a practitioner-led approach will maintain relevance, credibility, and impact. Positioned as a central hub, the Marine Restoration Working Group has the potential to deliver lasting, measurable benefits for Europe’s marine ecosystems.

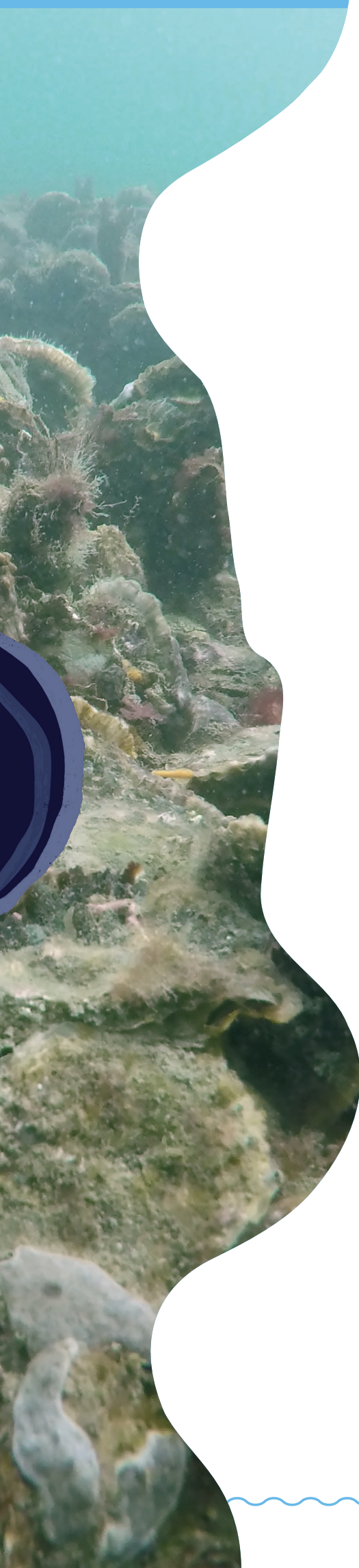


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