TOGETHER FOR THE OCEAN

PROTECTING 30% BY 2030

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE OCEAN PROTECTION GAP

Assessing progress toward the 30×30 target

June 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 **Even in a political climate marked by uncertainty, protectionism, and global macroeconomic headwinds driving a narrower focus on growth, conserving 30% of the ocean by 2030 continues to be a sound investment that returns prosperity.**

The ocean provides vital services to humanity, supporting the health of communities and wealth of our economies. Yet the ocean is under threat, with accelerating biodiversity loss and climate change endangering the essential services it provides. The '30×30' goal – a target established under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – commits Parties to conserve and manage at least 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030. This ambitious goal is one of 23 targets aiming to halt and reverse biodiversity loss this decade.

2 **Establishing and managing 30x30 for the ocean requires $15.8 billion annually – just ~0.5% of annual global defense budgets.[1]**

In return, just three key benefits from conserving 30% of the ocean could unlock ~$85 billion p.a. by 2050: by preserving natural coastal defenses to prevent escalating property damages; avoiding the costs of carbon emissions from seagrass loss; and reducing profit losses from declining, overexploited fisheries. Protection and conservation also enhance coastal tourism, boost fishery yields outside protected areas and generate powerful economic multipliers – reinforcing the case for decisive action.

30x30

Conserving 30% of the ocean by 2030 continues to be a sound investment that returns prosperity.

$85bn

Just three key benefits of 30×30 could unlock $85 billion annually by 2050

~0.5%

Achieving 30×30 for the ocean requires $15.8 billion annually – just ~0.5% of annual global defense budgets

3 Now is the moment to ramp up ocean conservation.

With delays to action comes greater biodiversity decline, risking irreversible tipping points and loss of species while increasing the costs for restoration and recovery. Investing in 30×30 can strengthen food security, safeguard coastal livelihoods, enhance social cohesion, and build climate resilience for generations to come – laying a foundation for a thriving, inclusive blue economy.

4 Yet countries are failing to invest in ocean conservation – the quantity, quality, and effectiveness of marine protection falls woefully short of global goals.

Today, just 8.6% of the ocean is protected or conserved, with only 2.7% assessed and deemed effectively protected[i] – a far cry from the 30% target. The majority is in national waters, of which 20% are protected and 6% deemed effectively protected. Just two countries – Palau and the UK – have effectively protected more than 30% of their waters, although effectively protected areas in UK waters are overwhelmingly located in remote, overseas territories. Currently, just 1.5% of the high seas are protected.[2]

5 Progress is slow. In some parts of the world it has even reversed – and the risk of further backsliding is real.

While progress has marginally accelerated since last year's report, at the current rate of progress – an increase of 0.8% since the adoption of the GBF in 2022 – ocean protection is projected to rise to just 10% by 2030 (compared with 9.7% in last year's report). This falls far short of the 30% target. Given the risk of backsliding, the effectiveness of this protection also remains in doubt. A case in point, in April 2025, the US government signed a proclamation allowing commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument, a designated marine protected area (MPA) larger than France, Germany, the UK, and Greece combined. This rollback reduced the level of fully and highly protected marine area in the US by a third, and globally by 0.3%. A further four US marine monuments are considered similarly at risk.[3] Overall, effective marine protection has therefore decreased globally since last year.

30x30

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8.6%

Just 8.6% of the ocean is protected, with only 2.7% assessed and deemed effectively protected – a far cry from the 30% target

20%

20% of national waters are protected and 6% deemed effectively protected

i. 'Effective' protection means an area has been assessed and deemed to have regulation and active management in place to ensure minimal or no damaging practices are occurring, such that the target conservation outcomes can be achieved.

6 Countries must urgently raise ambition to meet the 30x30 target, especially high-income countries which must do more to close their ambition gap.

Just a quarter of high-income coastal countries have set timebound 30×30 aligned targets for ocean conservation, despite having the greatest capacity to act. Without stronger leadership from these countries, global efforts risk stalling further.

7 Ratification of the High Seas Treaty provides a catalyst to ramp up ambition.

There are positive indications that, by the end of the year, the treaty will reach the 60 country ratifications needed for it to enter into force. In parallel, the scientific community has identified priority biodiversity hotspots to protect in the high seas, and countries are developing proposals to be considered for the first wave of high seas MPAs. If all prospective priority areas identified were implemented, as well as those in the Southern Ocean under consideration by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), a further 9.9% of the high seas could be protected – increasing the share of global ocean protection by 6%.[4] Much more will still be needed – and continued research to identify the next set of priority areas for protection will be key – but given the High Seas Treaty is yet to enter into force, this is a strong start.

8 Financing remains a critical bottleneck.

Currently, only $1.2 billion of finance is flowing to ocean protection and conservation – less than 10% of what is needed. This finance is overwhelmingly – 90% – from public sources.[5,6,7] Most immediately and in the short term, governments will need to increase funding flows to meet the capital injections needed, particularly high income countries. This includes honouring their commitment in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to provide at least $20 billion by 2025 and $30 billion by 2030 in international biodiversity finance to developing countries.

60

There are positive indications that, by the end of the year, the High Seas Treaty will reach the 60 country ratifications needed for it to enter into force

6%

If existing proposals and identified priority areas in the high seas were implemented, a further 9.9% of areas beyond national jurisdiction would be protected, increasing global ocean protection by 6%

$1.2bn

Only $1.2 billion of finance is currently flowing to ocean protection and conservation – less than 10% of what is needed

9 The good news is that we have the tools, and the money, to bridge the financing gap.

Just six public financing levers could deliver $18 billion in additional finance for ocean conservation, enough to meet – and exceed – the estimated financing need. Today, countries spend more than $22 billion p.a. on harmful fishing subsidies. Repurposing just two categories – fuel subsidies and tax exemptions, which make up 60% of the total – would cover 90% of the financing need for ocean protection and conservation. Mechanisms like debt for nature swaps and blue bonds already have traction as pathways to mobilize public capital for the ocean, while new taxes and levies on coastal tourism or offshore fossil fuel extraction can also boost public coffers for spending on conservation. In developing countries where marine ecosystems protect vulnerable coastlines, grant and concessional adaptation finance can support ocean conservation that boosts resilience. These levers have been demonstrated to work – they now need to be scaled. Countries like Belize, Indonesia and Barbados are leading the way – it is time for the rest of the world to follow.

10 Philanthropic capital can accelerate progress towards 30x30 by establishing basic enabling conditions, building capacity, supporting coordination, and removing key barriers to stakeholder support.

Strengthening capabilities in government and technical institutions is a key priority, particularly on essential topics like spatial planning, monitoring, and sustainable financing – including around how to best channel finance to where it is needed. Other critical uses include meeting one-off establishment costs and supporting a just transition for affected communities.

$18bn

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$22bn

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90%

Repurposing just two categories of harmful fishing subsidies – fuel subsidies and tax exemptions, which make up 60% of the total – would cover 90% of the financing need for ocean protection and conservation

11 Looking beyond 2030, the potential for private finance to contribute to long-term management costs looks set to grow, as nascent markets mature and proof points for innovative products accumulate.

Promising avenues include nature-linked insurance, blended MPA models integrating revenue streams, biotechnology applications leveraging genetic information from marine resources, and blue carbon and biodiversity credits. With the right regulatory and policy frameworks, these tools can support sustainable, long-term finance for ocean protection.

12 Above all, action on ocean protection must be just, equitable and inclusive.

The ocean is a common resource, and the responsibility to protect it for future generations should not and cannot fall disproportionately on the countries and communities most vulnerable to climate change and most reliant on the ocean. High income countries must build trust and follow through on their commitments to provide financial support for biodiversity to low and middle income countries; and electorates must hold their governments to account on delivering. Indigenous Peoples and local communities, who have stewarded marine ecosystems since time immemorial, must be at the heart of decision-making processes with free, prior and informed consent, and share equitably in the benefits of ocean conservation and exploration. Locally led marine areas, as implemented in Fiji and Madagascar, among many others, demonstrate a model of successful community-led management that can be replicated and scaled.

13 The UN Ocean Conference draft declaration recognizes the urgency of the challenge and the importance of action.

The conference in June will be a critical opportunity to build momentum – particularly around securing a fisheries subsidies agreement, ratifying the High Seas Treaty, and promoting a science-based, inclusive and equitable approach to ocean protection.

2030

Looking beyond 2030, the potential for private finance to contribute to long-term management costs looks set to grow

Trust

High income countries must build trust and follow through on their commitments to provide financial support for biodiversity to low and middle income countries

Inclusive

Indigenous Peoples and local communities, who have stewarded marine ecosystems since time immemorial, must be at the heart of decision-making processes with free, prior and informed consent, and share equitably in the benefits of ocean conservation and exploration