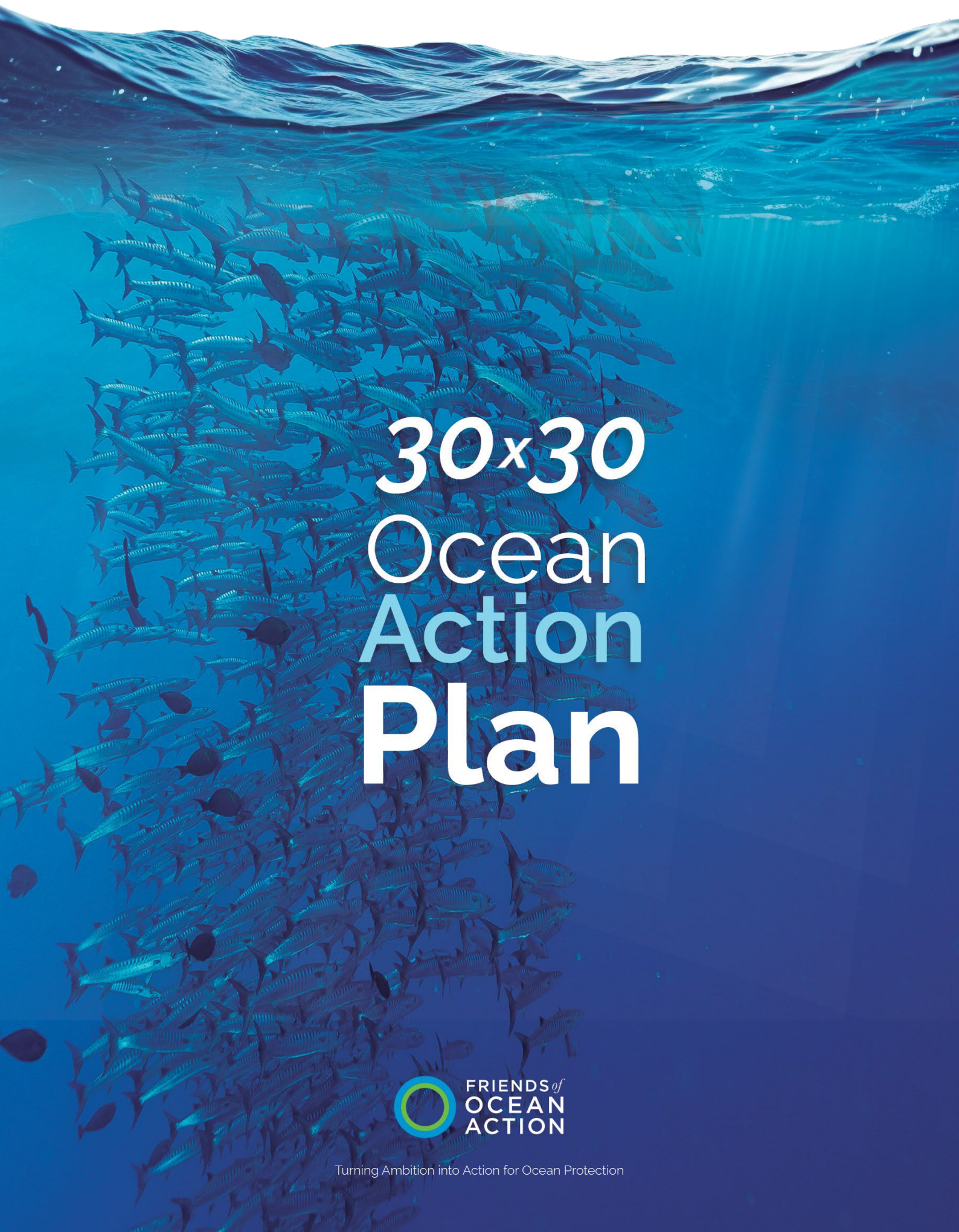

30x30 Ocean Action Plan

FRIENDS of OCEAN ACTION

Turning Ambition into Action for Ocean Protection

Acknowledgments

About this publication

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This report was produced by MarFishEco in cooperation with:

Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean

Alfredo Giron, Head, Friends of Ocean Action

Silvia Guzzini, Strategy and Programme Lead, Friends of Ocean Action

Giuseppe Di Carlo, Ocean Advisor, Dona Bertarelli Philanthropy

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Media contact
Erin Skoczylas
erin.skoczylas@weforum.org
www.weforum.org/friends-of-ocean-action

Strategic Partners

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30x30 Ocean Action Plan

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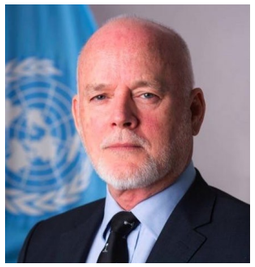
Foreword



By Ambassador Peter Thomson, United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean

We stand at a pivotal moment for ocean conservation. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) sets a bold, collective mission: to protect at least 30% of the ocean by 2030. The target requires that terrestrial, inland water, marine, and coastal areas—especially those critical for biodiversity and ecosystem services—are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems. To meaningfully achieve the target, sustainable use in these areas must fully support conservation outcomes.

Most people realise the ocean is vital to life on Earth, and by now, most should know it faces unprecedented threats from climate change, pollution, and unchecked exploitation of its resources. The causes and effects of these challenges are widely known, but we cannot dwell on them, for urgent circumstance demands we should now be focussing on the solutions.

Taken in tandem with other global frameworks, the GBF offers a comprehensive strategy to address biodiversity loss, with 30x30 being a key element. It is clear from the consensus of scientific evidence that if we don't make meaningful progress towards the 30x30 target, we will be witness to a great cascading away of biodiversity on this planet. Millions of species will become extinct, with unavoidable effects on what remains of life.

In response to the urgent calls made at the CBD COP16 in Colombia last year, I tasked Friends of Ocean Action with the development of a 30x30 Ocean Action Plan to be launched at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice this year. The explicit purpose of the Action Plan is to build momentum and accelerate progress toward 30x30 in the ocean.

This report provides a frank assessment of current protection, identifies key opportunities to accelerate progress, and outlines strategic actions to catalyse political will, mobilise finance, and empower communities and institutions. Given the constraints of time, it does not claim to be comprehensive, but it does aim to provide clarity on where we stand, and it does highlight promising pathways forward.

This report recognises that while we are not yet on track to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030, purposeful progress is underway and can be accelerated if all stakeholders unite behind the great task at hand. In so saying, it is important we see the 30x30 target as more than a conservation goal. It is in fact integral to long-term socio-economic prosperity, equity, and the rights of future generations.

The Action Plan is addressed primarily to governments, who bear the responsibility for leadership and enabling frameworks. But the journey to 30x30 is not one that countries must walk alone. A growing ecosystem of multilateral alliances, technical partnerships, and financing platforms is already in motion.

This Action Plan is not intended to prescribe fixed solutions or create another mechanism. The marine conservation landscape is already vibrant and diverse, with many actors driving positive action and tangible impact. Nevertheless, to overcome fragmentation and complexity, it would be helpful to the common cause if we can create better coordination and alignment. Therefore, this report is offered as a catalyst for unifying conversations, for illuminating existing enablers, and for fostering a collective resolve to turn ambition into tangible results.

Addressed to governments, the Action Plan outlines some of the critical actions that are proven or have high-potential pathways to accelerate progress. Countries, depending on their national circumstances, can carefully consider the report's recommendations and adapt these to their realities. At the same time, the Action Plan also posits how others can join these national efforts by supporting and further enabling governments to implement effective and equitable marine protection by 2030.

The launch of this Action Plan is just the start of further focused concerted action towards achieving 30x30. Let us all, governments and civil society alike, take inspiration from this Action Plan and use it to assist each other in the development and implementation of clear, robust, national roadmaps to achieve 30x30. These will have to be presented at the next Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP17) that will take place in Armenia next year.

And so, we all have work to do to protect biodiversity, both in terms of our immediate well-being and in the empiric cause of life on this planet. Let us get to it without delay. The health of the ocean, upon which humankind depends for a resilient future, demands nothing less.

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Executive Summary

As of June 2025, only 9.6% of the ocean has been designated as marine protected areas (MPAs) – 8.7% in national waters and 0.9% in the high seas.

Recent reports suggest that just 2.9% is fully or highly protected. Without urgent and coordinated action, the world is unlikely to meet the marine component of Target 3 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3 – to effectively protect at least 30% of the ocean by 2030. Two key challenges stand out: too little of the ocean is effectively protected, and progress is occurring too slowly.

The 30x30 target is more than a numeric milestone—it represents a strategic investment in ocean health and in human well-being. At stake are the ocean's most vital ecosystems and the critical services they provide, including food security, climate resilience, and the livelihoods of coastal and Indigenous communities. Protecting 30% is also essential to eventually reaching 100% sustainable management of the ocean, reconciling the apparent conundrum of protection and sustainable use.

This report provides a candid assessment of global progress and identifies key opportunities to accelerate marine protection and enable timely course correction. It reviews relevant mechanisms—across areas within and beyond national jurisdiction—and evaluates a set of large MPAs under potential consideration. If fully realised these could boost global ocean protection by an additional 4.7%, raising total global marine protection to 14.3%.

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At just 14.3%, global ocean protection would remain far from the 30% target – raising the urgency and the level of ambition required to deliver 30x30. It compels us to confront the systemic barriers standing in the way of increased, effective global ocean protection: adequate implementation, political inertia, sufficient financing, inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, fragmented data, and the correct use of available science and tools.

To help meet the 30x30 target, a two-pronged Action Plan is presented to support context-specific strategies and guide implementation by all governments and relevant stakeholders involved in the push to 30x30. The Action Plan does not aim to create new mechanisms or prescribe fixed solutions. Rather, it serves as a unifying call to align ongoing efforts, illuminate the enablers already within reach, and encourage the collective resolve needed to turn ambition into tangible action.

Global gains have been modest at best – but momentum is building and the path ahead is clear. The time for symbolic commitments has passed. With the ocean in crisis and the window for action narrowing, achieving 30x30 demands bold, equitable, and science-based marine protection across both national waters and the high seas. Crucially, once the BBNJ Agreement is ratified, it will enable high seas protections at scale—unlocking one of the greatest opportunities to close the gap. With the BBNJ Agreement and national commitments converging, we now have a historic chance to deliver meaningful protection—if we choose to seize it.

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GLOBAL OCEAN PROTECTION - WHERE WE STAND IN 2025

The ocean sustains life on Earth, supporting ecosystems vital for biodiversity, food security, economic opportunity, and climate regulation.

Photo: Image-Source / Envato Elements

From absorbing carbon dioxide to producing oxygen and feeding billions, its health is inextricably linked to human and planetary well-being. However, as our dependence on its resources grows—and as our values continue to prioritise extraction over stewardship—the ocean is facing intensifying and cumulative pressures from overfishing, habitat degradation, climate change, and pollution, making its protection more urgent than ever.

In December 2022, the international community took a bold step to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by adopting the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).[1] Among the 23 global targets outlined for 2030, Target 3—often referred to as the "30x30" target—stands out as a vital commitment to conserve at least 30% of the world's lands and inland waters, and 30% of the world's coastal and marine areas by 2030.[2] It was shaped by scientific consensus and broad international agreement that conserving at least 30% of these areas is essential to safeguard biodiversity, maintain vital ecosystem services, provide economic opportunity, and enhance resilience to climate change.[3] The target also recognises that the remaining 70% must be sustainably managed to support a healthy ocean and, by extension, a healthy planet. This target, along with the other interconnected 22 targets, has catalysed a global movement and inspired significant momentum towards advancing strategic conservation initiatives.

Coastal and marine areas under this target include the maritime zones within national jurisdiction, such as territorial seas, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and continental shelves, as well as areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). However, this target is not solely about achieving a spatial objective by a certain year. It also calls for ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) integrated into seascapes/oceanscapes that deliver real conservation outcomes. Internationally recognised standards for MPAs and OECMs from organisations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and evaluative frameworks like *The MPA Guide* underscore that not all MPAs provide the same level of protection.[4,5,6] While some allow extractive activities, others provide more robust ecological protection by prohibiting extractive and destructive uses and actively minimising all manageable human impacts. Therefore, the level of protection afforded and the extent to which the enabling conditions for success are in place during the creation and implementation of an MPA are just as critical for effectiveness within their local contexts as spatial extent.

Target 3 was crafted to address this dual challenge, requiring not just the designation of areas but their durable and equitable management, particularly in regions vital for biodiversity, ecosystem services, and climate resilience. Alarmingly, despite 9.6% of the global ocean being formally designated as MPAs (0.9% in the high seas and 8.7% within national waters), as self-reported by countries to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), only around 2.9% is considered fully or highly protected, according to The Marine Protection Atlas (MPAtlas).[7] The UN Environment Programme reflected this reality in the *Protected Planet Report* (2024), released at the 16th meeting of the CBD's Conference of Parties (COP16) as the first official accounting of 30x30 progress.[8] This persistent gap underscores that success hinges on outcomes, not only area, and calls for a fundamental shift from symbolic protection to genuine and tangible stewardship of the ocean.

Target 3, agreed upon by 196 countries, is not only a global conservation milestone but also a vital step towards reversing biodiversity loss, enhancing ocean resilience, and securing sustainable benefits for both people and planet. This high-level report identifies and evaluates priority 'low-hanging fruit' opportunities to scale up marine protection, with a focus on the largest MPAs that can be rapidly advanced to deliver meaningful progress toward the 30% target by 2030. While OECMs are also essential to achieving the 30x30 target, this report centres on MPAs due to their more advanced state of identification, and because OECMs require more case-specific analysis beyond the scope of this document. Nonetheless, the report provides an overview of OECMs and their value in advancing the 30x30 target (see OECMs 101). The report also reviews existing protection mechanisms, highlights promising developments for new and expanded protections within national jurisdiction, as well as in the high seas (see Appendix 1), and addresses key challenges in translating ambition into action.

This report culminates in an Action Plan intended to inform and primarily support all governments—as well as the wider ocean community—in effectively delivering on the commitments set out in Target 3. While the core audience is national governments, the Plan is especially relevant to agencies and ministries responsible for ocean, environment, planning, finance, and cross-sector coordination. It also serves international delegates and national focal points engaged in multilateral fora—such as the CBD, BBNJ, regional seas conventions, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the International Seabed Authority (ISA)—who play a key role in connecting global commitments with domestic policy, and ensuring these priorities are carried back to the right institutions. Their ability to bridge international ambition with national action will be critical to achieving 30x30.

Photo: Raul_Mellado / Envato Elements

EXISTING MECHANISMS FOR OCEAN PROTECTION

Global ocean governance relies on a complex web of legal instruments, governance frameworks, and institutional mechanisms operating across national and international scales.

While significant progress has been made in establishing area-based management tools (ABMTs), including marine protected areas (MPAs), and identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), current systems remain fragmented, with gaps in vision, plans, implementation of adequate measures, enforcement, and equity. This section outlines the foundational legal and policy instruments that underpin marine protection today and examines how they contribute to achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) 30x30 target.

The 'Constitution for the Ocean'

The global legal framework for ocean protection is anchored in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which entered into force in 1994, and established rules governing use of the global ocean and its resources. As a framework convention, UNCLOS grants states the obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment, including, among others, measures for the protection and preservation of rare or fragile ecosystems, the habitat of depleted, threatened or endangered species, and other forms of marine life.[9,10] These provisions apply to all maritime zones within and beyond areas of national jurisdiction. Additionally, beyond defining the boundaries of the different maritime zones and whose jurisdiction they fall within, UNCLOS sets out several duties, such as the duty for states to cooperate either directly or through competent organisations for the protection and preservation of the marine environment.[11] UNCLOS therefore forms the legal backbone for marine environmental protection and provides the basis for national and international collaboration to achieve marine conservation goals.

UNCLOS' general obligations to protect and preserve the marine environment are complemented by other relevant instruments, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), with respect to the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity. As a legally binding treaty with near-universal participation, the CBD provides both the mandate and mechanisms, such as the GBF, for Parties, individually or collectively, to translate broad environmental obligations into concrete, measurable commitments. Together, UNCLOS, the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) when it enters into force, and the CBD (among others) form a complementary framework for global marine biodiversity protection, with the CBD, through the GBF, providing the strategic direction and measurable targets, such as 30x30, that are essential for driving coordinated and effective marine biodiversity conservation worldwide.

Photo: Joebelanger / Envato Elements

Protection within National Waters

As a result of global commitments, States are expected to take the lead in establishing MPAs and other conservation measures within their national waters, which primarily includes their territorial seas and EEZs, as well as on their continental shelves.[12] This leadership is essential to realising the 30x30 target, as EEZs alone make up roughly 39% of the surface area of the ocean.[13] Beyond the spatial component, countries' EEZs often contain unique and ecologically significant ecosystems that require protection, especially where human activities are concentrated, as coastal areas serve as vital hubs for the provision of essential ecosystem services and underpin the livelihoods, well-being, and economies of local, regional, and national communities.

Thus far, the potential to establish MPAs and to identify OECMs to achieve the 30x30 target remains largely unrealised. Only 13 countries have protected 30% or more of their EEZs to date,[14] and only a subset of that coverage would be considered fully or highly protected.[15] It is critical and urgent to rapidly increase protection at the national level in pursuit of international targets and generate the level of protection needed to halt biodiversity loss and safeguard critical ecosystem functions.

While it is not a requirement for each country to designate 30% of their national waters as MPAs or to identify OECMs under Target 3—as the target is set for 30% of the global ocean rather than individual countries—doing so can deliver significant domestic conservation and social and economic benefit, reflect positively on national ambition, and contribute to the collective global effort to achieve 30x30. Additionally, transboundary MPAs spanning the EEZs of two or more countries offer a vital mechanism to conserve habitats, ecological processes, and species that transcend national boundaries, by promoting cross-border ecological connectivity, harmonised management, and joint stewardship of shared marine resources. The percentage of protection within a country's national waters should be determined according to its local and regional contexts, accounting for ecological, economic, and social factors. By acting decisively now, countries can close the ocean protection gap and deliver lasting benefits for nature, climate, and people.

The opportunity for action within national waters is twofold. Countries with extensive coastlines and large EEZs can play a pivotal role by establishing large-scale MPAs that conserve relatively intact ecosystems, recover degraded habitats and fish stocks, safeguard migratory species, and enhance climate resilience by protecting ecological processes across broad spatial scales. However, large-scale MPAs alone may not be sufficient to ensure ecological connectivity, particularly for mobile species or complex ecosystems. Well-connected networks of MPAs—both offshore and coastal—are equally critical to delivering conservation outcomes, especially when designed to reflect ecological linkages and species movements. In coastal zones, smaller and often community-led MPAs are vital for protecting habitats under intense human pressure, supporting sustainable local fisheries, preserving cultural values, and strengthening social buy-in. Together, these approaches can help form a coherent and connected system that integrates biodiversity goals with the needs, rights, and knowledge of local communities. By embedding both large-scale and network-based protection strategies within biodiversity-centred marine spatial planning, countries can advance the ambition of the 30x30 target while promoting equity, resilience, and long-term sustainability.[16]

Key national policy tools like the GBF's National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and potential supporting processes like the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy's Sustainable Ocean Plans (SOPs), combined with the GBF Target 1 on biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning, can help translate international commitments into actionable strategies and facilitate integrated ocean management across sectors. NBSAPs, mandated under the CBD as the main vehicle to implement national commitments, require countries to outline specific actions for biodiversity conservation across the terrestrial and marine environments. As of September 2025, 55 Parties have submitted NBSAPs to the CBD, and 140 Parties have submitted national targets that align with the GBF.[17] SOPs, while not mandated under a global policy instrument like the GBF, can help countries to develop a roadmap for sustainable ocean governance, guiding policies on marine spatial planning, fisheries management, and blue economy initiatives that can support the marine and coastal aspects of NBSAPs. By aligning national policies with global targets such as 30x30, these frameworks enhance policy coherence while fostering collaboration among government agencies, scientific institutions, and stakeholders. Additionally, they promote an integrated approach to conservation, ensuring better coordination between land and ocean management, and mobilising financial and technical resources to support long-term biodiversity outcomes across countries and regions. This is particularly true for small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) which may require stable coordinated efforts to effectively organise capacity and resources.[18,19]

Case Study 1.

The Azores – Designated and Leading by Example

In 2024, the Regional Legislative Assembly of the Azores (ALRAA) approved the creation of the largest network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the North Atlantic, covering nearly 287,000 km² (this increased ocean protection by almost 0.08%). This designation represents a landmark moment not only for the Azores, an autonomous Portuguese archipelago of nine islands, but for global efforts to meet the 30x30 target. The Network of Marine Protected Areas in the Azores (RAMPA) will protect 30% of the Azores' waters once implemented, with 16% designated as fully protected preventing extractive activities, and 14% as highly protected.[20] The process behind the designation of the Azores MPAs offers a compelling example of how robust political commitment, partnerships, transparent governance, and inclusive stakeholder engagement can combine to deliver ambitious, durable marine conservation outcomes.

From the outset, the Azores initiative was grounded in science-based planning, with a focus on identifying priority areas for conservation that support marine biodiversity, including vulnerable marine ecosystems that align with international standards of the IUCN and evaluative tools like the *The MPA Guide*.[21,22,23] The network was designed around a set of conservation objectives, grounded in science and refined through stakeholder consultation and approval. These objectives were set so that the network could minimise impacts on activities while maximising protection of ecosystems, providing benefits for the entire Azores waters. Central to this approach was the use of participatory mapping tools such as *SeaSketch*, which enabled fishers, scientists, conservation NGOs, and local communities to contribute local ecological knowledge, spatial data, and socio-economic information in real time and design the network in a collaborative manner. This approach ensured that planning was not only deliberative and data-rich, but also socially attuned—helping to integrate conservation priorities with economic realities and future blue economy opportunities and creating ownership by stakeholders.

The designation process was structured and inclusive, with multiple phases of consultation and clear policy alignment with the Azores' broader ocean governance frameworks across governments, facilitated through the Blue Azores programme which was created by a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019 between the Regional Government of the Azores, the Oceano Azul Foundation, and the Waitt Institute.[24] By embedding the MPA management strategy within existing sustainable ocean plans and committing to long-term monitoring and enforcement, the regional government ensured that protection would be effective, meaningful and lasting.

Another defining feature of the Azores approach was its commitment to engage communities beyond designation. Through community engagement and ocean literacy initiatives, marine citizen science programmes, the initiative actively involved local schools, tourism operators, and fishers in biodiversity monitoring.[25] These initiatives continue to serve not only to generate valuable ecological data but also to foster public understanding and ownership of marine protection. Community members are empowered to report observations, monitor restored fish stocks, and witness improvements to coastal resilience—contributing to a culture of stewardship that reinforces long-term success.

Now entering its second phase, the Azores is focusing on implementation: operationalising management plans, ensuring sustainable financing mechanisms are in place, and deploying effective monitoring and enforcement strategies and implementing a revision of coastal MPAs. These next steps will be crucial to ensuring that the designation translates into real-world impact for biodiversity, climate resilience, and community well-being.

MPAs in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction

In contrast to national waters, MPA designation in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) has a different set of conditions to consider. These areas—which include the high seas as well as the seabed, ocean floor and subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction,[26] hereafter referred to collectively as the "high seas"—fall outside of the control and responsibility of any one nation.

UNCLOS provides the foundation for marine conservation but does not include explicit procedures for MPA designation at the international level. As a result, to date, regional organisations have taken the lead in establishing high seas MPAs through regional agreements and existing international bodies, with the support of regional programmes and sectoral bodies.[27] However, while the high seas account for 61% of the ocean, only a small fraction is designated as an MPA. Just 1.5% of the high seas (0.9% of the global ocean) fall under MPA status through various regional bodies, and an even smaller portion is classified as fully or highly protected, according to MPAtlas.[28,29]

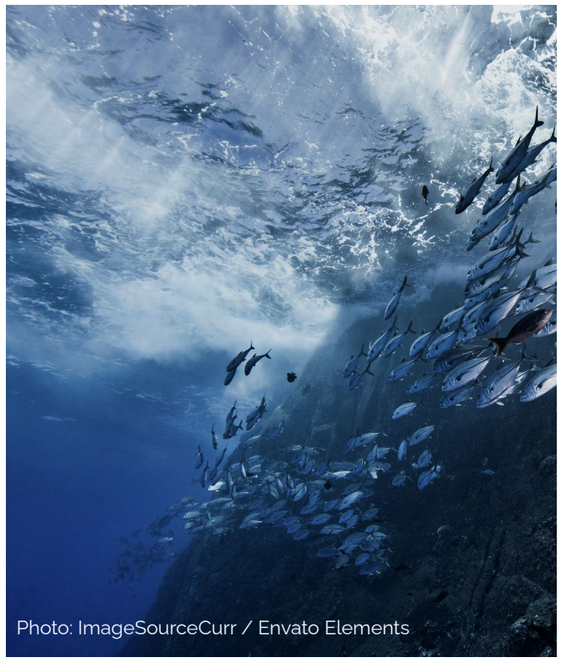


Photo: ImageSourceCurr / Envato Elements

Current High Seas MPAs

The Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) adopted the first MPA in ABNJ in 2009 around the South Orkney Islands in the Southern Ocean, followed in 2016 by the Ross Sea MPA, the largest yet.[30] Established by consensus among CCAMLR members, these MPAs were vital in demonstrating that international collaboration to establish high seas MPAs was possible, and they continue to serve as key tools for conserving high seas marine biodiversity while allowing for certain sustainable activities under strict regulation.[31] Multiple additional MPAs for the Southern Ocean have been proposed to CCAMLR in recent years, however, the MPA designation process has slowed primarily due to geopolitical tensions and politics, and to some extent by challenges integrating sustainable use and conservation goals.[32]

Outside the Southern Ocean, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention - so named due to the preceding Oslo and Paris Conventions) has facilitated the designation of high seas MPAs in the North-East Atlantic.[33] Since 2010, OSPAR has established 11 MPAs in ABNJ, with a very small portion of that considered to be fully or highly protected.[34] These areas are designated based on their ecological significance, such as the presence of vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems and migratory species. However, management measures within these MPAs depend on collaboration with relevant authorities. For instance, fisheries regulations fall under regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), such as the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), while shipping-related protections are put in place by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Without direct enforcement power, OSPAR relies on its member states to voluntarily implement any additional MPA conservation recommendations and advocate for protection within their respective jurisdictions. Importantly, several OSPAR MPAs have been criticised for inadequate protections, highlighting uncertainties regarding their potential to deliver positive conservation outcomes.[35]

Photo: Image-Source / Envato Elements

Hope on the Horizon: The BBNJ Agreement

A major breakthrough in ocean governance came with the adoption of the BBNJ Agreement in June 2023.[36] This implementing Agreement under UNCLOS establishes a formal global mechanism to create MPAs in ABNJ. Although it will not enter into force until 120 days after the 60th country deposits its instrument of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession, many countries are already beginning to align future MPA proposals with its provisions, signalling strong early momentum. Countries including Chile and Canada have emerged as early champions, launching the BBNJ First Movers initiative to accelerate the designation of the first generation of high seas MPAs under the agreement. Their leadership, along with support from countries such as Belgium, Costa Rica, France, the Republic of Korea, Nigeria, Palau, and the Philippines, has helped build critical momentum behind ratification and implementation of the Agreement.[37]

The BBNJ Agreement provides the opportunity to significantly advance high seas progress towards the 30x30 target and beyond if entry into force and implementation are secured soon, and if Parties to the Agreement commit to exploring the Agreement's provisions to their full potential. This will require consistent and coherent coordination with relevant institutions, frameworks, and bodies (IFBs) and a transparent and accessible Clearing-House Mechanism to facilitate conversations and data-sharing, supported by benefit-sharing, equitably formed treaty bodies, and stable financial mechanisms.

The BBNJ Agreement process for the establishment and implementation of MPAs will consist of several stages.[38] Proponents submit detailed proposals that include information on the ecological significance, vulnerability, and potential benefits of the area to be protected. These proposals are then evaluated by a Scientific and Technical Body against established criteria such as biodiversity importance, ecosystem services, and cultural or socioeconomic value. Following this scientific review, proposals are considered by the Conference of the Parties (COP), which aims to reach decisions by consensus, or, if necessary, by a qualified majority. Once designated, MPAs must be supported by management plans and monitoring frameworks, with periodic reviews to ensure their effectiveness. Throughout, the BBNJ process emphasises transparency, inclusivity, and respect for the rights and interests of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and developing states, ensuring that conservation efforts are both as equitable and robust as possible. MPA networks consisting of large-scale and small-scale areas will both be important to reaching the 30x30 target's aims of ensuring spatial coverage and well-connected, ecologically representative areas for marine biodiversity and ecosystem function protection.

Photo: Getty Images/IStockphoto

Beyond MPAs, the BBNJ Agreement fosters greater collaboration across international frameworks and institutions. It establishes vital provisions for capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology, making it more feasible for both developed and developing nations to actively participate in and benefit from ABNJ conservation. The Agreement also addresses benefit-sharing and introduces requirements for environmental impact assessments, laying the foundation for a more just and scientifically informed approach to managing ABNJ. Moving forward, the development of the first generation of MPAs under the BBNJ framework will be a critical step in achieving the 30x30 global target. It will also provide the opportunity to set a lasting precedent for high seas conservation that prioritises ecological connectivity, ecosystem representativeness, and transparent, participatory decision-making.

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

Marine OECMs provide an important complement to MPAs, offering alternative ways to achieve long-term biodiversity outcomes. Recognised under Target 3 of the GBF, OECMs can include areas such as community-managed fisheries, sacred coastal sites, or zones managed for ecosystem services or protected for military purposes, where conservation is achieved even if it is not the primary aim. To count toward 30x30, OECMs must demonstrably conserve biodiversity and manage or mitigate threats effectively. While the identification of OECMs is assessed case-by-case and remains context-dependent, OECMs can enhance ecological representativity and connectivity within marine protection networks—and both MPAs and OECMs can complement one another in achieving effective global ocean protection.[39]

Their identification can be supported by existing tools with respect to scientific evidence regarding valuable biodiversity attributes, such as, but not limited to, Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs), Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) and associated protection measures adopted by the IMO, and Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) conservation measures such as fisheries closures. When well-implemented, OECMs increase the inclusivity and flexibility of marine conservation in selected areas, playing an important role in achieving 30x30 (See more in OECMs 101).

An illustrative example of this scientific and governance integration is the recognition of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) closures as an OECM. In 2023, several NEAFC bottom fishing closures—originally established to protect VMEs in the high seas—were officially acknowledged as OECMs under CBD criteria.[40] This designation marked a significant milestone because for the first time, an RFMO's spatial measures were validated within this global biodiversity conservation framework. These closures, developed using robust scientific evidence and implemented through binding multilateral agreements, underscore how sectoral measures can yield genuine biodiversity outcomes when effectively managed and enforced. The NEAFC case also demonstrates the potential to bridge sectoral governance and biodiversity objectives in the high seas, providing a replicable model for scaling up marine protection globally through collaborative and science-based approaches.

Photo: AlexVog / Envato Elements

OECMs 101[41]

Progress towards 30x30 requires multiple tools to support a healthy ocean and thriving communities through biodiversity conservation. Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in the ocean are areas that by definition deliver effective in situ biodiversity conservation, even though their management objective may not primarily be conservation. Over the last few years, focus on OECMs, alongside marine protected areas (MPAs), has grown since they can deliver effective conservation outcomes for nature and people and contribute to global marine conservation targets such as Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). OECMs present opportunities to recognise effective conservation happening in diverse areas across the world with different conservation approaches. One such aspect is to recognise the governance and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), with their traditions, practices and innovations respected and their rights upheld. These systems have long sustained biodiversity and offered valuable models for effective, community-led conservation. Despite the benefits, there are concerns that OECMs can be misused when reporting and counting areas that are not effective for biodiversity conservation. Therefore, as with MPAs, focus on the "effectiveness" in OECMs as well as MPAs is paramount.

Globally, countries such as Indonesia are exploring the potential of OECMs to count towards conservation targets, and Canada has already reported marine OECMs to the World Database on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (WD-OECM), which account for 5.66% of Canada's total marine area conserved.[42] Yet compared to MPAs, global reporting of OECMs remains limited – at present reported OECMs are only 0.24% of the total area of the ocean as of May 2025.[43] Increased reporting of OECMs is expected before 2030, but concerns persist about quality of conservation and inclusivity of recognition and reporting processes. IPLCs' self-determination is integral when considering OECMs. In addition, securing and ensuring mechanisms to obtain continual free, prior, and informed consent from IPLCs to declare, recognise, or report an OECM remains a crucial issue.

Achieving those goals of high quality, transparent, and inclusive reporting requires clear and credible tools for recognising truly effective OECMs based on the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) OECM criteria contained in CBD Decision 14/8 (2018). To that end, an effort that aims to provide accessible, actionable, and evidence-based guidance to understand the likelihood of biodiversity conservation in candidate OECMs is underway with expertise and engagement from a diverse international group of 85 co-authors, led by scientists at Oregon State University. This collaboration will produce an "OECM Guide". The Guide will use science and Indigenous traditional and local knowledge to understand the impact of human activities in ocean areas and identify effective biodiversity conservation. These areas/measures are likely to contribute to Target 3 of the GBF as OECMs. The Guide is intended to be used alongside existing tools and guidance such as those developed by IUCN and FAO and complementing MPA tools like *The MPA Guide*.[44,45,46]

The promise of OECMs is considerable, but only if the areas counted are those that actually ensure continued protection of biodiversity and its benefits, and where applicable, recognise and respect the rights of IPLCs. Areas of the ocean where destructive and harmful extractive activities are prevented and activities that support biodiversity are fostered are key for accelerating meaningful action for conserving our ocean heritage.

SCALING UP PROTECTION: PROMISING AREAS CONSIDERED FOR PROTECTION

Photo: Getty Images / iStockphoto

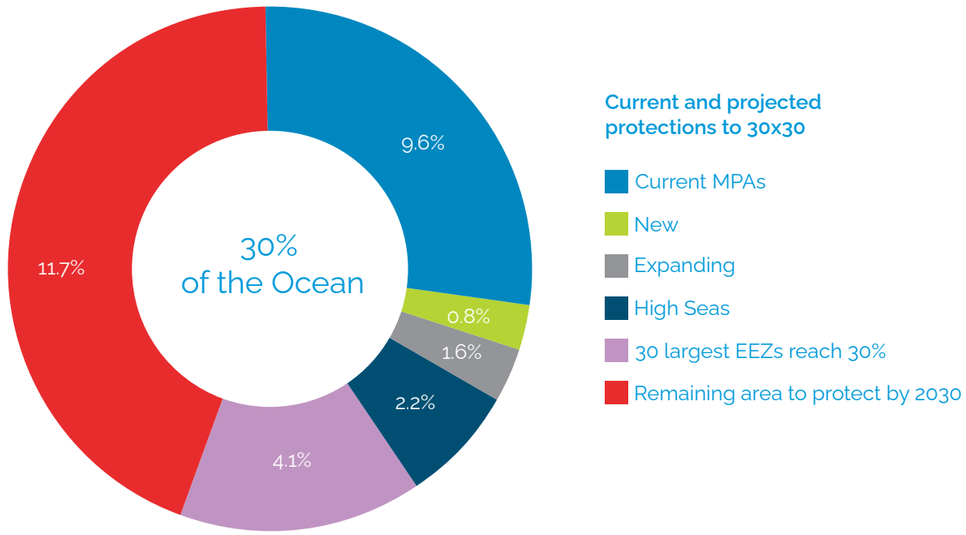
To align efforts and gather momentum to accelerate our progress towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Target 3, this report assesses 25 large areas (over 100,000 km²) that have been discussed as potential areas for future protection (see Appendix 1).

Whilst there are a multitude of smaller areas and sites being considered for protection, compiling all those efforts that are currently underway, and discussing each with the relevant stakeholders, was beyond the timeline and scope of the current report. The exclusion of smaller areas from this report, however, does not lessen their value in protecting marine ecosystems and providing benefits to people, nor their contribution in the push towards 30x30 and beyond. Additionally, this report does not propose a comprehensive list, nor does it posit that these areas will ultimately be designated as marine protected areas (MPAs) or other area-based management tools (ABMTs) in the future or at what level of protection. For a full description of methodologies and limitations, please see Appendix 2.

The assessment of areas herein indicates that if they were realised, ocean protection would increase by 4.7%, bringing total global ocean protection from 9.6% to 14.3%. These areas can be categorised into those that are new, those that are expansions of current protections, and those that are protection efforts in the high seas under regional bodies and the UN Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

New MPAs: Extending Global Coverage

If the new large MPAs under potential consideration are realised, there would be an increase in current ocean protection by approximately 0.8%.[47] Beyond these specific opportunities, broader national action could unlock even greater gains. For example, if the 30 countries[48] with the largest exclusive economic zones (EEZs) that have not yet established protection for at least 30% of their waters increased their protection to 30% within their EEZ, ocean protection would increase by approximately 4.1%.[49] Whether this is achieved through a coherent network of community-led and managed smaller protected areas, a large-scale protected area that protects huge swathes of ocean, or a combination of both, coastal countries have an essential role to play in achieving the objectives of the 30x30 target. Outlined below are just a few examples from Appendix 1 of the potential role maritime countries can play in advancing marine protection.



Case Study 2.

Canada's Portfolio of Incoming MPAs: Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans | New and Expanding | 340,845 km²

Canada's portfolio of new and expanding marine protected areas (MPAs)—collectively spanning 340,845 km² across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans—demonstrates how inclusive, climate-smart marine protection can drive national progress toward the 30x30 target while delivering global impact. Guided by a clear commitment to protect 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030 and a Federal MPA Strategy, Canada is working in close partnership with Indigenous Peoples, regional governments, and local communities to co-develop ecologically representative and well-connected MPA networks.[50,51] Key initiatives, such as the Mushkegowuk Council-led proposals in James and Hudson Bays and the Great Bear Sea network in British Columbia, exemplify co-governance models that blend scientific research with Indigenous knowledge and stewardship.[52,53,54] These MPAs are designed to protect vital ecosystems, enable species migration, enhance blue carbon storage, and build resilience to climate impacts like ocean warming and acidification. Importantly, Canada's approach reflects the values of procedural justice and equitable conservation, offering a replicable model for other countries on how a network of smaller community-based and locally managed MPAs is just as essential as larger-scale MPAs, particularly when progress is tracked and reported in an accessible manner at the national level. If realised, this suite of MPAs would significantly boost global ocean protection coverage and highlight the power of inclusive, knowledge-driven conservation in achieving the ambitions of 30x30.

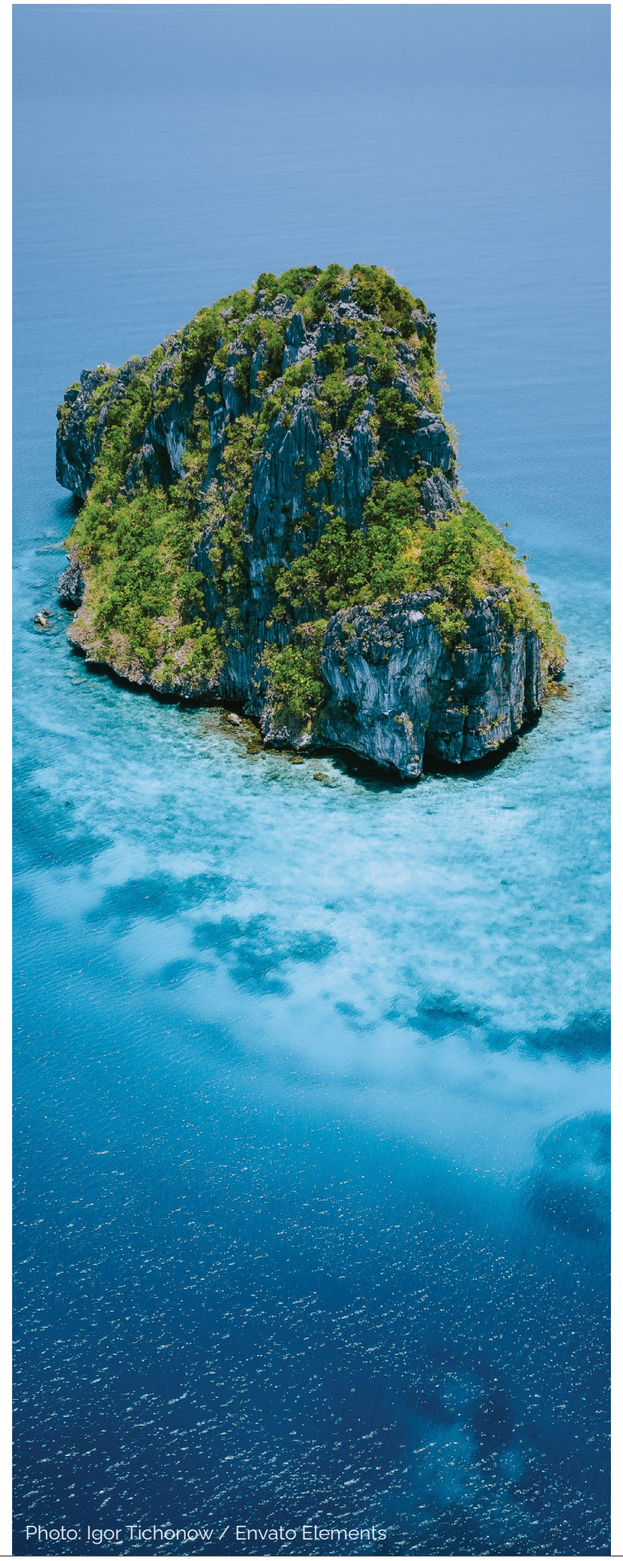


Photo: Igor Tichonow / Envato Elements

Expanding on Existing MPAs: Building on Established Foundations

Expanding existing MPAs is another critical strategy for accelerating progress toward the 30x30 target. Many current MPAs have been designated with limited boundaries due to political, logistical, or resource constraints, and may not fully encompass the ecological processes, habitats, or species they aim to protect. Additionally, as scientific and traditional knowledge bases are integrated and bolstered, new understanding of ecosystem processes and anthropogenic impacts can reveal that additional protection is necessary.

By enlarging these areas, conservation efforts can better account for ecosystem connectivity, species' migratory routes, and climate-driven shifts in marine biodiversity. Expansion also offers an opportunity to strengthen the level of protection within MPAs through expanding measures and around MPAs through buffer zones, reduce edge effects, and improve the overall resilience of marine ecosystems. Moreover, building on established governance structures and stakeholder relationships can allow for more efficient scaling of conservation outcomes when done equitably and transparently, fostering continuity and long-term impact. In this way, MPA expansion is both a pragmatic and powerful means of closing the ocean protection gap while enhancing ecological effectiveness and social legitimacy.

The assessment of planned protection within this report, which includes areas where the expansion itself is approximately 100,000 km² or higher, indicates that these potential large-scale expansions would increase ocean protection by 1.6%.[55]

Case Study 3.

Benguela Current MPA South Atlantic Ocean | Expansion | 148,000 km²

The potential expansion of the Benguela Current marine protected area (MPA) network—from 238,000 km² to 386,000 km²—offers a powerful example of how regional cooperation can drive progress towards the 30x30 target.[56] Anchored in the legally binding Benguela Current Convention (BCC), Angola, Namibia, and South Africa are working together to protect one of the world's most productive and biodiverse eastern boundary upwelling systems.[57] This transboundary initiative is guided by science-based ecosystem management and marine spatial planning, focusing on enhanced ecological representativity, particularly for shared fish stocks and migratory routes. Central to the process is the meaningful inclusion of artisanal fishers and coastal communities, ensuring that conservation outcomes are equitable and support livelihoods in ocean-dependent economies.[58] The collaborative model strengthens regional governance, with coordinated monitoring, enforcement, and stakeholder engagement. If realised, this expansion will not only boost spatial protection but also showcase how integrated, community-inclusive, and ecologically grounded action can contribute significantly to closing the ocean protection gap and achieving global 30x30 ambitions.

MPAs in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction: Anticipating Global Opportunities

MPAs in the high seas created both under regional conventions and under the BBNJ Agreement hold immense potential to advance the global 30x30 target. Historically under-protected, these vast ocean spaces, which make up 61% of the global ocean, contain critical ecosystems that support biodiversity, climate resilience, and global fisheries. As it stands, the high seas areas currently under potential consideration if realised, would increase current ocean protection by approximately 2.2%. However, this is by no means the full potential that the high seas can contribute to accelerating meaningful marine biodiversity conservation and ecosystem protection.

An important point to highlight regarding areas beyond national jurisdiction is that, while proposals that could deliver meaningful protection in the near future are being actively explored, the immediate focus must recognise current limitations. The BBNJ Agreement, which provides the long-awaited legal mechanism to establish high seas MPAs, will only enter into force 120 days following ratification by 60 UN member states. This means countries cannot yet fully operationalise the protection of these areas under this framework. Nevertheless, the potential is immense – it represents a pivotal opportunity to close this governance gap and unlock large-scale protection in the global ocean. At the same time, broader shifts in the global economic landscape—such as ongoing reforms to harmful fisheries subsidies—may further reduce the viability of fishing in certain high seas areas.

By enabling the designation of ecologically significant, well-connected, and effectively managed MPAs in the high seas, the BBNJ Agreement can help fill the protection gap. Now is the time to lay the groundwork—advancing preparatory efforts, building the scientific underpinning required to identify important areas and envision ABMT design, establishing conversation pathways between existing bodies, fostering international and regional collaboration, and accelerating the ratification process—so countries are ready to act decisively the moment the Agreement becomes operational. The examples highlighted below showcase two sets of MPAs – one under the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and the other through the BBNJ Agreement – that have the potential to inspire progress for marine protection in the high seas.

Photo: TravelSync27 / Envato Elements

Case Study 4.

Southern Ocean MPAs under CCAMLR[59] Antarctica | Southern Ocean | High Seas | 4,598,245 km²

The set of proposed marine protected areas (MPAs) under the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) represents one of the most ambitious opportunities to contribute to the global 30x30 target.[60] Spanning across the Southern Ocean, the Domain 1 MPA (670,000 km²), Weddell Sea MPA Phase 1 (2,238,245 km²), Weddell Sea MPA Phase 2 (720,000 km²), and the East Antarctic MPA (970,000 km²) would collectively deliver a significant boost of 4,598,245 km² to protection in the region. These proposals build on CCAMLR's pioneering role in establishing MPAs in the high seas, including the Ross Sea Region MPA—the world's largest when adopted in 2016. Situated within a globally significant ecosystem, these MPAs aim to protect critical migratory routes, climate refugia, and ecological connectivity across the Southern Ocean. As CCAMLR already has the ability to designate MPAs within its Convention boundaries, it can offer a tested model for future high seas conservation under the UN Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), demonstrating how science-based design, long-term monitoring, and adaptive management can be achieved through regional cooperation. While progress has been slowed by geopolitical challenges within CCAMLR's consensus-based governance, the successful adoption of these MPAs would mark a transformative step toward closing the ocean protection gap in the high seas and underscore the importance of multilateral action in delivering the 30x30 target.[61]

Case Study 5.

Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges Southeast Pacific Ocean | High Seas | 1,097,846 km²

The proposed marine protected area (MPA) for the Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges in the southeast Pacific—potentially covering an area up to 1,097,846 km²—has the opportunity to become one of the world's most significant high seas MPAs and a leading example of what is possible under the UN Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). With efforts led by Chile, and strong backing from regional scientific and policy partners, the initiative targets two connected seamount chains that are among the most ecologically intact and biodiverse deep-sea ecosystems on the planet.[62,63] These underwater habitats support unique species, migratory sharks, whales, and seabirds, while playing a vital role in global ocean health through carbon cycling and deep-sea ecosystem functions.[64] By extending protections from Chile's existing no-take MPAs – such as the Mar de Juan Fernández Marine Park, the Nazca-Desventuradas Marine Park, and the Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park – into the high seas, this proposal exemplifies how international cooperation and science-driven conservation can converge to safeguard biodiversity in one of the least governed ocean regions.[65] Additionally, by organising the scientific underpinning and establishing communication pathways with the relevant regional bodies and stakeholders in the way the BBNJ Agreement outlines, Chile is providing an example of preparatory governance to accelerate the Agreement's implementation once it enters into force. If designated, the Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges MPA would not only fill a critical gap in global marine protection coverage but also serve as a high-impact model for climate-resilient, well-connected high seas conservation under the 30x30 target.[66]

CHALLENGES ON THE PATH TO 30X30

Photo: Getty Images / iStockphoto

The global pledge to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 represents a powerful ambition—but translating that ambition into effective protection remains a major challenge.

Progress is held back by a set of deeply interconnected barriers, ranging from entrenched economic systems to governance gaps, underfunding, and weak accountability. At the root of the problem are structural drivers: global production and market systems that continue to prioritise extraction, minimise safeguards, and incentivise short-term profits. These systems shape marine policy and finance in ways that often undermine conservation, while subsidies and trade policies skew priorities away from long-term sustainability.

As a result, protections on paper frequently fail to deliver in practice. Many marine protected areas (MPAs) still permit destructive activities such as industrial fishing or oil and gas extraction, and in some cases, blanket restrictions are applied without assessing the specific biodiversity values or threats of a given site. This erodes both ecological effectiveness and social legitimacy, particularly where local knowledge and customary use rights are ignored. This highlights another persistent challenge in which Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), and small-scale fishers are frequently excluded from MPA planning and management, despite being key knowledge holders and custodians of marine ecosystems. This undermines trust and weakens compliance, while also missing valuable opportunities for co-management and innovation.

Many MPAs are self-reported without verification of protection levels or enforcement, making it difficult to distinguish between real progress and symbolic declarations. If 30x30 is to succeed, these systemic barriers must be addressed collectively—with urgency, transparency, and a commitment to equitable implementation. This, however, will rely on rectifying the persistent problem of sustainable finance. At present, an estimated $1.2 billion is spent annually on ocean protection and conservation — just a fraction of the $15.8 billion per year needed to meet the 30x30 global target. Moreover, the funding that is available is often short-term, project-based, or difficult to access.[67]

Many countries with rich marine biodiversity lack the stable, long-term funding needed to plan, manage, and enforce effective protections. Small island developing states, which govern vast marine areas, often operate with minimal resources. Without sustained financial support—especially for monitoring, enforcement, and locally led initiatives—protections risk being poorly designed or impossible to maintain. Governance gaps further compound these issues. MPA implementation is often slowed by unclear mandates, fragmented institutional responsibilities, and limited political will. Delays between political announcements and actual protection are common, and many MPAs under consideration remain stuck in planning stages.

Overcoming these challenges will not be easy—but the solutions are within reach. Confronting the root causes of ineffective ocean protection, closing implementation gaps, and leveraging new momentum—through opportunities like the UN Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)—will require coordinated, multi-level action. The Action Plan that follows is designed to help navigate these barriers by providing a practical guide for governments and stakeholders to turn commitment into credible and lasting protection. It identifies the enabling conditions, partnerships, and targeted interventions needed to deliver meaningful progress toward the 30x30 target.

ACTION PLAN FOR 30X30

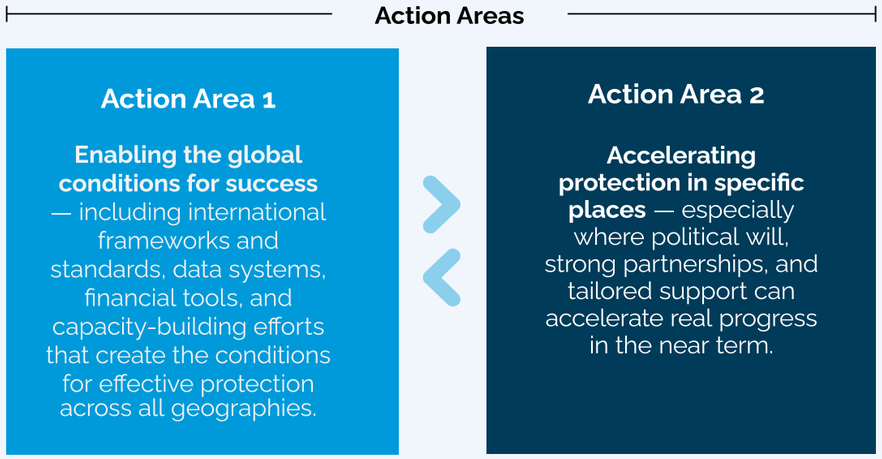
Whilst the challenges are many, there is a clear path that involves key actions to drive 30x30 progress. With only 9.6% of the ocean currently designated as MPAs—and just 2.9% fully or highly protected—the gap to 30% remains wide.

Even if the large MPAs that are currently under consideration and noted in this report are realised, total protection would rise from 9.6% to just 14.3%, leaving significant work still to be done. Achieving the global 30x30 ocean target will therefore require both strengthening the global systems that underpin ocean protection everywhere and accelerating progress in the places where protection is necessary and truly ready. To enable this, the actions identified below are presented under two distinct but complementary Action Areas to guide governments and other relevant stakeholders toward effective, equitable, and evidence-based marine protection.

Photo: Getty Images / iStockphoto

The Action Areas

The actions outlined in this plan are not presented in order of priority, nor are they meant to be pursued in isolation. Many are interdependent and mutually reinforcing—progress in one area can unlock or accelerate action in others. Together, they form a resource for governments to action effective and equitable marine protection by 2030.



This Action Plan does not aim to create new mechanisms or prescribe fixed solutions. Rather, it serves as a unifying call to align ongoing efforts, illuminate the enablers already within reach, and encourage the collective resolve needed to turn ambition into tangible action. While the actions are directed primarily at governments—especially those agencies and ministries leading ocean, environment, planning, and cross-sector coordination efforts—as well as international delegates and focal points who can carry these priorities into domestic policy spaces, success will depend on collaboration across all levels of society—including Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), civil society, science institutions, and the private sector. Their ability to connect multilateral commitments with national strategies and stakeholders will be vital to delivering on 30x30.

The following actions represent proven or high-potential pathways to advance 30x30 but they are not exhaustive and their implementation will vary by national and regional context. Each country or jurisdiction should assess where they can have the greatest impact—whether by advancing large-scale protected areas, strengthening governance systems, or supporting community-led efforts. This Action Plan can therefore be utilised as an additional tool to support context-specific strategies while encouraging innovation and support progress from all governments, wherever enabling conditions exist.

Action Area 1
Enabling The Global Conditions For Success

Photo: Image-Source / Envato Elements

Ratify the BBNJ Agreement and establish ABNJ MPAs

- Commit to ratifying the UN Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) by 2026 and take proactive steps upon its entry into force. This includes aligning national and regional frameworks with BBNJ processes, engaging actively in the establishment and operationalisation of its institutional bodies and tools, and prioritising the development of a strong scientific evidence base to inform marine protected area (MPA) proposals in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), including ecologically representative and well-connected MPA networks.
- Governments should formalise their contributions to further protections in the high seas by integrating their national strategies for BBNJ-related efforts into their National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions Plans (NBSAPs), Sustainable Ocean Plans (SOPs), and other domestic ocean policy instruments. These strategies should make clear how potential area-based management tools (ABMTs), including MPAs, in the high seas will complement—not replace—commitments made for their exclusive economic zones (EEZs).
- Designate a lead Ministry or agency and develop a national implementation framework that operationalises the provisions of the Agreement at a national level and includes legal and institutional review, inter-ministerial coordination, and structured engagement with IPLCs to ensure accountability, inclusive governance, effective marine protection implementation, knowledge co-production, and equitable benefit-sharing in high seas conservation.
- Establish formal coordination channels with regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and relevant regional seas conventions to align BBNJ implementation with sectoral mandates, prevent duplication, and strengthen integrated governance in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- Begin cross-sectoral scientific, technical, and diplomatic work to identify and prepare proposals for high seas MPAs under the BBNJ Agreement. This includes mapping ecologically important areas, aligning with regional governance bodies, engaging Indigenous and local knowledge systems, and forming country coalitions to champion early designation efforts once the BBNJ Agreement enters into force. Scientific planning should also account for ecological connectivity—such as larval dispersal, migratory routes, and habitat linkages, and climate-smart and dynamic area-based management approaches.
- This will ensure that high seas MPAs will function as adaptive, interconnected networks that reflect shifting species distributions and oceanographic changes, rather than status or outdated stationary sites that may lose relevance as conditions evolve. The Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) already identified in the ABNJ and reported to the CBD, should form a basis for targeting priority areas for conservation.
- Engage with enabling initiatives such as the High Seas MPA Accelerator, which supports collaboration and fast-tracks the development of proposals for a connected, high-quality, and well-managed network of high seas MPAs. This includes identifying opportunities for RFMOs to support area-based management objectives, co-develop criteria for spatial protection within fishery zones, and contribute data to the future BBNJ Clearing-House Mechanism.

Contribute actively to international and regional coalitions

- Establish clear, accessible regional maps of the growing ecosystem of multilateral alliances, scientific and technical partnerships, and financing platforms that are designed to support governments with the tools, data, knowledge, and capital needed to accelerate marine protection. This ecosystem includes initiatives offering cutting-edge scientific guidance, ecological assessments, and decision-support tools that are critical to informed and effective conservation. However, many of these resources remain underutilised or disconnected from national planning processes. Unlocking their full potential—especially the scientific and technical assets—is essential to support countries in delivering meaningful, equitable contributions to the global 30x30 target, aligned with their national context, ecological priorities, and capacity. Ensuring these tools are accessible and integrated into domestic planning will be key to maximising each country's role in advancing collective progress toward Target 3.
- Contribute actively to international coalitions and multilateral initiatives driving 30x30 outcomes—such as the Global Ocean Alliance, High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, High Seas Alliance, Blue Action Fund, UNEP Regional Seas Programme, and the Global Fund for Coral Reefs—by sharing national progress, aligning with global targets, and using open-access tracking platforms and independent verification tools to foster transparency, accountability, and peer alignment across countries and global initiatives.
- Recognise and engage with Indigenous- and community-led conservation networks—such as the ICCA Consortium, LMMA Network, and regional IPLC alliances—which play a critical role in delivering locally grounded, culturally appropriate marine protection that complements national and international efforts.
- Strengthen collaboration with RFMOs to align spatial conservation goals with fisheries policies, including through observer programs, data transparency, and the adoption of ecosystem-based approaches with a view to achieve 100% sustainable management of the global ocean.

Embed IPLC leadership and governance systems in 30x30 delivery

- Embed Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as rights-holders and governance leaders in the delivery of 30x30 by aligning national ocean strategies with customary governance systems and co-management models. Support legal, cultural, and institutional frameworks that uphold IPLC authority over marine areas under their stewardship, including pathways to formally recognise customary tenure and community-conserved areas.
- Establish permanent national and regional platforms for IPLC engagement in decision-making on development and conservation planning—drawing inspiration from the newly established IPLC Permanent Body under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). These platforms should provide direct, long-term funding to IPLC organisations to enable locally defined priorities, knowledge systems, and implementation approaches to shape national and global marine protection outcomes.[68] They should also support effective site-level governance by co-designing MPAs and OECMs with rights-holders, establishing joint management bodies, and ensuring equitable benefit-sharing.

Secure long-term, equitable financing

- By the CBD's 17th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP), report progress towards establishing and capitalizing permanent national and regional ocean conservation funds with clear legal mandates, transparent governance, and alignment to national climate, biodiversity, and biodiversity-inclusive blue economy strategies. This should explicitly aim to reduce overreliance on limited public budgets by mobilising blended and innovative finance as the backbone of long-term MPA and OECM funding by 2030 and beyond. These funds should unlock additional capital through environmental levies, and global instruments (e.g. GEF, GCF blue bonds, debt swaps, sovereign wealth funds), while securing dedicated and flexible funding windows to support IPLC-led protection and co-management.
- Embed de-risking mechanisms—such as first-loss capital, guarantees, and insurance—to reduce barriers for private investment, while ensuring these approaches uphold principles of equity and public benefit, and do not shift disproportionate risk or cost to the public sector or vulnerable communities. These should support the development of innovative models like conservation-linked bonds and results-based finance that align capital flows with long-term ocean protection and resilience.

Make ocean data public, trusted, useful, and policy-relevant

- Make ocean data public, trusted, useful, and policy-relevant by supporting systematic and interoperable data collection, ensuring transparent curation and open access to spatial, ecological, and management data—including relevant private sector data—through global platforms (e.g. WDPA, WD-OECM, OBIS, BBNJ Clearing-House Mechanism, Global Fishing Watch, MPAtlas), and investing in tools, standards, and institutional capacity that enable decision-makers across countries to translate data into actionable insights for marine planning, science-informed design, protection, adaptability, enforcement, and surveillance.
- For example, the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas could be used as a tool to support the effective implementation of Target 3, recognising and encouraging high-quality management, equitable governance, and measurable conservation outcomes.[69]
- Care must be taken to establish verifiable and transparent quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) protocols for data collection, curation, and analysis.
- Strengthen global and regional data systems that support high seas protection, including interoperable clearinghouse mechanisms, open-access science platforms, and national readiness to engage in BBNJ-related data sharing and decision processes.
- Governments should invest in innovative data partnerships and technologies, AI-driven mapping tools, and automated reporting systems that make ocean data more dynamic, timely, and actionable for decision-making, compliance, and enforcement. This includes prioritising innovation in monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems—such as satellite analytics, AI-powered alert systems, community-based technologies, and digital platforms—that enhance cost-effective monitoring, control, and surveillance, particularly for small island developing states.

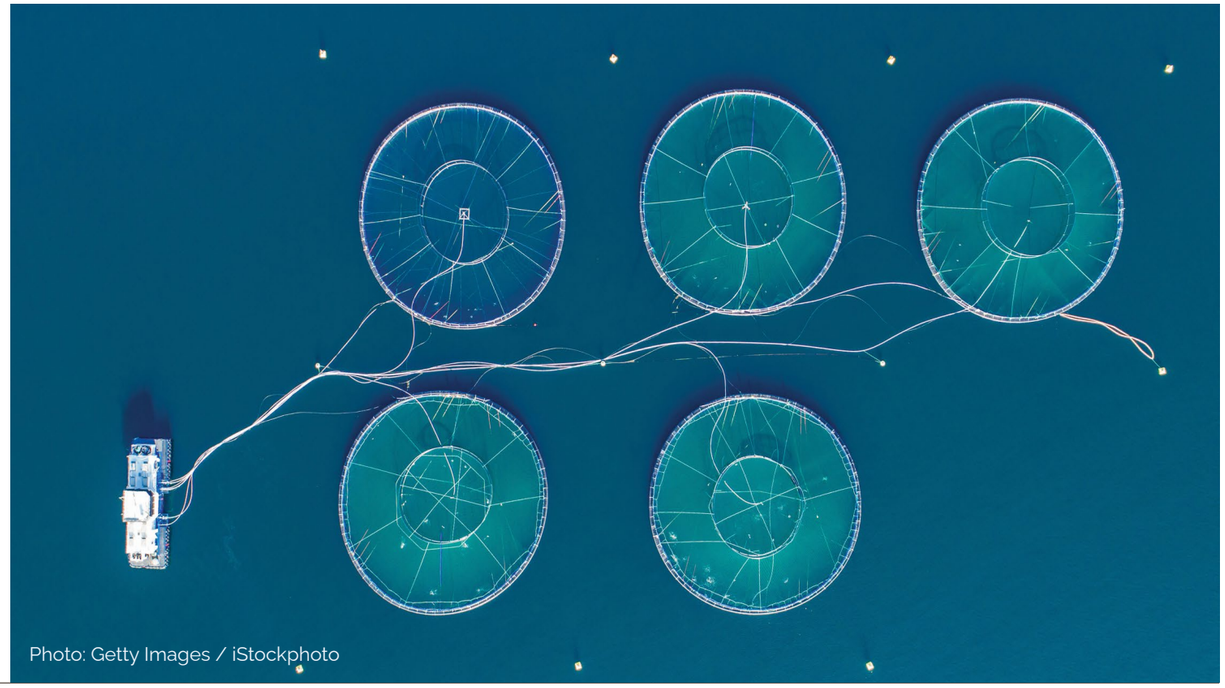


Photo: Getty Images / iStockphoto

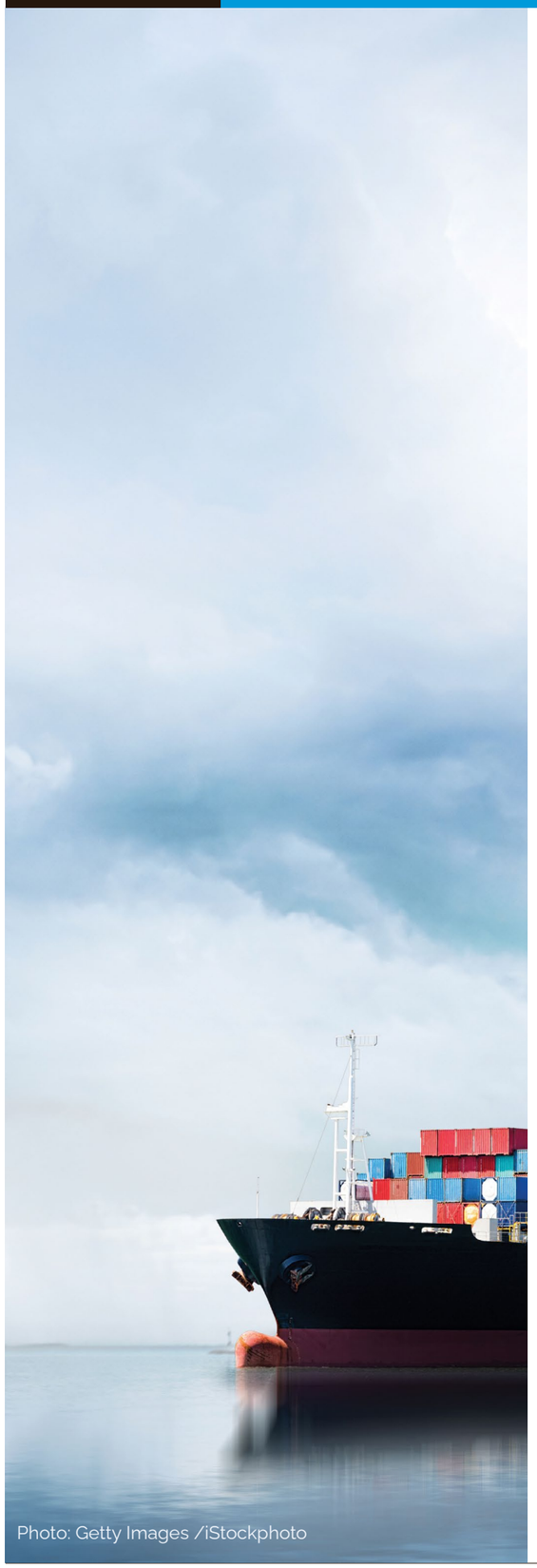


Photo: Getty Images /iStockphoto

Engage and align the private sector

- Establish regulatory and market-based incentives—such as tax benefits, certification schemes, and public procurement rules—that reward private sector actors, including those in fisheries, shipping, tourism, subsea cables, and marine infrastructure, for aligning their operations with the 30x30 target and contributing to measurable marine protection outcomes. These incentives should also stimulate private sector investment in MCS systems – such as satellite surveillance, vessel tracking, and compliance-monitoring tools – that enhance enforcement and transparency.
- Beyond financial levers, foster deeper private sector engagement by embedding ocean literacy, stewardship values, and shared responsibility into public-private partnerships. Encourage businesses not only to reduce their marine footprints but also to co-create conservation strategies that reflect the broader ecological, cultural, and economic value of the ocean.
- Require large marine-impacting companies to disclose their spatial footprint, biodiversity impacts, and marine conservation contributions through recognised frameworks (e.g. the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), the EU Directive on corporate sustainability reporting (CSRD), Ocean Disclosure Initiative). Disclosures should be grounded in robust, science-based indicators. Voluntary investments in Marine Prosperity Areas and restoration-linked MPAs should be encouraged, with a focus on long-term impact and collaborative governance, not just short-term reputational gain.

Strengthen public support, ocean literacy and youth leadership

- Launch coordinated local, national, regional and global campaigns that highlight the social, economic, and ecological benefits of MPAs and the 30x30 goal, using trusted messengers—including community leaders, scientists, youth, and Indigenous voices—and deploy targeted strategies to counter misinformation and depoliticise marine protection through transparent, science-based storytelling and inclusive engagement.
- Establish formal youth advisory roles within marine governance structures and invest in long-term leadership, training, and advocacy programs—prioritising Indigenous, coastal, and underserved youth—to ensure they are institutionally represented, empowered to lead decision-making processes, and equipped with the skills to shape local to global 30x30 delivery.

Photo: Wirestock / Envato Elements

Action Area 2
Accelerating Protection in Key Geographies

Photo: Delightfull / Envato Elements

Mobilise political leadership and embed 30x30 in national frameworks

- Mobilise high-level national leadership by establishing government-endorsed inter-ministerial bodies, with formally appointed 30x30 focal points. These bodies should be empowered to coordinate 30x30 implementation and align it with broader national planning and GBF targets and facilitate cross-sector coordination – including resolving potential conflicting interests and political tensions (i.e. fisheries, offshore energy and aquaculture, etc). National ambitions should reflect each country's context, capacity, and ecological priorities, while still contributing meaningfully to the global 30x30 goal.
- Establish a national 30x30 collaboration platform co-convened by government, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), civil society, private sector, and academia to align interests, identify barriers and opportunities, and track progress through inclusive dialogue and regional coordination.
- As part of this, embed legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders, uphold customary marine tenure, and—where appropriate—extend recognition to local communities with longstanding stewardship roles, based on national contexts, customary practices, and participatory processes.
- Adopt legally binding marine protection standards with clear pathways for MPA and OECM designation, enforcement, and adaptive management. Integrate 30x30 into NBSAPs, NDCs, Sustainable Development Plans, and Sustainable Ocean Plans to ensure coordination and financing.
- Develop national 30x30 roadmaps outlining site pipelines and implementation steps grounded in science, law, participation, and finance, and incorporate these into NBSAPs by CBD COP17 in 2026.
- Reform marine governance frameworks to distinguish community-led ocean uses from industrial and extractive sectors. Promote the principle of 100% ocean management—ensuring all marine areas are covered by planning or regulation rooted in ecosystem-based management. These plans should include at least 30% fully or highly protected zones to safeguard marine natural capital and support a thriving blue economy.

Accelerate the designation of MPAs and identification of OECMs

- Fast-track the designation of MPAs and the identification of OECMs already in planning or consultation by assigning a lead authority, securing funding, finalising management and governance plans, conducting stakeholder validation, and setting a fixed legal timeline—while integrating monitoring and evaluation systems into the design phase using internationally recognised criteria, so that designated sites meet reporting standards (e.g. CBD Decision 14/8 (2018) Annex III criteria, WDPA, WD-OECM database, MPAtlas, IUCN Green List) and deliver measurable conservation outcomes from the outset.
- As part of governance planning, institutionalise participatory governance through permanent national and site-level platforms that embed diverse voices—particularly those of women, youth, and marginalised coastal stakeholders—into the ongoing planning, implementation, and adaptive management of designated areas. A key aspect of this is ensuring that community-led and locally- managed marine protection efforts are actively engaged and have clear and accessible ways of reporting conservation outcomes to the relevant national-level body, so that these efforts can be reported by countries and recognised at a global level.
- Integrate both scientific and Indigenous knowledge systems from the outset in site design, governance, and management planning and throughout the life cycle of the MPA or OECM, including during periodic evaluation and adaptive management. All designated sites should include a defined schedule for periodic review, drawing on monitoring and evaluation data to inform adaptive management and continuous improvement.
- For designation in the high seas, governments should leverage scientific and technical support and coordination platforms—such as the High Seas MPA Accelerator—to collaboratively develop high-quality MPA proposals under the BBNJ Agreement.

Strengthen national institutions to gather, interpret and apply ocean data

- Ensure systematic collection and transparent curation of pre- and post-designation/identification concerning ecological, social, and enforcement data for MPAs and OECMs, and embed this information into national and other relevant data systems to inform planning, management, and evaluation. Strengthen institutional capacity to curate, interpret and apply data through decision-support tools, scenario modelling, and training, enabling adaptive, climate-smart management and science-based, participatory policymaking.
- Ensure that community-led efforts, including Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), are meaningfully included in data systems and reporting frameworks, so their contributions can inform national and international tracking of 30x30 progress.
- Build national capacity to contribute to global recording platforms (e.g. WDPA, WD-OECM, MPAtlas) and engage in high seas data processes under the BBNJ Agreement, including participation in clearinghouse mechanisms and ABNJ planning. Governments should also adopt emerging technologies—such as AI-powered analysis, sensor networks, and digital dashboards—to streamline reporting and generate real-time, actionable insights.

Strengthen transparent monitoring, control & surveillance (MCS)

- Invest in national monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) capacity by equipping marine agencies and community enforcement teams with patrol vessels, satellite tools, electronic monitoring systems, and sustained operational support. Develop regional resource-sharing agreements (e.g. joint patrols, shared intelligence systems) to boost cost-effective enforcement and close protection gaps—particularly in developing states and remote geographies. Prioritise innovative solutions such as low-cost satellite tracking, automated alert systems, community-deployed technologies, and shared digital platforms to expand surveillance reach and improve efficiency in resource-constrained settings.
- Ensure that all MPAs are implemented in line with their stated level of protection—especially promoting those designated as fully or highly protected. This requires governments to put in place the core systems needed to deliver protection from the start: baseline ecological and socio-economic assessments, operational management structures, adequate staffing and resources, and clear enforcement responsibilities.
- Legal frameworks must be reviewed and updated to ensure that penalties for infractions—such as fines or license suspensions—are consistently applied, proportionate to the offence, and publicly communicated. Regular, transparent reviews of implementation progress should be used to verify that MPAs are delivering ecological and social outcomes. Only through effective implementation and enforcement can MPAs contribute meaningfully to national and global targets.

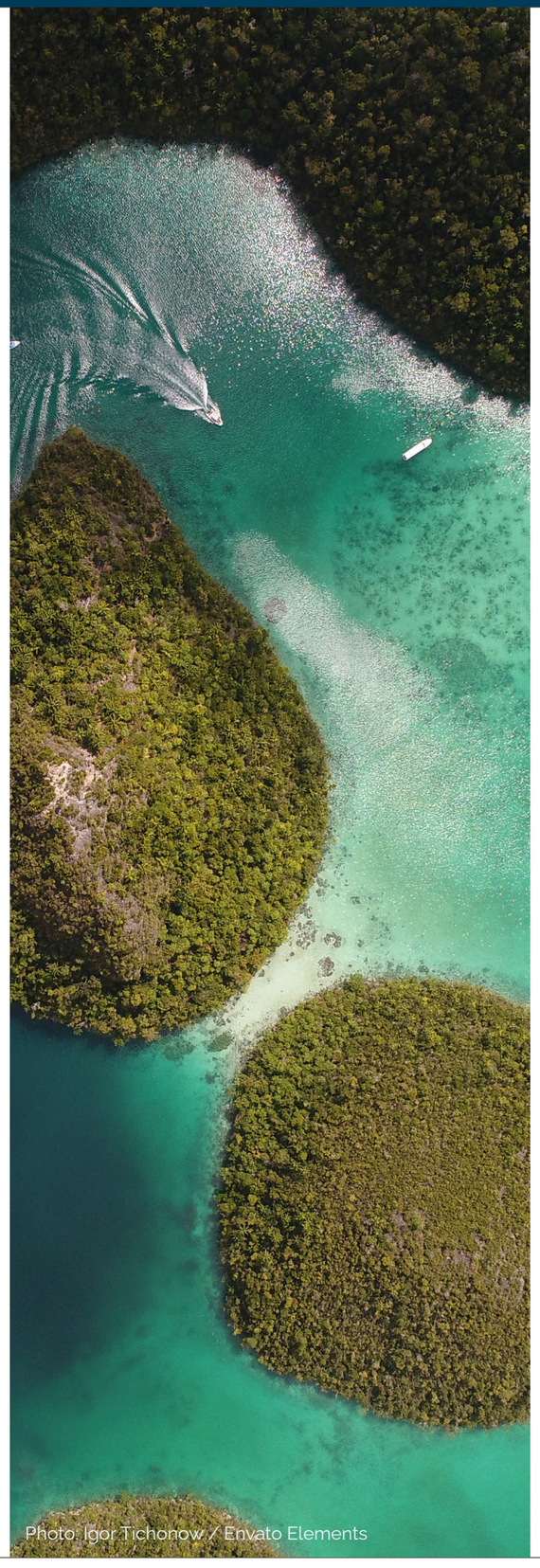


Photo: Igor Tichonow / Envato Elements

Support deployment of sustainable financing at national and site levels

- Establish dedicated national task forces or working groups—co-led by Ministries of Finance and Environment (or their equivalents)—to lead the development and coordination of a national MPA and OECM financing strategy. This team should identify financing gaps, mobilise resources, engage private and philanthropic partners, and ensure alignment with national biodiversity, climate, and blue economy priorities.
- Deploy long-term, fit-for-purpose financing at national and site levels to accelerate MPA and OECM designation and management—prioritising pipeline sites, Indigenous- and locally-led areas, and transboundary efforts—by channelling resources from national budgets, regional funds, and global instruments into co-management agreements, operational costs, and community benefit-sharing mechanisms that ensure financial sustainability and local ownership of protection outcomes.
- Incentivise co-investment by using de-risking tools such as credit guarantees, blended finance structures, and insurance-backed financing to reduce perceived financial risks and encourage private and philanthropic capital to flow into MPA operations, infrastructure, and long-term management. Reinforce blended finance as a strategic mechanism to reduce overreliance on limited public budgets—by combining concessional, philanthropic, and commercial funding sources in structured, outcome-linked financing models that support long-term marine protection delivery.
- Ensure that MPA management plans include costed business plans that identify long-term financial needs, align investment priorities with protection goals, and enhance implementation transparency and accountability.

A CRITICAL WINDOW FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

The next five years represent a decisive window to put the 30x30 ocean target within reach.

While the world is clearly not there yet, momentum is building—and the progress highlighted in this report represents just a portion of the global efforts already underway. Many other important initiatives, from locally led conservation to regional and sectoral reforms, are advancing alongside those profiled here. If we sustain this collective ambition, continue to value ocean protection, and act decisively to realise its many benefits, we can still achieve—or come close to achieving—the 30x30 goal. The pathway is clear, and the tools exist. By working together—effectively, inclusively, and at pace—momentum can be translated into lasting conservation outcomes. Acting now is not just strategic—it is essential to ensure the ocean remains a source of life, resilience, and opportunity for generations to come.

Photo: Wirestock / Envato Elements

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APPENDIX 1

Summary of Incoming Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) ≥ 100,000 km² Currently Under Discussion.

This table compiles proposed marine protected areas (MPAs) that are 100,000 km² or larger, based on current dialogues with governments, communities, and civil society groups. None of the MPAs listed here have been formally adopted or designated by governments; rather, they represent areas with significant momentum—whether through government discussions, Indigenous or community-led proposals, or active civil society campaigns. The table distinguishes between new MPAs, expansions of existing MPAs, and high seas proposals. Canada is represented as a single entry, as its national effort comprises a collection of smaller MPAs that collectively exceed 100,000 km²—demonstrating a coherent and ambitious strategy. Entries marked as TBD reflect initiatives known to be under consideration but for which no area figures or official boundaries have yet been proposed; these are excluded from the cumulative area total. Entries marked N/A are those that have no currently designated spatial protections. Areas that are discussed as case studies in the main report text are denoted with an asterisk.

	MPA Name	Category	Current Size (km²)	Incoming Size (km²)
New Areas	Gorringe MPA	new	N/A	100,000
	New Zealand Subantarctic Islands MPA Network	new	N/A	105,928
	Dos Mares	new	N/A	192,000
	Solomon Islands' Temotu MPA	new	N/A	274,000
	Cook Islands' Marae Moana Act: Ra'ui To'ora	new	N/A	400,000
	Te Tai Nui a Hau (French Polynesia, Marquesas Islands)	new	N/A	430,000
	Rāhui Nui nō Tuha'a Pae (French Polynesia, Austral Islands)	new	N/A	1,000,000
Expansions	Benguela Current (BCLME) Expansion - Angola, Namibia, and South Africa*	expansion	238,000	148,000
	Philippines Rise LSMPA aka Philippine Rise Ocean Conservation Area (PROCA) Project	expansion	3,500	150,000
	Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) Marine Park Expansion	expansion	71,000	300,000
	Nazca Desventuradas and Juan Fernandez Marine Parks Expansion	expansion	590,245	334,928
	New Caledonia Coral Sea Natural Park (CSNP) Expansion	expansion	136,890	1,156,072
	Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR) - Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama	expansion	372,846	1,529,060
	French Polynesia's EEZ Protected Area Expansion	expansion	1,086,000	2,284,000
MPAs in Canadian Region*	Southern Strait of Georgia, BC	new	N/A	1,400
	Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park, QC	expansion	1,245	3,242
	Fundian Channel-Browns Bank, NS	expansion	391	6,840
	South Coast Fjords, NL	new	N/A	9,114
	MPA Network Great Bear Sea, BC (Northern Shelf Bioregion), including the Central Coast NMCAR	expansion	16,615	13,878
	Anticosti-Mingan, QC	new	N/A	14,000
	Torngat, NL Inuit Protected Area/NMCA	new	N/A	17,000
	Wiinipaakw Indigenous Protected Area and NMCA, eastern James Bay	new	N/A	26,000
	Qikiqtait Marine Protected Area	new	N/A	42,789
	MPA Network Scotian Shelf-Bay of Fundy, NS/NB	new	N/A	46,845
	Sarvarjuaq Marine Protected Area	new	N/A	73,737
	Western Weeneebeg (James Bay) and southwestern Washaybeyoh (Hudson Bay), ON	new	N/A	86,000
		Subtotal (Canada)		**340,845**
High Seas Areas	The Lost City	high seas	N/A	10,000
	Saya de Malha Bank	high seas	N/A	60,000
	Emperors Seamount Chain	high seas	N/A	153,789
	Costa Rica Thermal Dome	high seas	N/A	518,078
	Sargasso Sea	high seas	N/A	600,000
	Western Antarctic Peninsula and South of the Scotia Arc (D1 MPA)*	high seas	N/A	670,000
	Weddell Sea Marine Protected Area (WSMPA) - Phase 2*	high seas	N/A	720,000
	East Antarctic Marine Protected Area (EAMPA)*	high seas	N/A	970,000
	Walvis Ridge	high seas	N/A	1,038,320
	Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges*	high seas	N/A	1,097,846
	Weddell Sea Marine Protected Area (WSMPA) - Phase 1*	high seas	N/A	2,238,245
	Lord Howe Rise and South Tasman Sea	high seas	N/A	TBD
Total				**16,821,111 km²**

APPENDIX 2

Considerations and Limitations for the "Scaling up Protection" Numbers

The information included in Appendix 1 was collected through a series of reviews of publicly available data and stakeholder consultation. An initial review of publicly available data informed the creation of a prospective list of potential areas being considered for marine protected area (MPA) designation. Additionally, two rounds of stakeholder surveys were conducted to identify potentially missing areas and verify the information collected through public sources.

Only areas ≥ 100,000 km²

This investigation produced a selection of large-scale areas (100,000 km² or larger) with potential for MPA designation. This collation does not present a comprehensive assessment of all proposed MPAs or protected areas globally (see WDPA). Many smaller, locally-managed, or community-led MPAs – which play essential roles in biodiversity protection and ecosystem function – were not included in the collation and reporting due to time and capacity constraints, lack of standardised data across different reporting systems, and difficulty accessing up-to-date information. Their omission should not be interpreted as a reflection of their socio-ecological importance. In cases where existing MPAs or MPA networks approached the 100,000 km² threshold through modest expansions (e.g., a 99,000 km² MPA gaining an additional 2,000 km²), these expansions have not been included in our calculations, as they would contribute minimally to new coverage protections. This choice reflects a focus on identifying new, large-scale areas only.

Effective protection is not assured

Size is only one consideration to evaluate the potential positive outcomes of an MPA. As size was the primary variable considered for the selection of new, large-scale areas, in Appendix 1, the inclusion of MPAs in this table does not indicate that the potentially proposed areas are assured or likely to achieve positive biodiversity and ecosystem function outcomes. Further study and data analysis would therefore be required to assess the socio-ecological effectiveness of potentially proposed areas through comprehensive review, following recommendations provided in *The MPA Guide* (2021).

Stage of MPA consideration

When reviewing the information provided in Appendix 1, it is important to note that the areas identified vary widely in their stage of consideration—ranging from early conceptual plans to more advanced proposals—and their inclusion does not imply that they have been formally proposed, that they have government approval, or that they are guaranteed to progress to designation. Additionally, the boundaries presented for many of the areas are approximate and may not reflect final delineations, which could change significantly following further scientific assessments, stakeholder consultations, or formal proposal and legal processes.

Up to date information

While best efforts were made to use publicly available and credible sources, some data may be outdated, incomplete, inconsistent, or not independently verifiable at this time. Information in this report was compiled as of September 2025 and may have changed since. Users of this report are encouraged to interpret findings as indicative rather than definitive. Ground-truthing, stakeholder engagement, and national and global-level validation are essential next steps to build a more robust and inclusive understanding of global conservation opportunities.

Multiple Canadian MPAs

The report includes a grouping of proposed MPAs in Canada where total coverage exceeds 100,000 km², to illustrate the potential significance of numerous, smaller-scale MPAs within a single governance system, however this grouping does not mean these MPAs are being proposed as a unified network. These MPAs are each coordinated by unique collaborations between regional and national governments, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), and relevant industry and civil society stakeholders, and should therefore be considered as individual proposals beyond the confines of this report. Additionally, this approach for the grouping of MPA proposals in Canada was informed by the availability of well-documented national planning processes, but similar initiatives in other countries may exist without being as accessible. As such, there may be comparable large-scale proposals elsewhere that have not been included in this report.

More Information and Contact

If you have updated information, corrections, or additional proposals that you would like to see included in any future iterations of this information, please contact Friends of Ocean Action at ocean@weforum.org.
Media Communications can be reached at erin.skoczylas@weforum.org.


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