



A unique group of leaders who are fast-tracking solutions to the most pressing challenges facing the ocean



Marine protection and conservation

Context

Global biodiversity loss is taking place at an increasingly fast rate and is close to reaching a critical point. We are seeing a worldwide decline in coastal and marine ecosystems and, in some cases, ecosystem collapse in many regions through habitat degradation, overfishing, coastal development, land-based pollution and climate change. In addition, the world's population and the estimated consequences of human activities and impacts are expected to put further pressure on nature.

A healthy ocean is highly productive: it generates and safeguards jobs, food supplies, tourism, business and industry, as well as livelihoods, and delivers goods and services that provide clean water and support communities and economies. Globally, there is growing recognition of the need to increase conservation efforts and that protecting the ocean is not just an environmental issue but a social and economic one too. The threats remain serious, however, and are currently projected to increase.

Marine protection and conservation measures are critical to maintain and restore coastal and marine ecosystems and fisheries. When effectively enforced and managed, they have been shown to deliver a windfall in terms of biodiversity while also creating economic value. In fact, such measures need to be supported by the correct design, management,

investments, governance and enforcement systems in order to fully enhance ocean productivity and health while sustaining the world's population, safeguarding economic and social development, and increasing resilience to the growing challenges posed by climate change. Gaps in financing and capacity-building must particularly be addressed to ensure an adequate response to these challenges.

Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water or 'the ocean goal') calls for 10% of coastal and marine ecosystems to be effectively and sustainably protected. While only 8% of the ocean is currently protected, with barely 2.5% of that protection fully implemented, encouraging progress and a growing momentum has led to raised hopes of meeting this target. Doing so is likely to contribute to long-term economic growth and improved livelihoods. If the world is to meet the SDG 14.5 target, we have just over one year – until 2020 – to address the above gaps.

The coming months represent a unique opportunity to mobilize collective action to scale up efforts and build on the current momentum by raising the ambition of targets such as SDG 14.5 and Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 (under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity). The importance of effective protection in conserving marine ecosystems has become increasingly recognized in the past few years with the adoption of these international commitments. However, further action and innovative tools, bold investments and new technologies, such as satellites, and new ways of monitoring and tracking data, are needed to fast-track scalable solutions and help overcome many ocean challenges.



Lionfish at coral reef, Maya Thila, North Ari Atoll, the Maldives. © Reinhard Dirscherl/Alamy

What the Friends are doing

Friends of Ocean Action is helping to drive concerted, public-private cooperation across geographies and sectors on the issue of marine protection and conservation. The Friends are mobilizing a global network that, through targeted activities, aims to:

- Build the business case for marine protection and conservation meant to mobilize a strong coalition of world business champions ready to contribute to achieving the target of 10% by 2020, and support calls for raised ambition looking ahead to 2030,
- Support the international community in increasing global Marine Protected Area (MPA) coverage by shifting to a more coordinated, effective and strategic network of MPAs, and
- Facilitate the development of platforms supporting the enforcement, management and monitoring of MPAs and other protected and conserved areas, with use cases built for specific hotspots.

In this context, due to the rapid decline in ocean health and the emerging scientific consensus advocating 20-40% of the ocean to be protected in order to safeguard global biodiversity, there is a serious challenge of scaling marine protection. Therefore, the Friends are supporting the widespread call to increase ambition towards protecting at least 30% of the ocean by 2030.

Building the business case

MPAs, when fully protected and well-managed, are the most effective tool to protect and conserve marine biodiversity and allow restoration of critical habitats. The level of protection for MPAs can however vary from fully protected areas with no take (i.e. no fishing is allowed within those areas), through to multiple-use areas (which aim to allow for both sustainable human use and biodiversity conservation side-by-side), and therefore their conservation outcomes may also vary.

MPAs, where the primary objective is conservation, are however not the only existing tool to protect and conserve the ocean. Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), where long-term positive conservation outcomes are achieved regardless of objective, are in fact emerging and have been recognized as critical additional instruments for marine protection and conservation.

Both these protection tools deliver quantifiable uplifts in "ecosystem services" benefits – everything from spill-over effects for increased food production, to carbon sequestration, to increased tourism receipts, to natural disaster mitigation, and reduction for example of financial risks associated with overfishing and reduced fish stocks. However, despite these benefits being critical for businesses in the medium and long term and the foundational inputs into compelling business cases, marine protection and conservation is often still perceived by the private sector as an obstacle instead of a long-term enabler for prosperity.

Friends of Ocean Action is working, together with experts from different sectors, to develop the business case for marine protection and conservation, that can help to inform and engage the private sector on the economic benefits of well-designed and enforced protected areas. This work aims at complementing ongoing global policy and communications efforts directed to meet the target of 10% of the ocean by 2020 and increase the ambition for the next decade. The Friends are producing engagement materials, including a report as well as sector-specific roadmaps to provide a suite of arguments and explore win-win opportunities for the private sector to engage



Yellow tube sponge and shell in Gökova Bay MPA, Turkey. © Images & Stories/Alamy

and invest, in concert with other relevant stakeholders, to support the establishment, enforcement and management of effective protected areas.

The objective is to change mindsets and start mobilizing a strong coalition of world business champions ready to join the call to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 at the UN Ocean Conference in June 2020 and commit to play their part to make this a reality in the next decade.

Policy

While engaging the private sector on MPAs, Friends of Ocean Action will also build on the momentum generated to raise the ambition on the broader biodiversity agenda, with targeted efforts focused towards raised global ambition on the percentage of the ocean to be protected by 2030. The Friends are working with stakeholders involved in processes such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to ensure the establishment of a more ambitious 2030 protection target. In addition, Friends of Ocean Action aims to support the international community in its efforts to address the current 'ad hoc' approach to marine conservation by shifting to a qualitative, coordinated, coherent, effective and strategic network of MPAs, which includes designing MPAs within broader spatial plans.

New technologies and access to data

Given the increasing anthropogenic changes facing the marine environment (including climate change, ocean warming, ocean acidification, ocean deoxygenation, coastal pollution, population increases and technological changes), there is a critical need to ensure that all MPAs and the areas around them are adaptively managed, with continuous improvement across all elements of management. Flexible governance and decision-making processes are needed and should be positioned to nimbly and rapidly absorb new information about ecological and economic conditions and threats, including climate change. These processes will rely on the implementation of adaptive management responses such as changes to management rules, zoning systems or MPA boundaries.

Friends of Ocean Action is supporting the development of an innovative MPA management tool, grounded in science and backed up by new technologies, satellite, monitoring and tracking data, that will improve the establishment, monitoring and enforcement of MPAs. The platform is being developed in collaboration with key technology institutions and academia and it aims to facilitate the enforcement and monitoring of existing and new MPAs.

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