

Brief the UMP – Blue Economy

The multidisciplinary identity and intersectoral approach of the UM Maritime Platform

Good afternoon esteemed Rector, Pro-rectors, vice chancellor & president of council, colleagues, and participants, it is my pleasure to represent the University Maritime Platform at this forum and to give a very brief overview of our developing identity and approach.

The University Maritime Platform supported by around 60 academic members is led by an interdisciplinary committee aiming to:

Synergise, Stimulate, and Accelerate research and training initiatives related to marine and maritime issues and industry, to the point that years after its coming into being, it proved fundamental in setting-up the SEA EU Alliance, whose structure originated from the UMP committee members, directly contributing to this new educational university project.

Therefore, the university maritime platform is optimally placed to support and strengthen relevant marine and maritime initiatives and collaborations under the University's framework, while reaching out to exchange experiences in support of national interests, innovative research, and EU strategies for the future, to ensure long-term sustainability in fast developing economic activities that increasingly consider the marine environment as the central source for growth.

However, economic growth cannot be sustainable without scientific knowledge and consideration of the marine's physical, chemical, and biological dynamics toward sustaining rich Mediterranean biodiversity and human socio-economic prosperity. While the safeguard of our heritage and culture also depends on furthering our comprehension of marine archaeology and maritime social sciences. With the emerging tools of information technology, artificial intelligence, innovative engineering and hardware developments, the potential for addressing solutions is becoming more multidisciplinary than ever.

The UMP therefore may play an increasingly important role in both national and European arenas to link established goals to various players, involving research and industry experts, to overcoming the challenges of a changing and vulnerable marine environment due to anthropogenic impacts. Climate change being just one of these impacts.

Let us remember that Ideas, theories, laws, targets, education..... have one thing in common – they depend on tangible and accurate information to act upon and to assess the impact of progress. The UMP is central to upholding this developing need to adapt for sustainable blue economies and resilient biodiversity.

We need to keep in mind that the many secrets our sea still holds should not be overlooked or considered useless to mankind and the planet's wellbeing:

For example: Let us take whales which are often considered futile to the maritime economy and seen as a hindrance to various money-making activities. However, knowledge of their ecosystem services contributing to economic output made economists rate the value of a single whale to **\$2 million** in essential ecosystem services over the course of its life. This extrapolates to over **\$1 trillion** from the whales still inhabiting seas and oceans.

So before losing species, ecosystem services and natural capital that are essential to the functioning of our seas, society and planet, we need to understand and compare **the immense value of a vibrant sea** and the millions of organisms undertaking their valuable job, with that of losing this intricate web of life for short-sighted visions, industries, exploitations, explorations, and developments of limited value to humanity and with great costs to future generations.

In conclusion, a sustainable blue economy must not be another buss phrase to misrepresent the real and urgent needs of our seas, oceans, and future society. Human health and wealth depend on a sustainable blue recovery to allow our seas to reach the **Good Environmental Status highlighted by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive**. Achieving best practices demands independent financial backing (free from bias and lobbies) to increase research efforts toward marine conservation, innovative technologies, reaching zero emissions in industries including shipping, integrative methods updating policies with respective management and enforcement.

The UMP is a unique opportunity at the University of Malta to encourage more integrative and holistic research and applications for sustainable BLUE ECONOMY which safeguards marine life and resources. **This platform may serve as a beacon toward achieving** this through **a multisectoral** approach and **a cross-sectional** involvement of students, technical and academic university staff, and external entities. Promoting relevant university study units, experienced professionals, scientific research projects, and practical applications to aid mitigate biodiversity loss, climate change, and target clean energy amongst other things.

Currently the UMP is expanding its membership as more academics are joining and are invited to join. Our website is being upgraded and updated to allow for enhanced promotion of the platform's targets.

As chair I also see the usefulness of updating the platform's title to include **marine** to better reflect its membership interests.

Thank you and keep in touch by sending us your emails at **maritime.platform@um.edu.mt**