

INTERGROUP



Seas, Rivers, Islands
&
Coastal Areas

INTERGROUP SEAS, RIVERS, ISLANDS & COASTAL AREAS

Activity Report 2019 - 2024



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As an islander myself, it is with deep-rooted connection to the seas, rivers, islands, and coastal areas that I took over the chairmanship of SEARica when we successfully renewed the Intergroup in 2019. In this same year, the European Commission introduced the European Green Deal, marking a pivotal step in addressing climate and environmental challenges, while fostering a sustainable transition for the EU economy. From preservation and restoration goals, food self-sufficiency aspirations, to renewable energy targets, more than ever, seas, rivers, islands, and coastal areas have become a crucial cornerstone to achieve EU objectives.

In this transformative time for Europe, the SEARica Intergroup has further consolidated its role as an essential forum to address the untapped potential of oceans and seas for the sustainable development of Europe, and for the maritime dimension of EU policies and strategies and related territorial specificities. The Intergroup has allowed us, Members of the European Parliament, to sit regularly around the same table with representatives of key EU institutions, regions, representatives of the maritime sectors, researchers, and NGOs. Breaking down the siloes to address environmental and socio-economic challenges in EU Policy in consideration of maritime and sea-basin realities, SEARica has valuably nurtured our parliamentary activities, with a shared ambition to place the seas high on the EU agenda.

However, building the next generation of EU maritime policies remains a work in progress. While gaining significant importance, the high potential of oceans and seas also engenders pressures on the sustainable uses of space. Our coastal areas and islands are also at the forefront of climate change's consequences, and must now be supported not only through

mitigation, but also through very ambitious adaptation policies. Therefore, as we chart our course towards a more sustainable future, we must ensure that the EU blue transition leaves no coastal communities, no maritime sector, no sea-basin behind. In this respect, I believe that the SEARica Intergroup could remain a paramount tool to reflect on the implementation of the EU Green Deal, while calling for a Blue one.

Throughout these four years, the mission of the SEARica Intergroup has been one of collaboration and commitment. I would like to express my warmest thanks to all SEARica Vice-Chairs, to all SEARica Members, for their active and valuable contribution in making SEARica a major platform for political dialogue and policy assessment. I also particularly thank the [Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions \(CPMR\)](#), which stands as the SEARica Secretariat, for their great support.

Since 2009, the SEARica Intergroup has sailed throughout EU mandates with the profound ambition to draw the attention of EU co-legislators on the main needs and potential of EU seas and rivers, as well as to raise the voice of citizens of islands, and coastal areas at EU level. I would like to express my wishes for success for renewal for the Intergroup, as Europe needs it, and our fellow citizens deserve it.

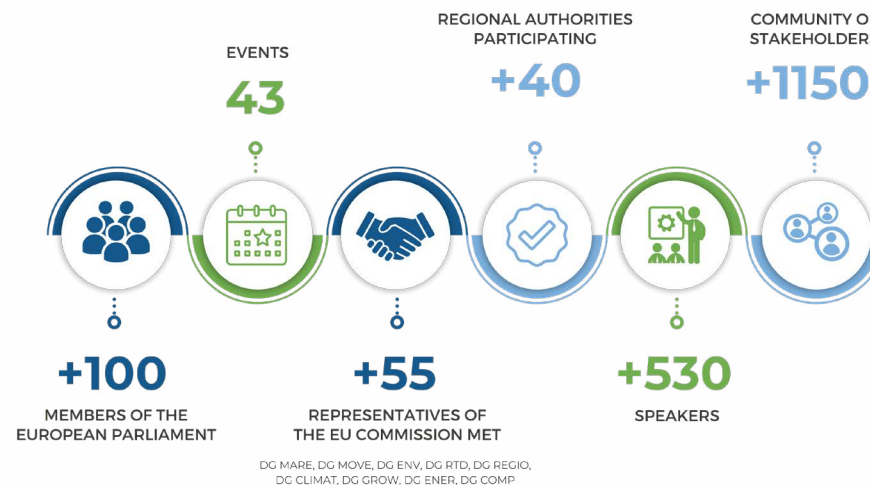


Tonino Picula
Member of the European Parliament,
Chair of the SEARica Intergroup 2019-2024



Since its creation in 2009, the SEARica Intergroup has brought together committed Members of the European Parliament to address seas, rivers, islands, and coastal areas challenges. The uniqueness of SEARica stands in its holistic ambition to not only focus on the maritime world, but also to connect it with the territorial realities of coastal areas. With this aspiration in mind, SEARica Members have worked collectively towards one common goal: **guaranteeing that EU policies ensure a sustainable use of the maritime environment and harness the specificities of coastal communities, ultimately benefiting the entire EU.**

Without a dedicated maritime committee at the European Parliament, the SEARica Intergroup has become a political forum of choice for cross-sectoral, cross-sea basin, and multi-level dialogues, serving as a bridge between European Parliament Committees concerned by maritime and coastal issues. Through the activities of the Intergroup, Members of the European Parliament have had the opportunity to streamline the SEARica dimension across their parliamentary activities, but also to benefit from a high-visibility platform to explore new ideas and own-initiatives. In addition to nurturing SEARica Members' parliamentary activities with political and technical knowledge, it has also become a dynamic place for EU representatives, regional governments, the scientific community, and representatives of the civil society to come together and learn from each other, building interconnections beyond the walls of the European Parliament.





Tonino PICULA
*Chair of the
SEARICA Intergroup*



Francois ALFONSI
Vice-Chair for Islands



Carmen AVRAM
*Vice-Chair for the
Danube & Black Sea*



Pierre KARLESKIND
*Vice-Chair for Marine
& Maritime Research*



Petros KOKKALIS
*Vice-Chair for Blue Economy,
Maritime Industries & Ports*



Vangelis MEIMARAKIS
*Vice-Chair for Tourism
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Jan Christoph OETJEN
*Vice-Chair for Maritime
Transport & North Sea*



Nils TORVALDS
Vice-Chair for Baltic Sea



Josianne CUTAJAR
*Vice-Chair for SMEs &
Digitalisation*



Giuseppe FERRANDINO
*Vice-Chair for Fisheries &
Social Issues*



Alicia HOMS
*Vice-Chair for Biodiversity
& Ocean Literacy*



Manuel PIZARRO
*Former Vice-Chair for
Atlantic, 2019-2022*



A VOICE FOR THE EU BASINS AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

With a steadfast commitment to translate the knowhow and priorities of coastal communities into EU policies, the SEARICA Intergroup has been a pivotal platform to elevate the voice of European citizens onto the EU stage. Bringing together key representatives from regional authorities, experts, universities, representatives of maritime private sectors and of EU institutions, the Intergroup has facilitated the formulation of propositions for actions and support at EU level. Through this sea-basin approach, the Intergroup has not only enabled a focus per sea-basin, but also exchanges of experiences, practices and lessons learnt between different areas.

STRIVING FOR A BETTER CONSIDERATION OF EU ISLANDS' UNIQUENESS AND NEEDS FOR ADEQUATE SUPPORT

With the hit of COVID-19 crisis and the need for EU recovery measures, the SEARICA Intergroup organised a roundtable hosted by **MEP Younous Omarjee** to reflect on the future of regional State Aid. Proposals for the revision of the rules to maximise these investments in consideration of islands and maritime regions' specificities have been debated. A year later, in preparation of MEP Younous Omarjee's [INI Report](#), the SEARICA Intergroup held a special conference on Islands & Cohesion Policy hosted by **MEP François Alfonsi**, shadow rapporteur on the file. This event allowed to contribute to the political debate by

continuing the discussion on state aid schemes, address islands' challenges on biodiversity climate change, focus on islands' characteristics generating additional costs, and discuss the creation of an Islands Pact, with a view to define a common EU policy on islands issues. The INI Report "EU Islands and Cohesion Policy: Future current situation and future challenges" was adopted in June 2022.

As the European Commission released its new Circular Economy Action Plan, the SEARICA Intergroup also addressed the case of coastal and islands region for its implementation. Hosted by **MEP Josianne Cutajar**, regional representatives, the European Commission, and representatives from EU projects have reflected on actions to put in place to help islands in the implementation of the Plan and benchmarked existing practices across maritime and islands regions.



"We need to strive for thorough consideration of the specificities of islands in order to guarantee policy adaptation to their challenges and opportunities. The SEARICA Intergroup has enabled us, Members of the European Parliament, to advocate for tailored solutions for islands and engage crucial discussions with regional representatives, cross-sectoral stakeholders, and experts."

MEP François Alfonsi
SEARICA Vice-Chair for Islands

SUPPORTING INNOVATION AND REGIONAL COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS IN THE DANUBE & BLACK SEA

With the active support of **MEP Carmen Avram**, the SEARICA Intergroup has been a consistent EU forum driving maritime regional cooperation and supporting regional frameworks such as the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA), the EUSAIR macro-regional strategy, and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA). Along these four years, the Intergroup has regularly organised political events to address challenges and seize opportunities for full implementation and engagement of these cooperations, with focus on the Blue and Innovative dimension of their priorities. With the perspective of safeguarding the Danube & Black Sea unique environment and build a more sustainable future, events have also been organised on the marine litter-related challenges, as well as on the future of fisheries and aquaculture in the area, enabling cross-sea basin exchange of knowledge and experiences to nurture future actions.

"The Danube & Black Sea offer a diverse array of maritime activities that holds transformative potential for the region. Supporting innovative development will be key to unlock opportunities, and I hope the SEARICA Intergroup will continue to be a political forum that can foster a promising future for the area."



MEP Carmen Avram
SEARICA Vice-Chair for the Danube & Black Sea

HARNESSING THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE BALTIC AND THE ARCTIC

In light of a new geopolitical context and the accelerating climate and energy independence challenges, SEARICA has actively reflected on the role of the Baltic Sea as frontrunner for a green transition and European energy sovereignty and

In May 2023, the [Final SRIA Implementation Plan](#) has been launched during a SEARICA event hosted by **MEP Marian-Jean Marinescu**. This guide aims to support the preservation of the Black Sea's distinctive habitats, foster sea-based sector growth, and stimulate employment through collaborative efforts across academia, funding bodies, industry, policy makers, and civil society.



Launch of the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan, hosted by MEP Marian-Jean Marinescu, 4 May 2023

security under the impulse of **MEP Nils Torvalds**, also addressing focused discussions such as on the role of ports in the implementation of the EU Green Deal.

Mirroring the European Commission's launch of its [Communication](#) for a green, peaceful, and prosperous Arctic, the SEARICA Intergroup decided to increase its action on the issue with the appointment of a new Vice-Chair for the Arctic, late **MEP**

Erik Bergkvist. In 2022, MEP Erik Bergkvist kicked-off the activities by hosting a political discussion on the potential and challenges for the green transition and blue economy in the Arctic, and on means to increase interregional cooperation to maintain a peaceful Arctic. In this respect, the SEArice Intergroup allowed to enlarge the reflection on the future of the area beyond the sectoral approach, with specific attention to Arctic coastal communities' needs and priorities.



SEArice event; The Baltic Sea Region – a key Region for European energy resilience in a challenging geopolitical context, 2 february 2023



“The Baltic Sea emerges as a pivotal region, particularly vital for European energy resilience and security challenges in current geopolitical context. The SEArice Intergroup is a great hub not only to address different realities, per sea-basin, sector, or topography such as in the case of islands, but also to foster political exchanges and collaboration with European counterparts.”

MEP Nils Torvalds

SEArice Vice-Chair for the Baltic Sea

TAPPING IN THE FULL POTENTIAL OF THE ATLANTIC

With the release of the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 of the EU Atlantic sea-basin strategy (AAP 2.0), the SEArice Intergroup has followed the implementation of the new priorities agreed by the four EU Atlantic Member States. In a dedicated event to the Plan, the SEArice Intergroup invited sectorial representatives to share their perspectives on the new priorities, but also brought together the expertise of various intergovernmental strategies to reflect on the lessons learnt and potential needs to optimise the Atlantic Strategy's governance. Mirroring the priorities of the sea-basin strategy, the Intergroup has hosted discussions on the AAP 2.0 advancement and discussed political recommendations as for [ASPBAN](#), the pilot project of AAP 2.0 Pillar I “Ports as Gateways and Hubs of the Blue Economy”, hosted by **MEP Deirdre Clune**. SEArice Members have also reflected together on how to bridge

scientific research and political initiatives to address Marine Litter in the Atlantic, contributing to the AAP 2.0 Pillar IV “Healthy Oceans and Resilient Coasts”.

Inspired by the SEArice exchanges on marine litter, **MEP Catherine Chabaud** called for the continuation of the [CleanAtlantic project](#) in her [INI Report](#) “Impact on Fisheries Marine Litter”, adopted in March 2021. Today, the partnership has successfully renewed their collaboration through the approval of the [FreeLitterAt project](#) that will address the prevention and reduction of macro and micro litter in the Atlantic until 2026.



MEP Deirdre Clune at the SEArice event; ports as hubs of the blue economy, 27 June 2023

“The Atlantic sea-basin represents immense potential for the sustainable development of Europe. As experienced when discussing the role of ports as hubs of the Blue Economy, engaging forward-thinking discussions and facilitate further cross-border cooperation through the SEArice Intergroup has been profoundly enriching.”



MEP Deirdre Clune

SEArice Vice-Chair for the Atlantic

REFLECTING ON ENHANCING THE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Throughout this term, the SEArice Intergroup has particularly addressed the EU action to enhance the sustainability of the Mediterranean economies. With a specific focus on the tourism sector, SEArice has been a political bridge to address this key economic transition for the area with policymakers.

With regional representatives across the Mediterranean, SEArice members have discussed key recommendations arising from the [INI Report](#) “EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism” of **MEP Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar**, SEArice Vice-Chair for Outermost Regions. The SEArice Intergroup has also particularly addressed climate resilience, biodiversity protection and restoration challenges across several events of this term, with important representation of the specific challenges of the Mediterranean and policy recommendations from EU projects.

A SOUNDING BOARD FOR THE MARITIME DIMENSION OF EU POLICIES & STRATEGIES

Throughout this term, the European Green Deal has highlighted the critical importance of the seas, rivers, islands, and coastal areas in achieving Europe's objectives. With the release of pivotal new legislation, the SEArca Intergroup has played a key role in monitoring the maritime dimension across EU policies, strategies and programmes. By actively engaging in discussions strategically aligned with the EU legislative process, the Intergroup has strived for EU policies to offer the necessary framework, support, and conditions to fully harness the potential of maritime and coastal areas in its implementation.

THE EU MISSION OCEANS & OCEAN OBSERVATION

While SEArca had been on the forefront to fight for the creation on Mission for Oceans in the research and innovation programme Horizon Europe during its 2014-2019 term, it is with great excitement that the renewed Intergroup 2019-2024 took up the torch and kicked off its activities with a dedicated event. On that occasion, SEArca members, the scientific community, DG RTD, and representatives of the civil society discussed and advised on the launch, context, and next steps of implementation of what became the [EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters](#).

A year later, SEArca concluded the European Commission's public consultation on Ocean Observation with a related discussion hosted by **MEP Alicia Homs** and with the participation of **MEP Catherine Chabaud** and **MEP Ville Niinistö**, in collaboration with DG MARE.



SEArca event on Mission Clean Oceans, 17 february 2020



“Ocean literacy is key for comprehending our marine biodiversity and ecosystems, and for next generations of EU citizens to grasp the vital role of our waters. I thank the SEArca Intergroup for being a compass to gain more knowledge and understanding of our seas, nurturing our work at the European Parliament.”

MEP Alicia Homs

SEArca Vice-Chair for Biodiversity & Ocean Literacy

THE FIT-FOR-55 PACKAGE

With the release of the fit-for-55 package, which included proposals directed to waterborne transport and aviation such as FuelEU and the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (AFIR), SEArca hosted a comprehensive discussion when the negotiations on the different files reached the European Parliament. Together with representatives of DG MOVE, maritime sectors, coastal regions, ports and NGOs, **MEP Tonino Picula**,

MEP Petros Kokkalis, **MEP Rasmus Andresen** (ITRE FuelEU Rapporteur) and **MEP Caroline Nagtegaal** (TRAN shadow rapporteur for AFIR) have addressed the path to decarbonisation of maritime transports through the EU legislative context. A follow-up session, addressing FuelEU, the Social Climate Fund and ReFuelEU Aviation has been organised in the next months also in the presence of **MEP Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar**, **MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen** and **MEP Catherine Chabaud**, as well as thematical events to explore measures to help the shipping industry to reduce its emissions.



SEArca event: Towards a maritime sector fit for 55, 7 december 2021 with the participation of (from left to right) MEP Josianne Cutajar, SEArca member Caroline Nagtegaal, MEP Petros Kokkalis and SEArca Chair MEP Tonino Picula

THE REVIEW OF THE REGULATION ON TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK (TEN-T)

Considering the European Commission's proposal to review the TEN-T regulation that established both the funding priorities and EU transport infrastructure standards for the years to come, the SEArca Intergroup hosted a discussion

on its maritime dimension. With the participation of DG MOVE, regional and maritime transports representatives, **MEP Jan Christoph Oetjen**, **MEP Tonino Picula**, **MEP Isabel Garcia Munoz** (TRAN Shadow-Rapporteur on the TEN-T), assessed whether the European Commission's proposal answered the calls from the European Parliament and the maritime sector, considering mirroring Initiatives Reports dedicated to the TEN-T and maritime transport.



“The SEArca Intergroup has been a strategic forum to shed light on the maritime dimension of key EU policy for Transports. We discussed constructive proposals on the review of the regulation on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), and explored how to further support the sector of maritime transport into delivering the objectives of the EU Green Deal.”



MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen

SEArca Vice-Chair for Maritime Transport and the North Sea

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S COMMUNICATION ON A NEW APPROACH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

As a conclusion event for the feedback process on the European Commission's roadmap for its communication on sustainable Blue Economy, **MEP Petros Kokkalis** hosted a SEArca Blue Economy conference in cooperation with DG MARE. Together with regional, national, sectoral blue

economy sectors, **Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius** and SEArca Members engaged on the content of the future communication that would guide the vision of the European Commission towards sustainable blue economy for the years to come.

As a complementary exercise, SEArca has also hosted a Conference on Blue Skills, to reflect on the maritime dimension of the launch of the EC Pacts for Skills and future initiatives and proposals to support the next generation of maritime professionals, and a conference on Blue SMEs.

“Supporting Blue SMEs is not just about economic growth, it is a political responsibility to secure a sustainable future for our EU coastal communities who rely on maritime sectors. The SEArca Intergroup has facilitated insightful cross-sectoral exchanges on the EU action to boost innovation, blue digitalisation, and sustainable transition for the generations to come.”



MEP Josianne Cutajar
SEArca Vice-Chair for SMEs & Digitalisation



“The SEArca Intergroup plays a pivotal role in championing maritime interests and the vital importance of fisheries in sustaining livelihoods, feeding communities and preserve marine biodiversity. I will carry with me the collaborative efforts and insightful perspectives gained from these discussions that safeguard health and resilience of our fisheries for generations to come.”

MEP Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar
SEArca Vice-Chair for Outermost Regions

THE NATURE RESTORATION LAW PROPOSAL

Ahead of the vote in plenary, **MEP Pierre Karleskind**, **MEP Catherine Chabaud**, **MEP Caroline Roose** and Rapporteur **MEP Cesar Luena** came together on the marine dimension of the proposal on nature restoration. Together with scientific experts, civil society and fisheries producers' representatives, they addressed core elements of the text and discussed the main needs to ensure effective implementation, such as data collection and harmonisation with other EU directives.



SEArca event: The marine dimension of the Nature Restoration Law, hosted by SEArca Vice-Chair for Marine & Maritime Research **MEP Pierre Karleskind** and SEArca Vice-Chair for Climate & Governance **MEP Catherine Chabaud**, 29 June 2023

“In charting our course to the future of EU maritime policies, we must rely on the based available knowledge for coherent decision-making. In this respect, the SEArca Intergroup has been a crucial bridge for dialogue between the scientific community and key policy makers, from the EU to the regional level, and to encourage marine and maritime research.”



MEP Pierre Karleskind
SEArca Vice-Chair for Marine & Maritime Research

THE EU CLIMATE LAW AND EU ADAPTATION STRATEGY

In light of the EU Climate Law and the EU Adaptation Strategy, SEArca has especially reflected on the special needs of maritime and coastal areas, as being in the forefront of climate change consequences such as sea-level rise, coastal erosion, floods and extreme temperatures. Throughout a series

of events, notably hosted by **MEP Josianne Cutajar** and **MEP Catherine Chabaud**, SEArca Members have exchanged on the experience and practices of regions and islands from different sea basins and has set discussions on the EU action and support to coastal areas together with DG CLIMA, European Investment Bank, European Environmental Agency and experts to ensure effective adaptation and resilience of these areas.



“The maritime world is our common home, where a wide variety of human activities are interconnected to the status of its biodiversity, and we must stop addressing policies in siloes if we want to aim for a balance of co-existences at sea effectively. The SEArca Intergroup has been the platform to address maritime issues holistically and to put different voices together around the same table.”

MEP Catherine Chabaud
SEArca Vice-Chair for Climate & Governance

SEARICA IN SUPPORT TO THE MARITIME SECTORS' RECOVERY

With this term being historically marked by COVID-19 crisis that deeply affected maritime economic activities, and therefore the prosperity of coastal communities, the SEArca Intergroup has been a vocal ally to support the EU action in their recovery. In the urgency to act, the SEArca Board has met with Commissioner Sinkevicius in May 2020, to stress the need for urgent and specific measures considering the revised MFF and EU Recovery Plan, sharing their key proposals with the support of a [signed declaration](#). The Intergroup has hosted several high-level discussions for maritime industries' recovery, and focused ones on the tourism sector, while streamlining the reflection on their recovery and transition along the whole mandate.

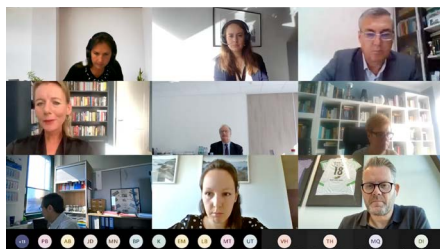


A HIGH-VISIBILITY LABORATORY OF INNOVATIVE IDEAS

In addition to supporting the legislative process at the European Parliament, the SEARICA Intergroup has also represented a place for exploration of new themes and challenges and a high-visibility platform for SEARICA Members to nurture their own initiatives and address other issues of their interest. Under the impetus of its Members, the SEARICA Intergroup has become a laboratory of new ideas at the European Parliament to shape and voice innovative ideas for the future of coastal and maritime areas.



On the proposal of **MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen**, SEARICA Members reflected on the future of water-based tourism. Together, SEARICA Members signed a [common declaration](#) with five proposals to develop common rules to boost a EU sustainable nautical tourism.



As part of her own-initiative report “Towards Future-Proof Inland Waterway Transport in Europe”, **MEP Caroline Nagtegaal** hosted a discussion to identify the barriers to overcome and the way to move forward for IWT sector in light of the EU Green Deal, with sectorial experts and representatives from the EU Commission.

Together with **MEP Carmen Avram**, she also hosted a dedicated discussion on the Danube River building on NAIADES III programme.



With the support of **MEP Catherine Chabaud** and **MEP Cyrus Engerer**, the Ocean Framework, a tool developed by Fondation de la Mer for and with companies to identify and measures their impact on the Ocean and set objectives for improvement, has been presented at the European Parliament. SEARICA Members have discussed its contribution and connections with EU policy and initiatives, such as the EU Mission Ocean.



Willing to explore the potential of wind propulsion to contribute to the Green Deal, **MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen** hosted a discussion with experts, representatives of the EU Commission and **MEP Catherine Chabaud**, **MEP Deirdre Clune** and **MEP Petros Kokkalis** to dive into how the shipping industry could deliver on decarbonisation, to reduce carbon and other GHG emissions by using a set of technologies and approaches already available today.



Recalling the European Parliament’s calls for an international moratorium on deep-sea mining, **MEP Caroline Roose** and **MEP Marie Toussaint** have brought together ministerial representatives, the EU Commission, scientific and civil society experts to discuss pathways for future EU initiatives to safeguard the deep ocean from mining harm.



Together with experts and policy makers, **MEP Tonino Picula**, **MEP Jan-Christophe Oetjen**, and **MEP Pierre Karleskind** addressed challenges of underwater noise, in light of the award-winning documentary “Sonic Sea”.

Together to shape a sustainable and prosperous future for EU Seas, Rivers, Islands, and Coastal Areas in the European Parliament



Seas, Rivers, Islands & Coastal Areas

Interested in learning more about the SEARICA intergroup? Please contact us at: info@cpmr.org ; delphine.kaczorowski@cpmr.org

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