



DUAL GOAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION: COLLABORATION BETWEEN QATAR AND EU

Summary

- Tackling marine pollution and developing a sustainable blue economy as a means of economic diversification are areas of common strategic interest for both Qatar and the EU. Qatar faces an increasing issue of ocean pollution due to littering and microplastic contamination. Economic diversification is one of the major goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030 to ensure the reduction of over-dependence of the Qatari economy on hydrocarbons. On the other hand, the EU's blue economy has created jobs and has contributed significantly to its GDP.
- Various research has indicated that marine pollution in Qatar has adverse consequences on marine biodiversity and the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated this problem due to the increased usage of face masks. Additionally, statistics have revealed that there is great potential for Qatar in developing its blue economy as a means to diversify its economy and achieve self-sufficiency in fish stocks.
- This policy brief recommends the signing of an MoU between Qatar and the EU to achieve the twin objective of protecting the marine ecosystem and achieve economic diversification. By exchanging technology and know-hows, jointly increasing investments to develop the blue economy, and engaging in bilateral trade of the output from the blue economy, Qatar and the EU can fulfill their common interests.

Introduction

Qatar is one of the most developed countries in the Middle East, according to the United Nations, with a high rate of economic growth. This dramatic change, however, comes at a price. Underneath its enviable exterior, the country is beset by environmental problems. Because of its rapid urbanization and economic development, Qatar is vulnerable to coastal pollution from marine debris.

Also, Qatar's reliance on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) makes up the majority of country exports, which indicates a problem of overdependence on one source of income. In order to ensure a sustainable future, there is a need for diversifying the economy as envisioned in Qatar National Vision 2030.

The launch of the Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union (EU) in 2007 serves as an important factor that stimulates consolidation of coastal and marine activities, with the aim of building a sustainable blue-economy in Europe. EU has seen significant improvement in their blue sector, since the implementation of this policy. Taking these common interests shared by Qatar and the EU, this policy brief recommends the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Qatar and the EU to collectively drive the shift towards a blue economy.

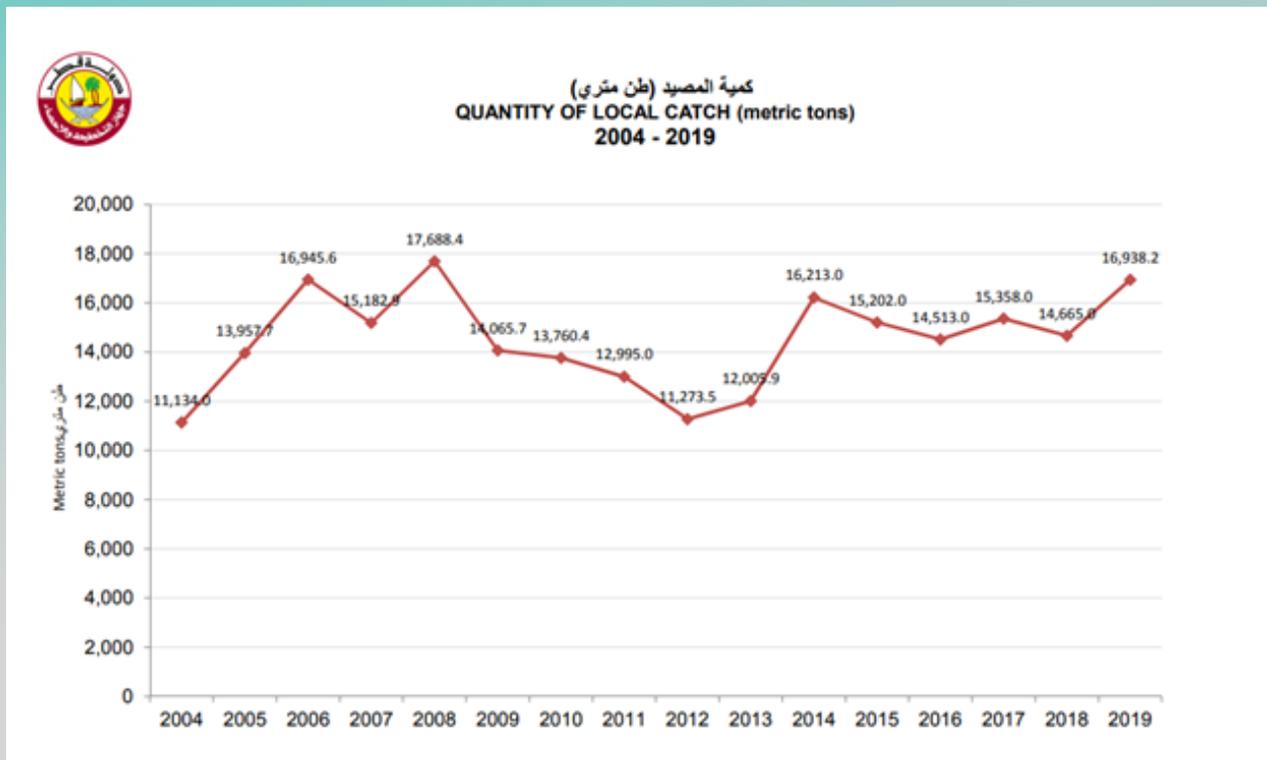
Qatar and its Coasts

Qatar has a twin incentive to reduce ocean pollution and create a sustainable blue economy as a source of economic diversification, according to the Qatar National Vision 2030.

Firstly, Qatar has a traditional link to the oceans. Now, the country has an opportunity to become a world leader in marine salt-based aquaculture. Currently, Qatar Government aims to achieve self-sufficiency in the agriculture and aquaculture sector, with supply falling short of demand by 6000 tons. In the National Development Strategy 2022, the government has taken measures to increase self-sufficiency in fish supplies. By implementing various plans such as fostering fisheries, establishing sophisticated fish farms, forming research centers to expand fish production, Qatar aims to achieve 65% of fishery self-sustenance.

The below graph indicates a sluggish growth in the quantity of the local catch, therefore presenting an opportunity for further growth to suffice demand. Secondly, Qatar is facing an increase in marine pollution that adversely impacts its marine biodiversity. Various research indicates an exponentially increasing threat of debilitating marine ecosystem.

Marine Litter (ML) is defined as any industrial or processed solid items that were disposed into the marine ecosystem. Having an ML density of 1.98 item/ m², Qatar has an ML density that is greater than the worldwide average of 1 item/m². The average ML of Qatar's coasts is also high compared to other coastal regions such as the Red Sea, Italy, and Slovenia. More than 70% of the ML on the coasts consists of plastics. Additionally, in the current times, a recent research suggests that the increased use of N95 masks and disposable surgical masks during the COVID-19 pandemic would result in the accumulation of polypropylene (plastics) in Qatar's coasts. This trend is expected to continue at a higher pace in the coming years. The high level of micro-plastics in the land and marine environment of the Arabian Peninsula can be attributed to the high face mask utilization. Moreover, the research indicated that there are no regulations in place for the management of micro-plastic pollution in the Arabian Peninsula.



Recommendation

There is a need for an MoU between the Ministry of Municipality and Environment of Qatar (MME) and the EU Commission.

The European Union has successfully established a strong framework for creating a sustainable blue economy as a part of its Integrated Maritime Policy. With the interests of Qatar and EU aligning in creating a blue economy, it is recommended that they sign a Memorandum of Understanding that encompasses at least the following conditions:

- First, Qatar and the EU should collaborate on research and development of a blue economy facilitated by the exchange of knowledge and transfer of know-how.
- Second, increase investments in the development of new technologies for the economic and environmental sustainability of the ocean.
- Finally, Qatar and the EU can engage in bilateral trade of the output from the ocean economy to spur the growth of a sustainable blue economy thereby combining the interests of Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Integrated Maritime Policy of the EU.

With the Integrated Maritime Policy of the EU showing promising results on its coastal waters, Qatar has the advantage to adapt and understand the strategies adopted in the plan. Qatar's commitment to a sustainable future, evident in its Vision 2030 plan and EU's commitment to helping build blue economy in areas around the world, perfectly aligns the plans of both the nations to jointly shape the Persian Gulf's first sustainable blue sector.

Conclusion

Qatar's Vision 2030 strategically outlines the need of the hour: environmental and economic sustainability. Integrated Maritime Policy of EU is one the most successful examples of building a blue economy. The intersecting interests of Qatar and the EU can help build Persian Gulf's first blue economy.

References

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Akber Abbasi, S., Khalil, A. B., & Arslan, M. (2020). Extensive use of face masks during COVID-19 pandemic: (micro-)plastic pollution and potential health concerns in the Arabian Peninsula. *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences*, 27(12), 3181–3186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sjbs.2020.09.054>

Further readings: https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/ocean/blue-economy_en

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