



# Maritime Strategy: mid-term review

June 2023 – June 2025

## Background

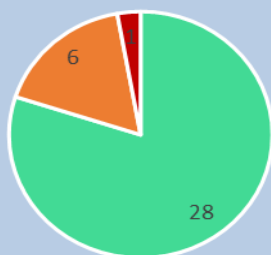
The Maritime Strategy (2023–27) was adopted by the Federal Council on 2 June 2023. It is structured around five thematic priorities, which are subdivided into objectives and measures. In total, the strategy comprises 15 objectives and 35 measures.

The Federal Council has instructed the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) to assess progress on implementing the strategy on a yearly basis, in cooperation with the competent offices and stakeholders. The results of this assessment are presented in this report.

## Results at a glance

The 2025 assessment indicates progress in a number of areas, including the conclusion of new free trade agreements, the signing of the UN High Seas Treaty, and the establishment of partnerships between research institutions. However, some measures have not made significant progress, for example those aimed at increasing Switzerland's fiscal competitiveness in the maritime sector, improving the appeal of its flag, or promoting a moratorium on deep-sea mining.

Progress of measures (June 2025)



### Key

**Green:** Activities to implement these measures are progressing as anticipated, without any major problems.

**Orange:** Activities to implement these measures have encountered problems or delays that must be closely monitored.

**Red:** Activities to implement these measures have encountered serious problems or delays requiring additional attention.

The measures in orange and red require particular attention and have therefore been prioritised, as all measures are vital to the strategy's success.

## Main activities carried out by thematic priority

For the sake of brevity, only a selection of the activities undertaken to implement the measures is presented below. The progress of the measures in each thematic priority is indicated using a pie chart. An overview of the remaining challenges is provided in the second part of the report.

### 1. Rules-based maritime order (international law)



- Participation in various negotiations, including those of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the International Seabed Authority, the Special Tripartite Commission established for the Maritime Labour Convention, the Human Rights Council (to promote and protect the human rights of seafarers), and the Central Commission for Navigation of the Rhine (to safeguard Switzerland's access to the sea).
- Publication of IMO conventions that have entered into force; commissioning of external body to examine ratifications necessary to adopt the existing rules for maritime navigation.
- Organisation of various events to exploit synergies and bring together international maritime stakeholders based in Geneva (e.g.: course on 'Protection at sea' from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration), support for projects such as the Global Resource Information Database's Global Sand Observatory, and

the launch of the new Centre for Humanitarian Action at Sea by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP).

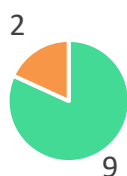
- Switzerland has also expressed interest in hosting the secretariats of the new Science Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution Prevention, and of the new Global Plastics Treaty, both of which relate to maritime issues.

## 2. Maritime economy



- Conclusion or ratification of new free trade agreements containing maritime transport commitments between the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and Moldova (entered into force on 1 April 2025), between EFTA and Chile, and between EFTA and Thailand. The agreement with India adopted by Parliament on 21 March 2025 also contains rules on maritime employees, as well as market access commitments relating to international transport and access to ports. Finally, the updated agreement between EFTA and Ukraine contains improved commitments on maritime transport.
- With regard to the measures on fiscal competitiveness, two panel discussions have already been organised to discuss the difficulties encountered and possible solutions. These exchanges brought together the Federal Administration (mainly SECO and the FDFA) and the cantons and private sector stakeholders concerned. Despite these exchanges, no concrete solutions have yet been found.

## 3. Marine environment and social issues



- Ratification of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies in January 2023. The second wave of negotiations, regarding additional rules on overcapacity and overfishing, are at an advanced stage and should conclude shortly.
- Participation in negotiations that led to the IMO establishing regulations to achieve net zero in global shipping by 2050.
- Chairing of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee, which is responsible for all issues that arise within the International Whaling Commission (IWC) with regard to whale hunting by indigenous people.
- Signature of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) in February 2025. The documents intended for public consultation with a view to ratifying the BBNJ Agreement and implementing it in Switzerland are currently being drawn up.
- Adoption of the second phase (2025–30) of the Swiss Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan.
- Presentation of Switzerland's national activities and support for new and future parties to the UN Water Convention (UNECE). Active participation in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR), with the aim of sustainably managing and restoring its waters, and in the International Commission for the Protection of the Waters of Lake Geneva.
- Negotiations with neighbouring countries to tackle new challenges in shared basins. Several agreements are currently being finalised on the Doubs (a tributary of the Rhône), Lake Geneva (which the Rhône crosses) and the Rhône (which flows into the Mediterranean Sea).
- Organisation of an event on the environment section of the maritime strategy, bringing together the Swiss stakeholders concerned.

## 4. Marine scientific research



- Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) support for 15 projects in oceanography (CHF 11.3 million) and 158 new projects in hydrology, limnology and glaciology (CHF 89.3 million) between 2020 and 2028.<sup>1</sup> Support for the Swiss Polar Institute (SPI) between 2021 and 2028

<sup>1</sup> Source: SNSF data portal; as at 22 May 2025.



(CHF 9.4 million). The SNSF's research funding includes support for projects, careers, programmes and infrastructure.

- Participation alongside Swiss experts in meetings and working groups within the framework of the Arctic Council, and involvement in events bringing together the Swiss polar and maritime community. Promotion of international dialogue and exchanges of best practice in sustainable management. Support for international scientific and maritime cooperation, including the facilitation of partnerships and MoUs for Swiss institutions.
- Diplomatic support for EPFL's Transnational Red Sea Center (TRSC), including during the summer school with researchers from countries bordering the Red Sea.
- Conclusion of cooperation agreements between the SPI and major polar organisations with access to research icebreakers, as well as with Tara Océan to give the Swiss scientific community access to the Tara research sailing vessel and the Tara Polar Station drifting base.
- SPI funding for numerous scientific projects based on or using research vessels. The maritime section of the SPI Flagship programme 'GreenFjord' has carried out campaigns on the RV Sanna and the Forel Heritage (a Swiss vessel).
- Organisation of two events related to the science and research section of the maritime strategy, bringing together the stakeholders concerned.

## 5. Swiss flag



- Easing of registration conditions for commercial seagoing vessels from 1 January 2025.
- Drafting of a bill to strengthen oversight and administrative resources for corrective measures. This is the subject of informal consultations.
- Continuous improvement and revision of the inspection system to safeguard the quality of the flag.
- Launch of the digitalisation process for flag services. The homepage of the Swiss Maritime Navigation Office (SMNO) has been redesigned and improved, with further improvements under way.
- Improved communication on the advantages of the Swiss flag, in particular through the SMNO's participation in sectoral events, the use of social media, and interventions by SECO's State Secretariat to encourage Swiss companies to adopt the flag.

## Measures assessed as having encountered problems or delays (rated as orange)



Progress on six other measures was rated as orange. These are outlined below.

### **Measure C1.1 – Negotiate an international instrument to end plastic pollution throughout the life cycle of plastics**

Switzerland is actively involved in negotiations aimed at drawing up a legally binding international agreement to end plastic pollution. As a member of the High Ambition Coalition, it regularly contributes to thematic workshops and informal discussions to help move the process forward. It also sent high-level representatives – from the Federal Council and State Secretariat – to four ministerial meetings.

The final session (INC-5.2) of these complex and sensitive negotiations will take place in August 2025 in Geneva. The main points of divergence are:

1. the scope of the agreement (in particular whether plastic production is included);
2. the treatment of problematic products and chemicals of concern in plastic products, and the regulatory measures envisaged;
3. the financial architecture of the agreement.

### **Measure C3.3 – Develop stringent environmental standards for deep-sea mining and consider a moratorium on commercial deep-sea mining**

Switzerland took part in the International Seabed Authority (ISA) negotiations on this issue, where it advocated strict environmental standards, the development of a general environmental policy, and a moratorium on seabed mining until further scientific information is available on its effects and the protection of the marine environment can be guaranteed. At the third United Nations Ocean Conference, Switzerland reaffirmed its commitment by joining a statement in favour of a moratorium.

There are still major differences between countries when it comes to operating regulations, and further negotiations will be required to develop the relevant standards and norms.

There are also concerns that the United States will unilaterally authorise deep-sea mining. Although no authorisation has yet been granted, such a move could complicate ongoing negotiations and put pressure on other countries. The legality of such a decision is currently being examined, alongside possible responses.

### **Measure D2.3 – Consider upgrading to consultative status under the Antarctic Treaty**

The increasing politicisation of discussions in the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings and the growing difficulties in reaching a consensus are holding back progress on this issue. Some of the consultative parties are blocking pending applications, creating unfavourable conditions for a change in Switzerland's status.

Nevertheless, Switzerland continues to take part in the consultative meetings and is closely monitoring current applications, particularly from Canada and Belarus. Bilateral discussions were also held with a number of parties to gather their assessments and impressions.

### **Measure E1.1 – Review conditions of registration for merchant ships and Rhine vessels and for international recreational boating, paying particular attention to nationality and capital requirements**

Registration conditions for merchant ships and Rhine vessels were eased on 1 January 2025. The main condition is now that the place of effective management be in Switzerland. The rules for yachts have also been relaxed: legal entities can now register yachts if they are entered in the commercial

register and administered from Switzerland, and third-party liability insurance can be obtained from foreign companies if the provision available in Switzerland is insufficient.

However, it has not been possible to introduce all the desired flexibility for commercial and non-commercial seagoing vessels, particularly with regard to the simplification of procedures and the removal of requirements relating to the company's assets and increased control by auditing bodies. These require a revision of the law, which has been delayed by ongoing negotiations on specific principles.

Regarding commercial vessels on the Rhine, there is a need to decide where registration conditions must be determined and to what extent they can be eased in line with international requirements.

### **Measure E1.2 – Develop comprehensive safety and sustainability standards for merchant ships and Rhine vessels sailing under the Swiss flag, maintaining a clear distinction between shipping licences and registration**

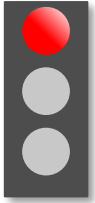
A draft bill has been prepared and is currently the subject of informal consultations. However, shipowners are rejecting the stricter sustainability requirements – which go beyond international standards – citing a risk of competitive disadvantage. One of the avenues being pursued is to work with shipowners to ensure that the disadvantages of these stricter environmental standards can be mitigated by using a newer generation of ships.

### **Measure E3.1 – Attractive cost-benefit ratio for the Swiss flag**

The appeal of the Swiss flag is enhanced by a modern legal framework and a flat-rate flag tax that is relatively low by international standards. However, the flag's competitiveness has been impacted by Parliament's rejection of a tonnage tax and the tightening of tax practices applicable to seafarers employed on ships sailing under the Swiss flag.

Discussions are under way with shipowners, other maritime-sector stakeholders, the cantons and the federal agencies concerned to identify solutions. Two panel discussions have already been held as part of these efforts. Working groups could also be set up to promote a common understanding of the challenges, respond to requests from the sector and explore possible solutions.

## Measure assessed as having encountered serious problems (rated as red)



The implementation of this measure encountered serious difficulties and requires special attention. Suitable solutions are being actively sought. The measure and the problems encountered are described below.

### **Measure B2.1 – Maintain and expand the existing network of double taxation agreements and possibly introduce a tonnage tax**

Switzerland has already concluded 100 agreements against double taxation with more than 110 countries and territories. New agreements are being concluded and existing ones revised on an ongoing basis.

During legislative proceedings on 28 May 2024, Parliament decided to reject the introduction of a tonnage tax. This decision compromises the Maritime Strategy's objective to ensure attractive tax conditions for the maritime sector. It also jeopardises the existence of the maritime sector in Switzerland – a source of jobs and tax revenue – and makes it harder for global companies to operate large fleets of ships from Switzerland.

Another issue is the need to clarify the legal situation in the Federal Act on Direct Federal Taxation (DFTA) and the Direct Taxation Harmonisation Act (DTHA) of the tax exemption for seafarers on board seagoing vessels flying the Swiss flag (Art. 5 para. 1 let. f DFTA; Art. 4 para. 2 let. f DTHA).

As with measure E3.1, discussions are under way with shipowners, other maritime-sector stakeholders, the cantons and all the federal agencies concerned to identify solutions. Two panel discussions have already been held as part of these efforts. Working groups could also be set up to promote a common understanding of the challenges, respond to requests from the sector and explore possible solutions.

## Annex: Summary table: Assessment of progress on measures

Strategic priority	Objective	Measure	2024 evaluation	2025 evaluation
<b><u>A. Rules-based maritime order</u></b>	<b>A1. Strengthen international law (application, enforcement, further development)</b>	A1.1 Actively participate in the further development of international law in the maritime context	green	green
		A1.2 Exercise Switzerland's rights through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and other dispute settlement mechanisms	green	green
		A1.3 Influence relevant bodies, forums and negotiations with a view to safeguarding the rights of landlocked states	orange	green
	<b>A2. Adopt the body of rules under international law</b>	A2.1 Advance the body of law governing maritime matters, including, in particular, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions.	orange	green
		A2.2 Ratify agreements and amended agreements that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals	orange	green
	<b>A3. Strengthen Geneva as a location for organisations operating within the maritime sector</b>	A3.1 Exploit synergies by promoting networking between Geneva-based international maritime actors in relation to global trade, intellectual property, the environment, peace and security, humanitarian aid, human rights and healthcare	green	green
		A3.2 Adopt an attractive host state policy with a view to creating optimum locational conditions for organisations operating in the maritime sector	green	green
<b><u>B. Maritime economy</u></b>	<b>B1. Improve market access for international maritime services</b>	B1.1 Improve market access for maritime services by participating in multilateral regulatory forums or negotiating free trade agreements	green	green
	<b>B2. Maintain an attractive tax regime</b>	B2.1 Maintain and expand the existing network of double taxation agreements and possibly introduce a tonnage tax	red	red
<b><u>C. Marine environment and social issues</u></b>	<b>C1. Participate in international instruments in the areas of marine biodiversity, plastic pollution and decent work</b>	C1.1 Negotiate an international instrument to end plastic pollution throughout the life cycle of plastics	orange	orange
		C1.2 Strengthen the targets to reduce GHG emissions of maritime shipping to net-zero by 2050 as part of the revision of the IMO Greenhouse Gas Strategy	green	green
		C1.3 Ensure decent work in the maritime sector in the framework of the Maritime Labour Convention (ILO-MLC 2006)	green	green

	C2. Provide a safe and sustainable marine food chain	C2.1 Step up monitoring to ensure that marine resources are used lawfully and sustainably, in particular under the auspices of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and other managing authorities	green	green
		C2.2 Support trade measures in the context of species conservation	green	green
		C2.3 Support the right of indigenous peoples and local communities to exploit marine resources including whales, subject to biological criteria	green	green
	C3. Strengthen sustainability standards in the use of marine resources	C3.1 Safeguard at least 30% of the world's marine areas for biodiversity by 2030	orange	green
		C3.2 Implement relevant targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	green	green
		C3.3 Develop stringent environmental standards for deep-sea mining and consider a moratorium on commercial deep-sea mining	green	orange
	C4. Protect Switzerland's transboundary rivers that flow into the sea	C4.1 Emphasise the importance to Switzerland of managing transboundary rivers that flow into the sea	green	green
		C4.2 Reconcile interests between upstream and downstream countries when entering into and developing international treaties	green	green
	<u>D. Marine science and research</u>	D1. Strengthen Swiss science in international ocean bodies	D1.1 Promote marine research through the competitive project funding schemes of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)	green
D1.2 Maintain funding through committees and contributions from the academic community and by supporting research bodies of national importance (SPI). Research bodies are selected in line with the conditions laid down in federal research and innovation legislation			green	green
D2. Position Switzerland as part of the polar community		D2.1 Use Switzerland's Arctic Council observer status to promote international scientific research, the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, dialogue among nations and dialogue with indigenous peoples' organisations	green	green
		D2.2 Promote a 'science diplomacy culture' by facilitating fruitful interaction between science and politics	green	green



		D2.3 Consider upgrading to consultative status under the Antarctic Treaty	orange	orange
	<b>D3. Strengthen research shipping</b>	D3.1 Ensure that the Swiss research community can exploit synergies to the full by facilitating access to research vessels and platforms	green	green
		D3.2 Participate in international expeditions and projects and lend political support to research vessels sailing under the Swiss flag	green	green
<b><u>E. Swiss flag</u></b>	<b>E1. Ensure competitive conditions of registration for merchant ships and Rhine vessels and updated regulations for international recreational boating</b>	E1.1 Review conditions of registration for merchant ships and Rhine vessels and for international recreational boating, paying particular attention to nationality and capital requirements	orange	orange
		E1.2 Develop comprehensive safety and sustainability standards for merchant ships and Rhine vessels sailing under the Swiss flag, maintaining a clear distinction between shipping licences and registration	orange	orange
		E1.3 Ensure compliance with international rules	green	green
	<b>E2. Improve oversight and sanctioning</b>	E2.1 Strengthen regulatory requirements (monitoring and reporting obligations) and administrative capacity to initiate corrective action and impose penalties	green	green
		E2.2 Establish a coherent and effective inspection scheme to safeguard the quality of the flag	green	green
	<b>E3. Provide a service-oriented public authority for the maritime sector</b>	E3.1 Attractive cost-benefit ratio for the Swiss flag	orange	orange
		E3.2 Provide fast, high-quality digital services (e-government)	green	green
		E3.3 Communicate the benefits of the Swiss flag through appropriate means	orange	green