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Background Note

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Expanding the Blue Economy – Towards a more sustainable EU Integrated Maritime Policy

It is an established geographical fact that 70% of our planet is made up of water. It is also well-known that water has always been the mainspring of civilisation. However, as populations become increasingly dependent on water in its different forms, we are moving towards a time when claims will start being made on vast stretches of water which, as yet, do not belong to anyone. Such increasing dependence cannot, however, be assessed in isolation from the concept of sustainability. Indeed, the unsustainable use of our marine waters threatens the balance of entire ecosystems and, in turn, this affects other activities, such as fishing and tourism, which are highly dependent on the seas. Use-related competition is set to become increasingly stiff but if the unsustainable use of marine resources spirals out of control, such competition would merely turn out to be a veritable race to the bottom.

The contribution of marine economies to the GDP of different EU Member States varies on the extent of shoreline and proximity to the sea, however, island states are naturally more dependent on maritime activity. Such activity includes, *inter alia*, coastal tourism and diving, sea transport, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as ocean energy and seabed mining. Taken together, these and similar marine-related activities are said to contribute to the Blue Economy and sustaining them for the future is referred to as blue growth.

Through its Integrated Maritime Policy, the European Union seeks to provide a more coherent approach to maritime issues, with increased coordination between different policy areas such as blue growth, marine knowledge and integrated maritime surveillance. This policy takes cognisance of the inter-connectedness of industries and human activities centred around the sea, saves time and money by encouraging data sharing, and promotes structured and systematic collaboration. Needless to say it is only through the continuous evolution of such policy that the sustainability of European waters can be assured.

Regulating maritime activity is however no easy feat; more so when one considers that such activities are likely to transcend international boundaries. A case in point is Europe's continuous fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU Fishing). IUU fishing is not just Europe's problem and more worldwide collaboration is urgently required to avoid depletion of fish stocks. Together with climate

change and marine pollution, challenges which also transcend borders, IUU fishing could, unless controlled, spell the end of entire fishing industries and fishing communities. The same can be said of other major marine-related problems, not least those of marine litter and micro-plastics.

In this session Members will have the opportunity to discuss the opportunities of the Blue Economy and the challenges that it faces. Members are also encouraged to consider what role national parliaments and the European Parliament could play in safeguarding the Blue Economy.