



Overview

Amid complex policy landscapes and [federal funding gaps](#), states, Tribes, and localities face challenges in advancing coastal and marine priorities. This sense of uncertainty — compounded by increased pressures from [climate change](#), [rapid coastal development](#), [gentrification](#), and [shifting global markets](#) — introduces many challenges for states. Investing in the [Blue Economy](#) at the state level provides the opportunity for states to drive sustainable economic development while preserving critical marine and coastal ecosystems.



What is the Blue Economy?

The [Blue Economy](#) refers to the “[business sectors](#) that rely on the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic health, improved livelihoods, jobs, or ecosystem health.” It encompasses a wide range of economic activities that depend on the ocean and coastal resources. What distinguishes the Blue Economy is its emphasis on [sustainability](#) — supporting economic growth while protecting the long-term health of ocean and coastal ecosystems.

State Policy Options

Recognizing both the economic potential and the challenges ahead, a growing number of states are taking proactive steps to [promote and protect](#) their Blue Economies. These efforts include statewide ocean and coastal strategies, funding for resilient infrastructure, support for workforce development, and incentives for sustainable innovation.

*Please note: all legislation marked with two asterisks “**” indicates bipartisan sponsorship.*

Establish a Blue Economy Task Force or Office

Currently, only two states have defined the Blue Economy in statute: [Maine](#) and [Florida](#). Other states are exploring the creation of Blue Economy Task Forces and Offices of the Blue Economy to increase capacity and coordination.

- ****Oregon SB 1525 (Enacted 2026):** Establishes a Blue Economy Task Force to study and prepare a report on the sectors of Oregon’s blue economy, existing economic development plans, and opportunities to enhance the state’s sustainable blue economy businesses while protecting coastal ecosystems.
- ****Florida CS/HB 1285 (Enacted 2024):** Establishes the Office of Ocean Economy within the State University System. The Office is focused on research and development, technological innovation, emerging industries, workforce training, and education to stimulate the ocean economy.

Workforce Development

The [marine workforce](#) is vast, touching multiple points of coastal and inland economies. To support both maritime heritage and emerging blue industries, states can invest in workforce development opportunities and protections.

- ****Virginia HB 67 (Enacted 2026):** Directs the Department of Energy to identify and develop training resources to advance workforce development in the offshore wind industry, prioritizing veterans, local workers, and workers from economically disadvantaged communities.
- ****Massachusetts S 68 (Introduced 2025):** Would establish a “Lobstering Closure Mitigation Fund” to provide financial assistance to lobstermen affected by fishing area closures intended to protect endangered species like the North Atlantic Right Whale.



Working Waterfronts

[Working waterfronts](#) are a vital part of the Blue Economy. These are the physical spaces that support water-dependent industries — ports, shipyards, seafood processing facilities, ferry terminals, and access points. They are not only essential for the functioning of Blue Economy sectors but also face threats from [coastal development](#), [environmental degradation](#), and [rising property values](#).

- **[Washington HB 1689 \(Introduced 2025\)](#)**: Would adopt California's emission standards for ocean-bound vessels at berth to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution while expanding alternative shore power for vessels.
- ****[Maine LD 1245 \(Enacted 2025\)](#)**: Establishes a 15-member Working Waterfront Advisory Council to protect and improve access to working waterfronts in the state, with a focus on climate resilience, workforce development, decarbonization, and electrification.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture is a key component of the Blue Economy, with [\\$1.6 billion generated by aquaculture](#) in 2023 alone. Aquaculture systems [contribute to the seafood sector](#) by supplementing yield from wild-capture fisheries, creating jobs, and restoring nearshore habitats. States can invest in sustainable aquaculture growth by mandating pilots, creating permitting pathways for small-scale farming, and allocating funding for farmed seafood marketing.

- ****[Hawaii HB 1572 \(Introduced 2026\)](#)**: Would establish a comprehensive Restorative Aquaculture Development Program to address the decline of the state's aquaculture industry. This bill mandates the funding for three pilot demonstration sites for restorative aquaculture in the state.
- **[New Jersey S 216 \(Enacted 2026\)](#)**: Allocates funding for the Jersey Fresh Program to advertise and promote aquaculture products. This act also requires the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to establish a quality grading system that distinguishes aquaculture products from wild-caught seafood.

Learn More

To learn more, visit NCEL's [Blue Economy Issue Page](#) or contact NCEL Ocean Program Manager, Alissa Weinman at alissa@ncelenviro.org.



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