

OCEAN PROTECTION GAP REPORT

2026

Assessing progress toward the
30x30 target



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was produced by Systemiq and authored by Naseer Chia, Moritz de Chaisemartin, Guido Schmidt-Traub, Alexandra Philips, and Paula Petersen. It was commissioned by the Bloomberg Ocean Fund, and produced in partnership with Campaign for Nature, the High Seas Alliance, the Marine Conservation Institute, RISE UP, SkyTruth, and WWF International, in association with the Together for the Ocean campaign. The report builds on the methodology and approach established in last year's Ocean Protection Gap report.

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SKYTRUTH

S Y S T E M I Q



FOREWORD

I come from Seychelles, an ocean state where our marine territory is almost 3,000 times larger than our land.

For Seychellois people, the ocean is not a separate environment beyond our shoreline. It surrounds us, sustains us, and is deeply rooted in who we are. Fish is part of our daily diet, fishing supports families and communities across our islands, and our tourism economy depends on the healthy waters and marine life that make Seychelles what it is. The blue economy accounts for nearly half of all employment.

This makes ocean protection deeply personal. A healthy ocean is bound up with our prosperity, our security, and our future.

In 2022, governments pledged to protect and conserve at least 30% of land and ocean by 2030. Yet, with only four years remaining, progress at sea is falling dangerously behind. Around 20% of the world's land and inland waters are designated as protected or conserved, compared with only around 10% of marine and coastal areas. Existing commitments could bring protection on land close to the global target, reaching around 27% by 2030. For the ocean, however, they would bring global coverage to only around 12%.

I know from experience that ambitious ocean commitment is possible. Under my presidency, Seychelles embarked on an ambitious effort that led to 30% of our waters being designated for protection in 2020, demonstrating what can be achieved when political commitment is translated into action. These protections are about more than conserving marine ecosystems. They are also about sustaining the fisheries, livelihoods, and natural environment on which Seychellois communities and our tourism economy depend.

But reaching a target on a map is only the beginning. As this Ocean Protection Gap Report makes clear, designation must translate into effective protection. This is a challenge for Seychelles, as it is for countries around the world.

Globally, while around 10% of marine and coastal areas are designated as protected or conserved,

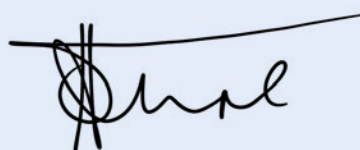
only 3.5% of the ocean is assessed as effectively protected. Protection on paper is not enough. Protected and conserved areas must be effectively managed, properly financed, and safeguarded from damaging activities if they are to deliver lasting outcomes for marine ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

In 2019, while President, I issued a plea to the international community from the depths of the Indian Ocean. That experience renewed my determination to advocate for the beating blue heart of our planet. My message then was that we cannot wait for another generation to address problems we have created ourselves. That message is even more urgent today.

The greatest remaining opportunity lies in the High Seas. They cover most of the global ocean, yet less than 1% is effectively protected. No matter how well Seychelles protects its own waters, the sea does not recognise national borders.

The High Seas Treaty gives us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change this. With the Treaty now in force, governments must turn legal breakthroughs into effective protection on the water, backed by science, finance, capacity, and effective management.

This report shows how significant the ocean protection gap remains, but also where action can make the greatest difference. We should be impatient about the pace of progress, but optimistic about our ability to close it – by protecting more of the ocean, and protecting it well.



Danny Faure

Former President of the Republic of Seychelles
2016-2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2026, the world passed an important milestone: more than 10% of the ocean is now reported as protected or conserved, up from 8.6% in 2025. However, progress remains far off track from the global target to protect and conserve at least 30% of the ocean by 2030 (30x30). At the recent historical pace, global coverage would reach only around 15% by 2030, halfway to the target. The expansion of marine protected and conserved areas is also not yet matched by the conditions needed to deliver effective implementation. Only 3.5% of the ocean is assessed and deemed to be effectively protected.ⁱ

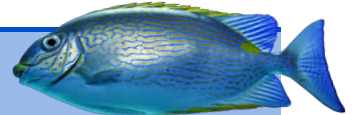
Implementation is the defining challenge for the remaining four years to 2030. As ambition has increased, countries should continue to ramp up designation, but also ensure those areas are effectively managed, financed, enforced, equitably governed and delivering measurable outcomes. New analysis by SkyTruth for this report, using data from the Marine Conservation Institute, shows that while protection of key marine habitats is relatively high on paper, only a small share is assessed as being effectively protected: 33% of mangroves are reported as protected, but just 0.3% are fully or highly protected; for seagrass the figures are 34% and 11%, respectively; and while 47% of warm-water corals fall within protected areas, less than 10% are fully or highly protected.¹

The implementation gap is even more acute on the High Seas, where less than 2% is protected today, and less than 1% is assessed and found to be fully or highly protected.² Making up nearly two-thirds of the global ocean, achieving 30x30 will not happen without protecting the High Seas. The first generation of High Seas marine protected areas (MPAs) will be a test of whether countries can translate ambition into effective conservation measures on the water. It will be critical to ensure that early High Seas MPA proposals include the conditions necessary to be effective, rather than repeating the same gap seen in national waters. There is no time to create a new generation of paper parks on the High Seas.

Just

3.5%

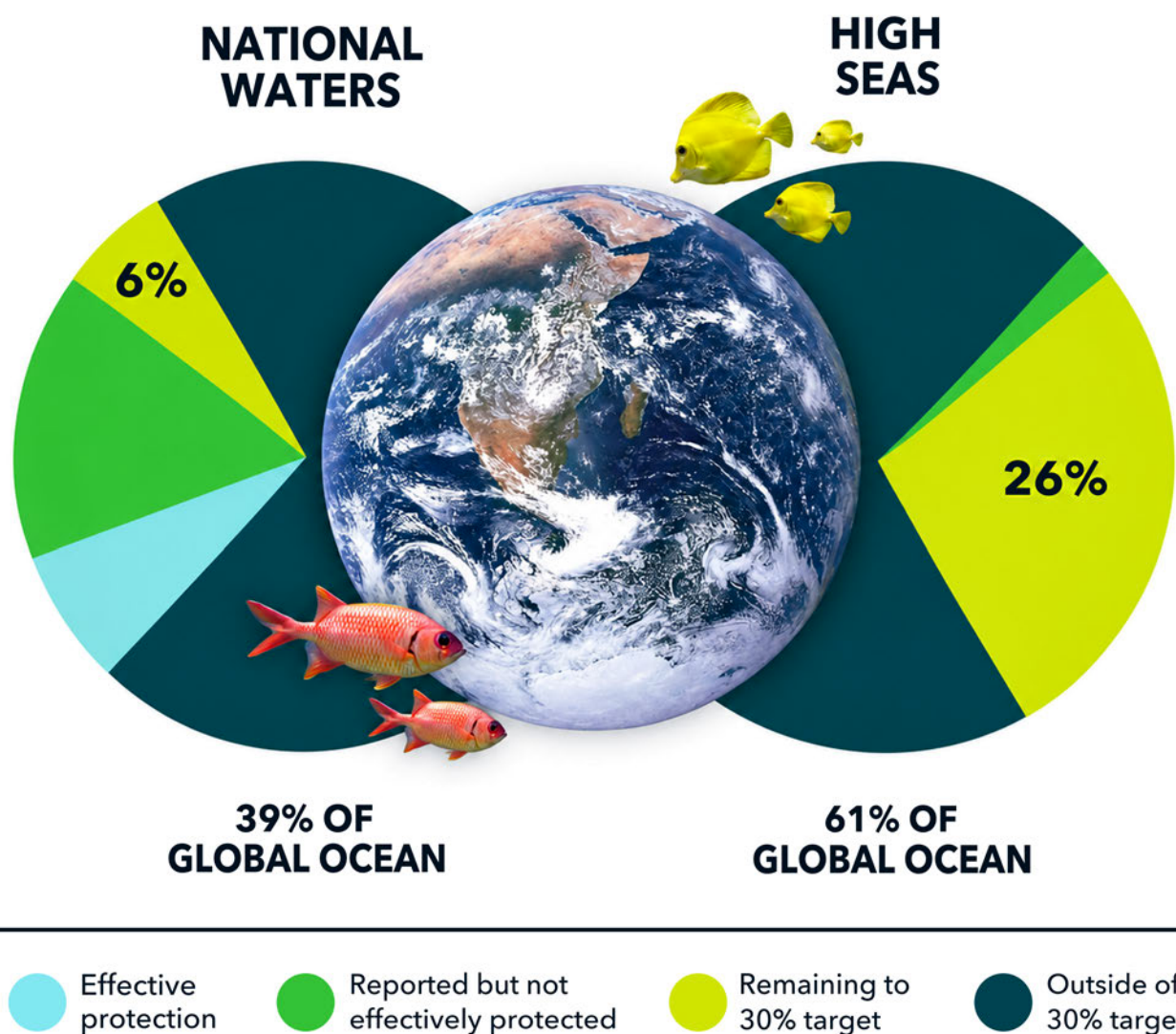
of the ocean has been assessed and deemed to be effectively protected



i. In this report, effective protection is defined to mean 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. This report uses the Marine Conservation Institute's MPAtlas analysis of fully/highly protected zones as a proxy for the share of the ocean that is currently effectively protected. In MPAtlas, areas are classified as 'Fully Protected' when no impact from extractive or destructive activities is allowed and all abatable impacts are minimized, and 'Highly Protected' when only light extractive activities are allowed that have low total impact, and all other abatable impacts are minimized. For more information on the share of the global ocean that has so far been assessed, please consult the MPAtlas. While not all MPAs need to be fully or highly protected in order to be effective, these categories are consistently associated with the strongest ecological outcomes and therefore provide the best globally consistent proxy currently available. Achieving effective protection also depends on enabling conditions including equitable governance, sustainable financing, and effective monitoring and enforcement. At the global scale, achieving effective conservation outcomes further depends on protected and conserved areas forming science-based, connected and representative networks - dimensions that are not yet consistently assessed at the global scale.

Representing nearly two thirds of the global ocean area, the High Seas are the biggest implementation gap

Visual: Share of national waters and the High Seas that is effectively protected, reported as protected but not effectively protected, and remaining to achieve the 30% target.

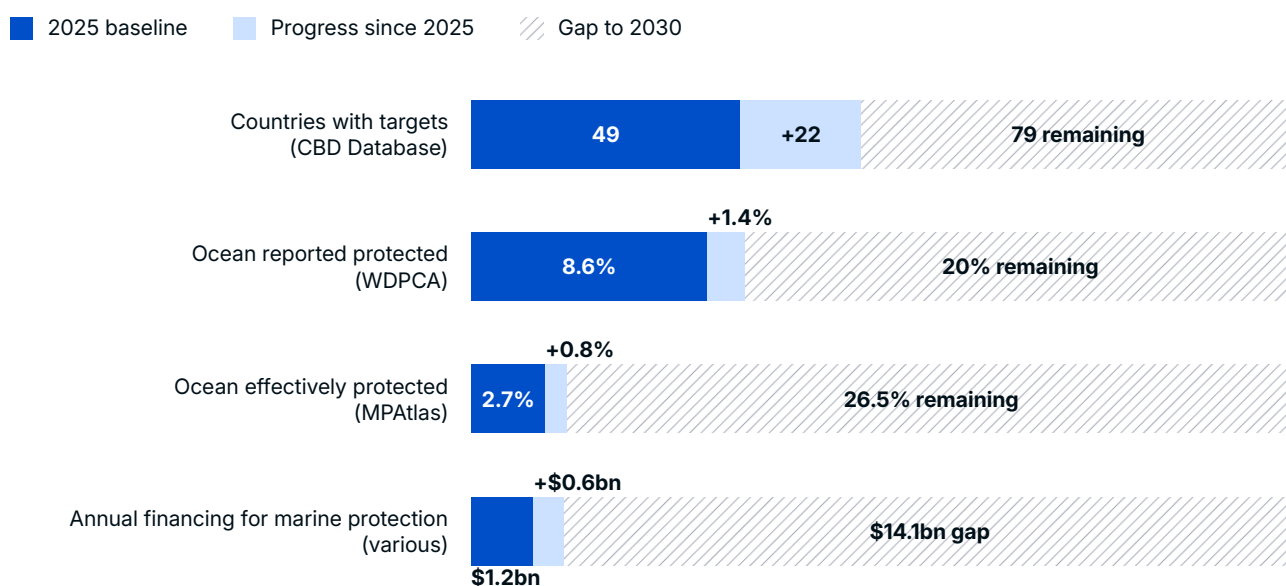


Countries are showing that effective protection is possible, but it requires more than designation alone. Examples from Chile, Palau and elsewhere demonstrate that ocean protection can be successful if underpinned by effective governance, long-term finance, community leadership, enforcement and monitoring.

Nearly half of coastal countries now have quantified 2030 national ocean protection targets, but ambition must now be matched – and exceeded – by implementation. Current national targets could achieve 26% protection of national waters by 2030, but many countries have yet to translate these commitments into effective protection. A quarter of countries with a quantified 2030 target do not yet protect or conserve any of their waters, and nearly half have only protected 5% or less.³

Ambition on ocean protection is rising, but implementation and financing are not keeping pace

Graph: Annual progress against the ambition, implementation and finance elements of the ocean protection gap



Effective protection and conservation carries substantial economic returns. Previous analysis identified at least US\$85 billion in potential annual economic benefits by 2050 from healthier fisheries, coastal protection and conserved blue carbon ecosystems.⁴ At the same time, weak protection also carries measurable costs. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is estimated to cause US\$23.5 billion in annual losses globally, while bottom trawling in European waters, including within many MPAs, imposes environmental costs estimated at up to €16 billion a year.^{5,6}

Current financing for marine protection is estimated at around US\$1.8 billion a year – approximately a tenth of what is needed to deliver 30x30. Annual investment in marine conservation is equivalent to just one month of the US\$22 billion governments spend each year subsidising harmful marine activities. Closing the finance gap will require greater domestic funding alongside international finance, philanthropy, and private capital.

Annual investment in marine conservation is equivalent to just one month of the US\$22 billion governments spend each year subsidising harmful marine activities.



The High Seas Treaty offers the clearest opportunity to change this trajectory.⁷

The Treaty entered into force in January 2026, and at time of publication has 94 parties.⁸

The Treaty creates, for the first time, a global mechanism for establishing area-based management tools, including MPAs, in the 61% of the ocean beyond national jurisdiction. Without rapid progress on the High Seas, achieving 30x30 is all but impossible. In a complex environment for multilateral collaboration, the entry into force of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement is a bright spot that offers a real opportunity for constructive engagement.

Delivering effective protection is achievable.

Investing in the conditions that enable implementation will be key to determining whether 30x30 delivers meaningful conservation outcomes or protection only on paper. These conditions include:⁹

- **Durable finance.** Long-term, sustainable financing is essential to support management, monitoring, enforcement and community-led stewardship. Domestic finance will need to provide the bulk of ongoing management costs, which requires putting ocean protection higher up on finance ministers' agenda, but international funding, philanthropy and the private sector all have roles to play.

- **Open data and transparency.** Accessible data, monitoring systems and public reporting are critical for accountability, enforcement and informed decision-making.

- **Equity, inclusivity, and a human rights-based approach.** Effective protection and conservation must recognize and support the rights, leadership, knowledge and stewardship of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

- **Effective management and enforcement.**

Protected and conserved areas require clear objectives, robust management plans, effective compliance systems and sufficient institutional capacity to implement protections in practice.

CBD COP17 and BBNJ COP1 must mark the shift from ambition to implementation.

We know what effective protection and conservation look like, and there is growing evidence that the long-term ecological, social and economic benefits can far exceed the costs of action. Governments should arrive ready to strengthen national commitments, secure sustained financing for long-term management, redirect harmful subsidies and lay the foundations for the first generation of effectively managed High Seas MPAs under the BBNJ Agreement. The measure of success is no longer only how many hectares of protection are announced, but how much ocean is genuinely protected, conserved, financed and delivering outcomes for people and nature.



Chapter 1

THE CASE FOR 30X30



30x30 safeguards the foundations of human and planetary wellbeing

Healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems are essential natural infrastructure for food security, resilience and economic prosperity – ocean health is critical to a liveable planet.

More than 3 billion people rely on seafood for a significant share of their diets, while healthy coastal ecosystems reduce exposure to storms and erosion, store carbon, and support tourism and other ocean-dependent livelihoods. Continued degradation of these systems therefore creates direct ecological, economic, fiscal and human costs.

Effective marine conservation and management across both national waters and the High Seas is one of the most practical tools available to safeguard these benefits. When well designed and effectively managed, protected and conserved areas can help ecosystems recover, rebuild fish populations, restore blue carbon habitats and reduce risks to coastal communities.



At least

US\$85 billion

in potential annual economic benefits by 2050 if 30x30 is delivered

The 30x30 goal – Target 3 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – commits countries to conserve and effectively manage at least 30% of land and ocean by 2030, through equitably-governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).ⁱⁱ The 30x30 target is closely interconnected with the other 22 GBF targets, in particular Targets 1 and 2: Target 1 calls for integrated spatial planning to bring all land and sea areas under participatory, science-based management, while Target 2 focuses on restoring degraded ecosystems.

To meet the 30x30 target for the ocean, protection will need to include both national waters and the High Seas – areas beyond national jurisdiction, defined for the purpose of this report as both the water column and seabed. National waters make up 39% of the global ocean area, while the High Seas account for the remaining 61%.

ii. Adopted in 2022 under the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and ratified by 196 countries, the GBF is a global agreement that sets out 23 ambitious targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss this decade, towards a planet in harmony with nature by 2050.

GBF TARGET 3: CONSERVE 30% OF LAND, WATERS AND SEAS

"Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous

and traditional territories where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories."¹⁰

Ocean protection is an investment in economic security. It is a practical investment in resilience, livelihoods and long-term economic security that can translate directly into positive fiscal impacts for countries.

The Ocean Protection Gap Report 2025 estimated that three benefits alone could generate at least US\$85 billion annually by 2050: recovering fish stocks, protecting coastal wetlands and conserving seagrass carbon stocks. These estimates capture only a subset of the ecological, social and cultural value at stake.

Effective protection and management could also help reduce the estimated US\$23.5 billion in annual losses from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.¹¹ A lack of up-to-date, accurate data on IUU fishing makes it hard to scale this number reliably, and this is likely to be a vast underestimation of the true scale of the problem – a separate study estimated IUU losses of US\$9.4 billion for West Africa alone, which demonstrates that the effects of IUU fall disproportionately on coastal states and communities that depend heavily on fisheries for food and employment.¹²

MPAs cannot eliminate IUU fishing on their own. However, protecting strategically important areas with robust monitoring, surveillance and enforcement systems can deter illegal activity, improve transparency across fishing fleets, and strengthen compliance both within protected areas and more broadly across the wider seascape. Well-managed MPAs in both national

waters and the High Seas will be critical to unlocking this benefit.

The economic consequences of IUU fishing extend beyond the value of the catch.

An estimated US\$4 billion in potential tax revenues is currently lost to IUU fishing every year, weakening the public resources available for fisheries management and other services.¹³

Governments should therefore treat ocean protection less as a discretionary cost and more as public infrastructure. Well-managed marine ecosystems protect coastlines, sustain fisheries, support tourism, strengthen food security, reduce disaster risk and improve long-term economic productivity. The case for financing ocean protection is therefore environmental, fiscal and economic.

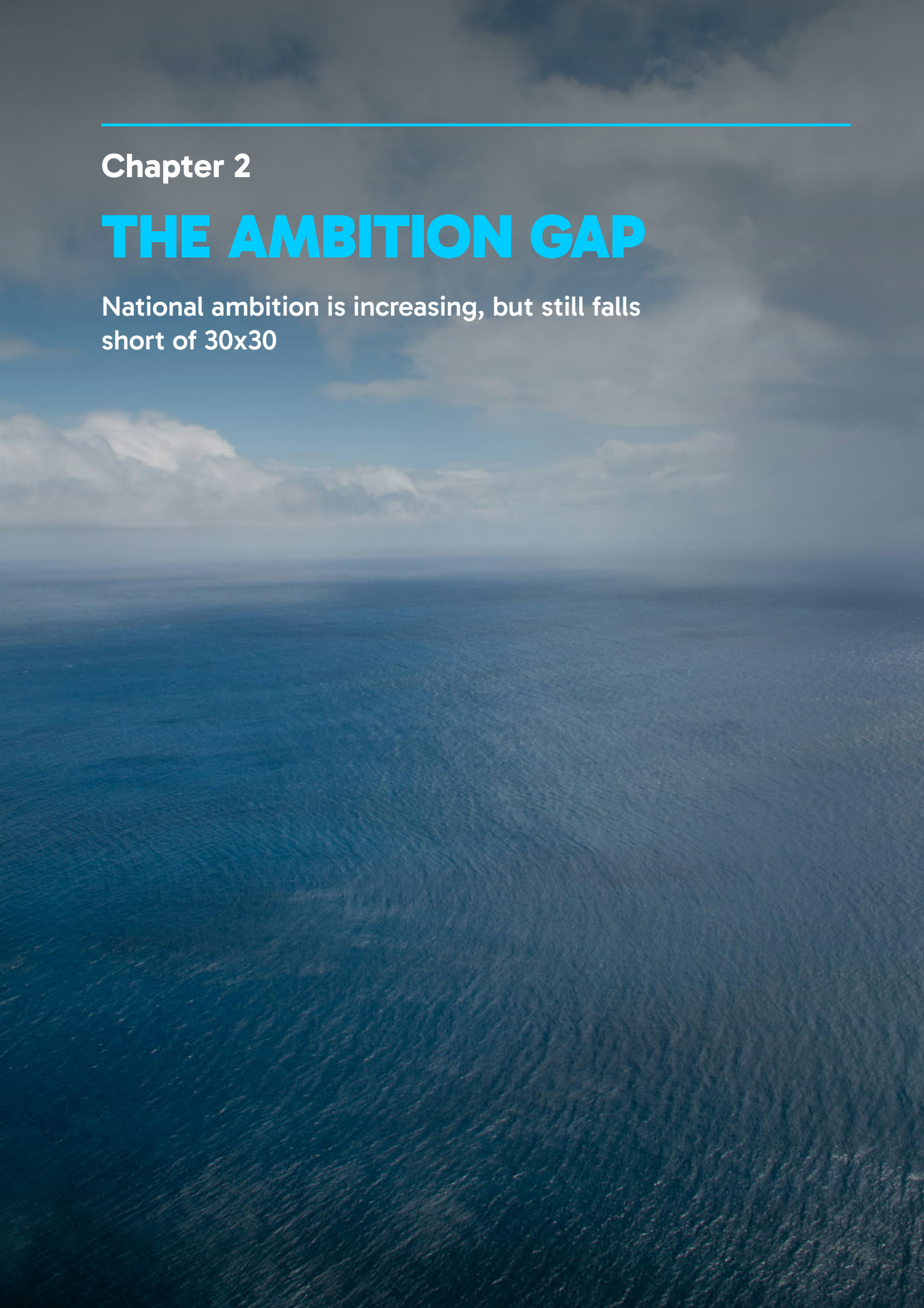
30x30 will only deliver these benefits if protection, conservation and management measures are effective. While the right solution for protection looks different from zone to zone, protected areas need appropriate rules, active management, enforcement, community support and long-term finance.



Chapter 2

THE AMBITION GAP

National ambition is increasing, but still falls short of 30x30



More countries have set measurable 2030 targets since last year, but even if all current commitments are delivered, only 12% of the global ocean would be protected and conserved by 2030.

National ambition has improved since 2025, with lower-income countries showing particularly high ambition, but overall global ambition remains far below what is required to achieve 30x30. Of the 155 countries assessed for this report,ⁱⁱⁱ nearly half now have quantified, timebound 2030 targets, compared with less than a third last year. If fully delivered, these national commitments would protect around 26% of national waters by 2030, still short of the 30% target. Because national waters account for 39% of the global ocean and given the very low protection of the High Seas today, these commitments would translate into protection of only around 12% of the global ocean by 2030.

The “Ambition Gap” measures how far countries' stated national commitments fall short of the global 30x30 target. It assesses national marine and coastal targets submitted through the CBD's online reporting tool against the GBF's Target 3,^{iv, v}

The improvement since last year reflects 22 additional countries now meeting the criteria for a quantified 2030-timebound target compared to last year. 17 of these are countries submitting targets via the CBD reporting tool for the first time.¹⁴ Six countries updated their targets to make them quantified and/or timebound to 2030.^{15, 16}



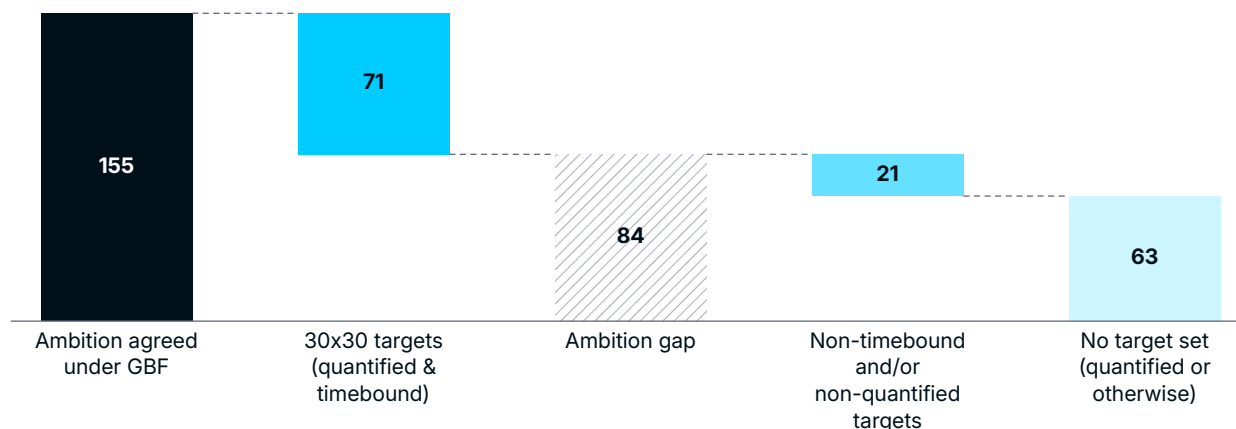
iii. The 155 countries consist of 154 CBD parties with coastlines, plus the United States which is not a party to the CBD.

iv. Under the CBD, countries committed to the 23 Targets of the GBF and to submit National Targets and/or National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) by 2024. Setting the targets ensures ambition in line with the GBF is set at national level, coordination with national policy, and enable action plans. For this report, we have analysed countries' GBF Target 3 commitments, with which countries commit to effectively conserving and managing at least 30% of the world's land, inland waters, and ocean by 2030.

v. The CBD online reporting tool was used for establishing an overview of all national commitments. However, the tool's capacity to provide a fully comprehensive overview is limited, as some countries do not have submitted their national targets via this tool, yet, and not all target entries are up to date. Therefore, for certain country case studies, further sources on the status of a country's target were used.

Graph: Less than half of coastal countries have made commitments aligned to 30x30 for the ocean

Gap between total number of coastal countries signed up to the GBF and those with GBF-T03 related targets for ocean protection (# of countries)



Most income groups have strengthened their ambition. Upper-middle-income countries saw the largest increase in quantified 2030 targets since 2025 of any income group, at over 21%, while the share among low-income countries increased by only 7%.

This represents meaningful progress in formal target-setting, but not all of the increase reflects increased ambition over the past year. Countries have continued to submit and update National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) following adoption of the GBF and the 2024 submission deadline. Some of the year-on-year increase therefore reflects NBSAPs being submitted to the CBD database or being expressed in a more quantified form, rather than governments adopting wholly new levels of ambition in 2026.¹⁷

Ambition also remains unevenly distributed, with some of the highest levels of formal ambition found among countries with the least fiscal capacity to implement it. Low-income countries have the highest share of quantified 2030 targets across income groups, at 60%, while high-income countries have the lowest at 37%, despite generally having greater fiscal and institutional capacity. Ambition is therefore not concentrated where the greatest financial capacity sits, reinforcing the importance of international finance. Without sufficient capacity and resource support, countries may not be able to achieve their ambition.

Membership in high-ambition coalitions is generally associated with stronger target-setting, but many members have yet to translate commitments into quantified and timebound targets. Around 66% of High Ambition Coalition members and 73% of High-Level Panel members have quantified 2030 targets.¹⁸

Ambition remains unevenly distributed, with some of the highest levels of formal ambition found among countries with the least fiscal capacity to implement it.

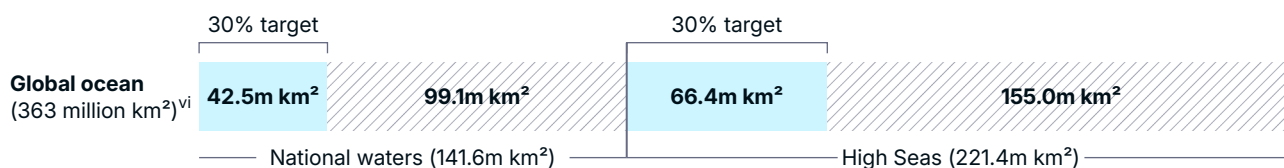


Some countries have adjusted target timelines to beyond 2030, but this does not necessarily reflect weaker ambition. Post-2030 timelines may reflect countries' caution on the barriers to implementation – as in the Dominican Republic and Seychelles, both targeting 30% by 2035. In some cases, delayed timelines go hand-in-hand with targets higher than 30%: Gambia aims for 35% by 2035, and Panama for 60% by 2035.

Targets submitted through the CBD database provide a consistent measure of formal national intent, but they do not capture the full picture of national policy or implementation. Some countries have domestic marine commitments that are not recorded in the tool, while submissions may also be incomplete or out-of-date. For some countries, the assessment of targets can understate progress. In five countries, reported marine protection already exceeds the level stated in their submitted national target: Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Comoros, and the UK.¹⁹ A further six countries protect significant

areas of their seas but have not formally submitted targets: Palau, New Zealand, Monaco, Ecuador, Indonesia, and the US.²⁰

Even allowing for these limitations, current national commitments remain well short of a credible pathway to 30x30. Established protected areas and quantified targets together now account for 26% of national waters – an increase of 3% from 2025. Even if all existing national commitments were achieved – an ambitious scenario based on historic trends – global coverage would reach approximately 12% by 2030, leaving a significant shortfall to 30%. To reach the global target of protecting 30% of the ocean, closing this shortfall would require a dramatic expansion of effective conservation and management in the High Seas from less than 2% today to nearly 33% by 2030. This underscores the scale and urgency with which High Seas protection must expand in the next four years to keep 30x30 within reach.



SCENARIOS TO 2030²³

Current commitments: If all existing marine targets were delivered in full, and proposed areas in the Antarctic currently under consideration were designated by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), global marine and coastal coverage would reach approximately 12% by 2030, of which approximately 11% would be attributable to coverage in EEZs and approximately 2% would be attributable to coverage in the High Seas.²⁴ Within national waters alone, where conservation delivers the greatest biodiversity benefits, coverage would reach approximately 26% by 2030.

Global acceleration: Assuming the remaining countries without quantified targets adopt targets of comparable ambition, and priority biodiversity

areas in the High Seas are fully protected, global marine and coastal coverage would increase to approximately 26% by 2030. Achieving this outcome would require not only expansion in Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), but also rapid implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.

Historical pace: Assuming progress would follow historical pace, global marine and coastal coverage would reach approximately 15% by 2030. The observed rate of expansion was 17% per year in 2016–2020 (i.e., in the run-up to the Aichi deadline) and 6% per year in 2022–2026 (i.e., since acceptance of GBF). Even if the world continued at these high rates of expansion, this projection would still fall short of Target 3 by 2030.

vi. Illustrative only. The GBF does not require the 30% to be achieved in national waters and in the High Seas but is a global target.



National ambition is also rising faster than implementation, widening the gap between commitments on paper and reported protection.

National targets are an essential first step, but their value ultimately depends on whether they are translated into designation and implementation. A quarter of countries with a target to protect at least 30% of their marine areas have not yet legally designated any of their waters as protected areas.²¹ More than half have designated 5% or less.

This gap widens further when considering effective protection: 79% of countries with a target of at least 30% still have 0% of their national waters assessed as fully or highly protected.²²

NBSAPs and setting quantified 2030 targets are an essential first step towards delivering 30x30, but do not provide the full picture of progress.

Quantified targets in NBSAPs translate global commitments into national priorities, provide a basis for spatial and investment planning, help coordinate action across government and create signals for funders, businesses and civil society. They also strengthen transparency and accountability by establishing a benchmark against which progress can be assessed. However, the larger challenge is that stated ambition is not yet translating into protection at the necessary pace. Closing the gap to 2030 will require countries not only to strengthen their commitments, but also to establish the finance, governance and delivery systems needed to implement them.

Chapter 3

THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

From paper protection to effective protection

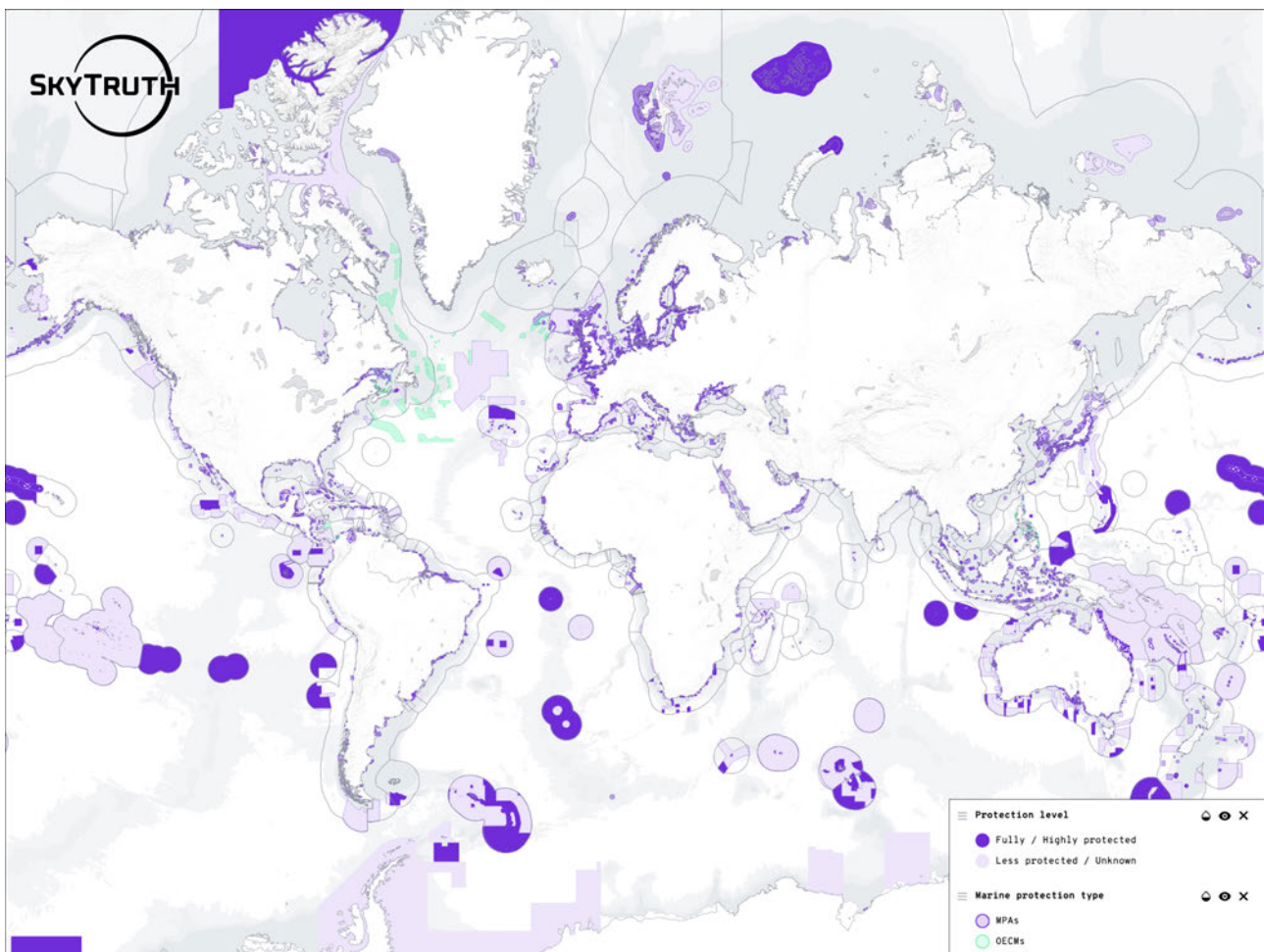


The world has reached an important milestone: more than 10% of the global ocean is now reported as protected or conserved.

Reported protection of some of the ocean's most important ecosystems is higher than the global average: 42% of warm-water corals, 33% of mangroves and 24% of seagrasses occur within protected and conserved areas.

However, just 3.5% of the global ocean is assessed and deemed to be effectively protected.^{vii} This represents less than a 1% increase since 2025, or less than

3,000,000km², with just over four years left to deliver 30x30. Fully and highly protected zones account for only around one-third of reported coverage, indicating a substantial gap between designation and the conditions most strongly associated with ecological outcomes. To deliver on 30x30, the area of ocean under effective protection would need to increase almost ninefold in four years.



vii. This report uses MPAtlas analysis of fully/highly protected zones as a proxy for the share of the ocean that is currently effectively protected. In MPAtlas, areas are classified as 'Fully Protected' when no impact from extractive or destructive activities is allowed and all abatable impacts are minimized, and 'Highly Protected' when only light extractive activities are allowed that have low total impact, and all other abatable impacts are minimized. While not all MPAs need to be fully or highly protected in order to be effective, these categories are consistently associated with the strongest ecological outcomes and therefore provide the best globally consistent proxy currently available. Achieving effective protection also depends on enabling conditions including equitable governance, sustainable financing, and effective monitoring and enforcement. At the global scale, achieving effective conservation outcomes further depends on protected and conserved areas forming science-based, connected and representative networks – dimensions that are not yet consistently assessed at the global scale.

Effective protection means an area has been assessed and regulation and active management are in place to ensure minimal or no damaging practices – such as industrial fishing, mining, or oil and gas exploration or extraction – are occurring, such that the target conservation outcomes can be achieved.

While countries may meet the 30% conservation and management target through legal designation, designation alone does not guarantee biodiversity outcomes. Protected and conserved areas must also be effectively governed, financed, managed and enforced if they are to recover ecosystems and deliver benefits for people. Where damaging activities continue largely unrestricted, protection is unlikely to achieve its intended conservation objectives or the long-term social and economic benefits that healthy marine ecosystems provide. A minimally protected area that restricts use of a single fishing gear and allows all others will not achieve the same conservation benefits as a no-take area, which restricts all extractive activities.

Area coverage alone is no longer a sufficient measure of progress. As countries move towards 30x30, attention must also be given to whether protected and conserved areas are delivering meaningful outcomes for biodiversity and people.

The ocean protection gap is commonly understood as the difference between the 10% reported as protected today and the 30% we need to reach. Closing the implementation gap – between designation and effective protection – will determine whether 30x30 delivers meaningful outcomes for biodiversity, climate and people.

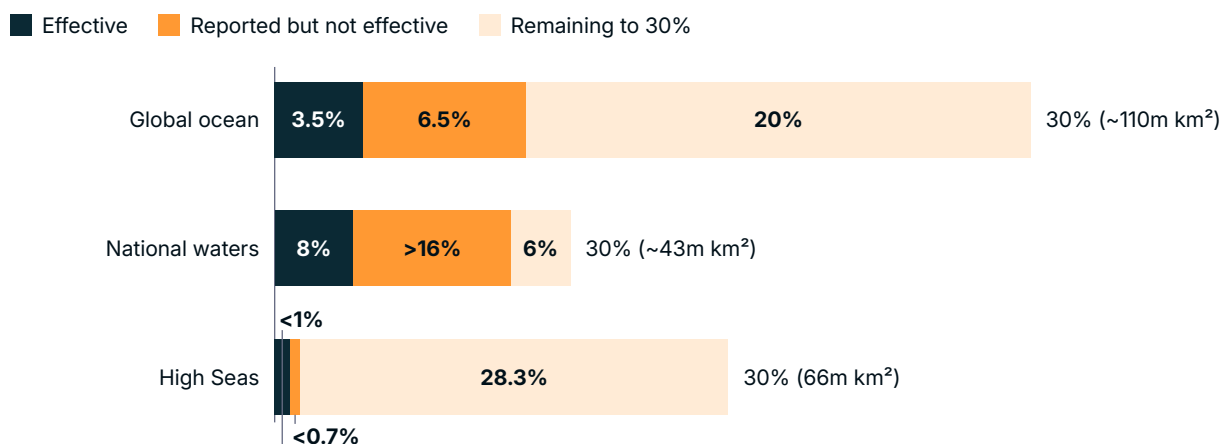
The implementation gap is evident within national waters. Although around 24% of national waters are reported as protected or conserved, just 8% are effectively protected – around one-third of the reported total.

The remaining two thirds are a mix of lightly protected, minimally protected, or designated but not yet implemented.²⁵ Only three countries have met or exceeded 30% effective protection – Chile, Palau, and the UK. Chile is the only country to have passed this milestone in the last year. The UK's reported coverage is driven largely by extensive MPAs in its Overseas Territories, with protection levels in domestic waters substantially lower and bottom trawling remaining permitted in many designated MPAs.

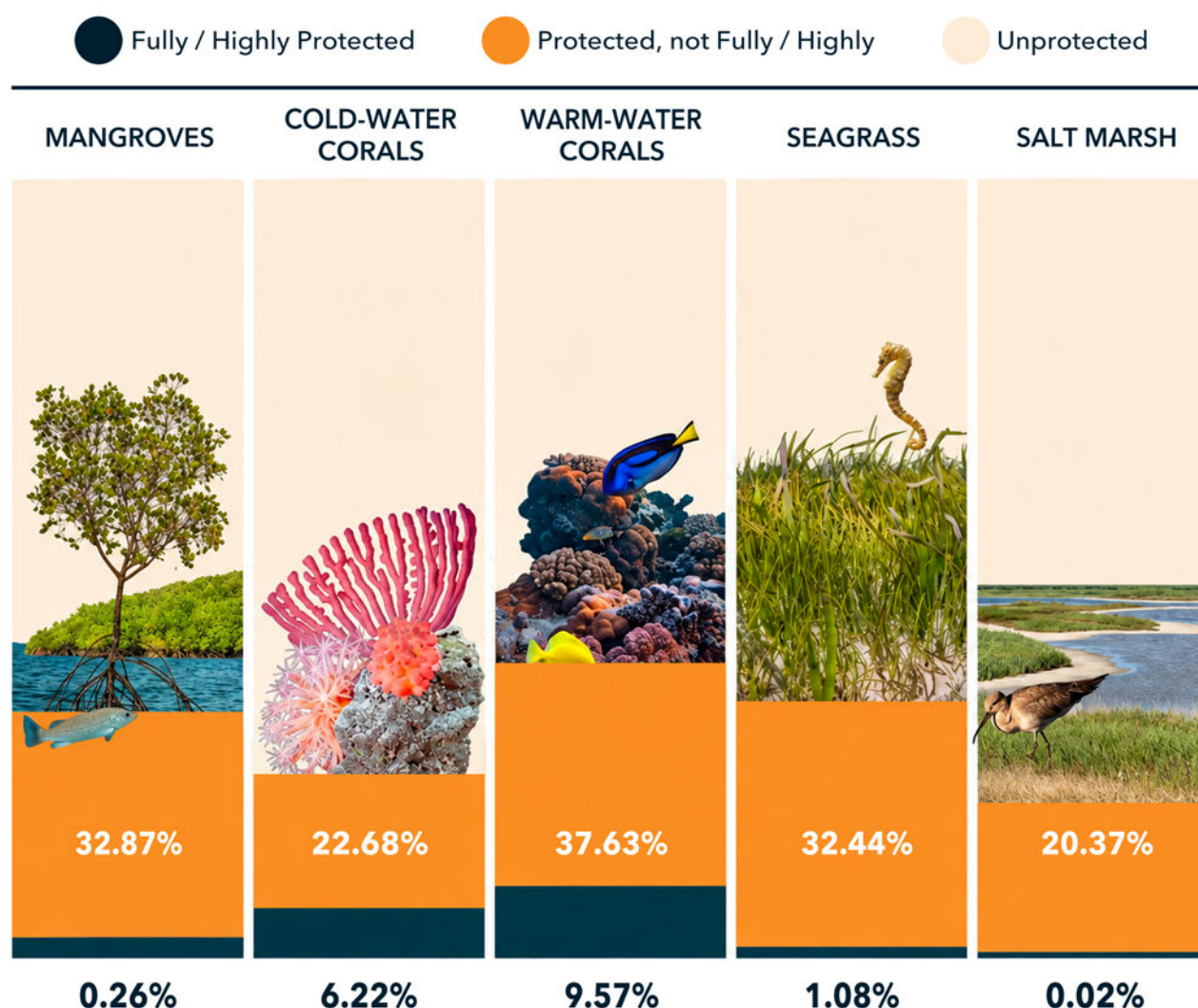


The High Seas account for the largest remaining ocean protection gap

Progress towards the 30% target in national waters and the High Seas, showing the share effectively protected, reported as protected but not effectively protected, and still requiring protection. Bar lengths are proportional to the area represented by 30% of each jurisdiction.



There is a stark difference between the share of key habitats reported as protected, and the share assessed as fully or highly protected



The gap between reported protection and full or high protection is even more acute on the High Seas, where just 1.45% is protected today, and less than 1% is considered effective – an area roughly the size of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Moving from less than 1% effective protection to 30% would require adding roughly 65 million km², an area more than six times the size of Europe. The first generation of High Seas MPAs under the BBNJ Agreement will be an important test of whether countries can translate diplomatic ambition into effective conservation measures on the water. It will be critical to build effectiveness into High Seas MPA proposals from the outset, rather than repeating the same gap seen in national waters. There is no

time to create a new generation of paper parks on the High Seas.

Headline figures on the protection level of key ecosystems also obscure the fact that effectiveness here is concerningly low.

New analysis for this report shows that while protection of key marine habitats is relatively high on paper, only a small share is assessed as being effectively protected: 33% of mangroves are reported as protected or conserved, but just 0.3% fall within areas assessed and deemed as fully or highly protected; for seagrass the figures are 34% and 1.1%, respectively; and while 47% of warm-water corals fall within protected areas, less than 10% are fully or highly protected.²⁶

Effective and equitable protection and conservation are essential to unlocking the full value of 30x30 for the ocean. The economic case for 30x30 set out in last year's report, and summarised in Chapter 1, depends on protection delivering outcomes: healthier ecosystems, recovering fish stocks, resilient coastal habitats, stronger tourism assets and more secure livelihoods. Paper parks will not generate these returns. The benefits come from areas that are well-designed, effectively managed and supported by communities.

There are encouraging signs that some countries are beginning to shift from coverage alone towards greater effectiveness, although progress remains uneven. Samoa and Portugal are two examples that have made meaningful increases in effective protection since last year's report, increasing their effective protection to 25.6% and 9.5% respectively. As part of its national plan on nature protection, Indonesia has committed to assess the effectiveness of 19.1

million hectares of existing MPAs alongside designating new areas. The French Pacific provides further examples of this transition: in June 2026, French Polynesia announced the expansion of fully protected waters by another 520,000 km². This brings around 1.4 million km², or 30% of French Polynesia's waters, under full protection from extractive industries.²⁷ Meanwhile, there is ongoing work on management planning, zoning, Green List ambitions and possible expansion of highly protected areas in New Caledonia to strengthen governance and management of the 1.3 million km² Coral Sea Natural Park, one of the world's largest MPAs. Belgium has committed to strengthen monitoring systems, biodiversity databases and restoration programs that support effective protection. Regional initiatives such as MedFund, MedPAN and WIOMSA also point to a growing focus on management effectiveness and long-term financing, rather than new designations alone.

CASE STUDY

INDONESIA

Strengthening the implementation of marine protection

Indonesia is expanding its MPA network while shifting the focus from designation to management effectiveness. Under its national biodiversity plan, the government has committed to assessing the effectiveness of 19.1 million hectares of existing marine protected areas alongside the creation of new ones.

In early 2026, the provincial government of Maluku and Blue Alliance Indonesia signed an agreement delegating the long-term management of 1.4 million hectares of marine conservation areas. This public-private partnership sets clear rules for the co-management of six large conservation areas and for investment in the blue economy.

Maluku sits within the Coral Triangle and holds coral reefs, fisheries and ecosystems that underpin regional food security and climate resilience.



Effective long-term management of these 1.4 million hectares is expected to support reef recovery, strengthen ecosystem resilience to climate pressures, improve food security and sustain coastal livelihoods.

What sets the initiative apart is its combination of formal government authority, durable implementation capacity and an ambition to build sustainable financing through the blue economy, rather than treating MPA management as a short-term conservation project. The model has been in operation since 2024 in Banggai, Central Sulawesi for 750,000 hectares, where it has delivered larger and more stable management teams and operating budgets, credible enforcement, meaningful participation by customary-rights holders and fishing communities, transparent benefit sharing and measurable ecological outcomes.

CASE STUDY

A SCALABLE MODEL FOR COMMUNITY-LED PROTECTION IN THE COMOROS

In the Comoros, coastal communities depend heavily on reef fisheries, but declining fish stocks and degraded reefs are placing food security and livelihoods under growing pressure. Dahari, an NGO established in 2013, is working to address this gap by supporting fishers to develop permanent, community-led no-take zones. Fishers themselves lead the selection of areas, agree management rules and monitor compliance, giving those most dependent on ocean health greater agency in its recovery.

The first site, the Vassy marine no-take zone, was set up in 2021 by the Malezi Mema fishers' association of Dzindri, Salamani and Vassy on Anjouan. It has already delivered results, backed up by catch monitoring data. In 2023, Ansoiya Mohamed, president of Malezi Mema, testified: "Since we introduced the permanent reserve, fish species that had left are starting to return. Fish like the tripletail ("kafwadji") have now returned and the fishers are catching them".

Tangible recovery of fish stocks is helping build support among local communities and those further afield. The original reserve has since been expanded, more than doubling its size from 8 to 20 hectares, and its success has also inspired the establishment in early 2026 of three further sites, in Kowé, Maweni and Moya.



The next step is formal legal recognition. Although the no-take zones are recognised and managed locally, the absence of a legal framework at the national level leaves them vulnerable to being displaced by future plans and limits access to long-term finance. Recent government commitments at the 2026 Our Ocean Conference to recognise community-managed areas in Comorian law could change that — securing these gains, rewarding the fishers delivering them, and creating a pathway for community stewardship at scale.

Community-led protection, including in OECMs or LLMA or areas that could be recognised as OECMs, remains under-recognised in global tracking systems, despite its importance for durable implementation. Locally managed and community-governed areas can deliver biodiversity and livelihood benefits, but many remain invisible in official statistics. Better recognition of community-led and Indigenous-led protection – with safeguards, consent and robust evidence of biodiversity outcomes – could

improve both the accuracy and equity of global progress towards 30x30. These approaches show that other stakeholders beyond governments can play an important role in effective protection. Durable protection will depend not only on ecological outcomes, but on legitimacy, fairness and local support. Recent developments point to growing recognition of these approaches: Kenya has committed to expanding recognition of co-managed marine areas as OECMs.

OECMs could help expand recognition of effective community-led areas, but only with robust integrity standards that ensure they meet CBD criteria and secure the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of rights-holders.

In the right context, OECMs have the potential to recognise a wider range of conservation models, including community-led, Indigenous-led and multi-use areas that deliver biodiversity outcomes outside formal MPAs – acting as a complementary solution.

Technology is reducing barriers to effective implementation. Advances in satellite monitoring,

vessel tracking, remote sensing, AI and data platforms have the potential to transform how marine protected and conserved areas are monitored and managed. These technologies are improving transparency, strengthening compliance and enforcement, and reducing the cost of monitoring large and remote marine areas, including on the High Seas. While technology cannot replace the need for effective governance, sustainable finance or local capacity, it can significantly improve the feasibility and affordability of effective implementation.

TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING THE ECONOMICS OF EFFECTIVE OCEAN PROTECTION

Technology is reducing the cost of surveillance, but effective protection still depends on people and institutions.

Satellite monitoring, autonomous vessels and artificial intelligence are making it cheaper to observe large and remote areas. They can identify dark vessels, suspicious fishing patterns and pollution events, helping enforcement agencies target scarce patrol capacity. Today, the base case for the late 2020s is that satellite-USV tip-and-cue absorbs the bulk of routine monitoring, with crewed OPVs reserved for boarding and interdiction. This paradigm shift in ocean monitoring was considered – even last year – as a distant future. But technology cannot determine ecological recovery, resolve jurisdictional responsibility or impose sanctions on its own. Its value depends on trained staff, clear mandates, interoperable data and reliable operating budgets.

1. Detection: Advances in technology are making it possible to observe large and remote areas more continuously and at lower cost.

- Satellite RF surveillance is on a steep cost curve: Unseenlabs' BRO constellation now stands at 21 nanosatellites plus its first Gen-2 microsatellite

(BRO-31), delivering dark-vessel detection over swaths of up to ~300,000 km² per pass on subscription contracts one to two orders of magnitude cheaper per km² than crewed patrol.²⁸

- Unmanned surface vehicles follow the same curve: Saildrone's Voyager, deployed under a US\$15.5M USCG contract for 16 vessels in March 2026 (~US\$970k per vessel), sustains months-long autonomous patrols with a full radar/EO/IR/ML detection stack at what Saildrone estimates is ~4% of conventional-vessel cost.²⁹
- Low-cost satellite connectivity is an important enabler of detection. Services such as Starlink Maritime allow autonomous vessels, onboard sensors and remote monitoring systems to transmit data in near real time, at lower costs than was historically possible. Its unlimited tier is roughly 10 times cheaper than Inmarsat, the incumbent traditional maritime technology, with terminals 5 to 15 times cheaper too. This price cut happened in September 2025, making high-seas communication increasingly affordable and viable at scale.³⁰

2. Verification: Detection alone is not enough. AI and data platforms add a further layer, turning raw satellite and tracking data into actionable, attributable intelligence at a scale manual review cannot match.

- SkyTruth's Cerulean platform applies machine learning to satellite radar imagery to automatically detect oil slicks, then cross-references vessel tracking and infrastructure data to flag the likely source, whether a passing ship or an offshore platform. Cerulean is open-source and publicly accessible, giving enforcement agencies and civil society a continuously updated global monitoring tool without the cost of commercial alternatives. Because satellite imagery can be ambiguous, SkyTruth pairs its AI detections with expert human verification, underscoring the continued need for capacity and finance to ensure that automated tools are accurate, credible, and ultimately help achieve meaningful outcomes.

While there is still a long way to go in our understanding of the ocean, the data required to cheaply police and (non-scientifically) monitor the



oceans generally already exists (although to a lesser extent for the High Seas). Whether AI- or human-generated, data still needs to be processed. The key task for organisations working on this is to ensure that it is available and usable in a way that is optimised for delivery. A number of organisations, including SkyTruth and WCS, are working on this topic.

3. Response: The gains that technology could unlock will only be realised if governments and partners invest in the people and institutions needed to use these systems and act on their findings: trained staff, clear mandates, legal follow-up, port-state cooperation, community monitoring and stable operational budgets.

Understanding and addressing the conditions required for effective implementation will determine whether 30x30 delivers meaningful conservation outcomes or protection only on paper:

- **Durable finance.** Long-term, predictable financing is essential to support management, monitoring, enforcement and community-led stewardship over time. Domestic finance will need to provide the bulk of ongoing management costs, which requires putting ocean protection higher up on finance ministers' agenda, but international funding, philanthropy and the private sector all have roles to play.
- **Open data and transparency.** Accessible data, monitoring systems and public reporting are critical for accountability, enforcement and informed decision-making.
- **Equity, inclusivity, and a human rights-based approach.** Effective protection and conservation must recognise and support the rights, leadership, knowledge and stewardship of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- **Strong management and enforcement.** Protected areas require clear objectives, robust management plans, effective compliance systems and sufficient institutional capacity to implement protections in practice.

Chapter 4

THE FINANCE GAP

Financing remains the biggest constraint on delivering effective protection



30x30 cannot be delivered without sustained finance to establish, manage and maintain effective protection – but current funding remains far below what is needed

The world currently spends ~US\$1.8billion a year protecting its ocean, roughly one-tenth of the estimated financing needs.³¹ This is the equivalent of just one month's worth of the US\$22 billion governments spend each year on harmful fishing subsidies.³² The latest reported estimates suggest that global finance for ocean protection increased by around 50% compared with estimates reported in last year's report. This does not necessarily represent a 50% increase in one year: much of the difference reflects updated datasets and reporting periods. Regardless of methodology, finance remains close to one-tenth of the estimated need. The finance gap remains one of the most significant constraints on delivering effective protection.

Ocean protection has consistently received a disproportionately small share of global biodiversity finance. Most international funding for protected and conserved areas targets terrestrial ecosystems, with marine areas accounting for just 14% of total flows, despite covering more than 70% of the Earth's surface.³³

At current flows, the world faces an annual ocean protection financing gap of just over US\$14 billion. Without a step change in finance, many countries will struggle to effectively manage protected and conserved areas over the long term. The implementation gap and the finance gap are two sides of the same problem.

The overwhelming majority of financing needed – around 95% – is for long-term management, not one-off establishment. Staff, monitoring, enforcement, community engagement, governance and regular scientific review cannot be funded by one-off grants or project cycles.

Short-term project funding is not enough to deliver 30x30. Effective protection requires reliable, long-term finance that can support management over decades, not just cover designation costs or launch activities. This means expanding the use of durable public finance mechanisms, including budget allocations, trust funds, endowments, conservation funds, debt instruments, earmarked levies, fees on sectors that benefit from or degrade marine ecosystems, and subsidy reform.

Around

US\$1.8bn

spent each year protecting the ocean, the equivalent of one month's worth of the US\$22 billion governments spend each year on harmful fishing subsidies



CASE STUDY

NIUE'S OCEAN CONSERVATION COMMITMENTS

financing the long-term management of a large-scale marine protected area

Niue, a small island developing state in the South Pacific, has protected 100% of its exclusive economic zone under the Nukutuluea Multiple-Use Marine Park, including the 127,000 km² Moana Mahu no-take zone, covering 40% of its waters. Like most SIDS, its challenge is not designation but financing long-term management over decades.

To address this, Niue launched Ocean Conservation Commitments (OCCs) in 2023. OCCs are a novel instrument designed to capitalise a long-term endowment, the NOW Trust. One OCC represents the cost of protecting one square kilometre of Moana Mahu for a year, priced at NZ\$12.50/km²/year, or NZ\$250 over the 20-year commitment. With 127,000 km² protected, the mechanism is structured to raise a NZ\$32 million endowment whose returns fund enforcement, monitoring, community-led management and climate resilience in perpetuity.

The OCC mechanism is governed by the NOW Trust, a public-private partnership between the Government of Niue and the local NGO Tofia Niue. The Trust is overseen by a board split evenly between government and non-government representatives, and channels funding to conservation activities through



14 village resource-management committees, giving local communities a direct role in how protection is delivered on the water.

OCCs are structured as commitments rather than credits. They confer no ownership, resale rights or financial return, and are not tradeable. Their integrity rests on the guaranteed protection of a legally designated no-take area rather than on biodiversity-uplift verification, which keeps monitoring costs within Niue's capacity.

By March 2026, Niue had raised around NZ\$13.3 million, with sponsors ranging from individuals to heads of state. Repeat surveys between 2016 and 2023 recorded a 60% increase in fish biomass and a 45% increase in top predators, evidence that durable, country-driven finance can underpin effective protection.

By March 2026, Niue had raised around

NZ\$13.3 million

Domestic public spending remains the largest source of finance for ocean protection, but is still far too low, particularly given its critical role in financing long-term management. Effective ocean protection is a public good that contributes to private returns. It delivers food security, coastal resilience, climate benefits and biodiversity, and supports long-term productivity and yield outcomes that markets systematically underprice. This is why sovereign budgets must provide the initial backbone of long-term management finance.

There is currently no comprehensive, consistently reported global dataset on domestic public spending for marine protection. Based on analysis of figures reported in UNEP State of Finance for Nature 2026, domestic public spending on marine protection reached nearly US\$1.5 billion in 2023, an increase of around 50% compared with the 2022 data reported in 2025's Ocean Protection Gap report.³⁴ This suggests a meaningful increase, but spending remains far below the scale of need.

The annual ocean-protection gap is approximately US\$14 billion. Governments spend around US\$22 billion each year on harmful fisheries subsidies. Redirecting less than two-thirds of that support would, in arithmetic terms, be enough to close the gap. The comparison suggests that the finance gap is not solely a question of resource availability, but also of political priorities and allocation.

International public finance has increased but remains piecemeal. Although estimates of international public finance differ depending on methodology and reporting scope, all point to the same conclusion: international finance remains measured in millions of dollars rather than the billions required. The recently launched 30x30 Funding Dashboard estimates multilateral and bilateral flows of up to US\$200 million in 2024, an increase of around one-third from the figure reported in last year's Ocean Protection Gap Report.³⁵

High-income countries should treat international ocean finance as a resilience investment that delivers enhanced biodiversity, climate and development outcomes.

International finance should prioritise countries that hold globally important biodiversity but lack the fiscal space to finance effective protection alone. This is both economically efficient and necessary for equitable delivery.

Philanthropic funding towards marine protection has increased significantly, reaching just under US\$200 million per year, around 60% (more than US\$70 million) higher than last year.³⁶ Philanthropy has played a critical role in catalysing action, accounting for more than half of funding for establishing new protected and conserved areas from 2022–2024 across both terrestrial and marine settings. It can fund science, advocacy, civil society, early-stage design, political engagement, community participation, data systems and innovative models that public finance may be too slow or risk-averse to support. However, while philanthropy is growing and highly catalytic, it cannot finance long-term 30x30 management costs at scale. It can help unlock and shape public finance, but cannot replace sovereign budgets, public financing mechanisms or other durable funding sources.

Private finance can play an important role in helping to close the financing gap as a targeted complement to sovereign and public finance, but its limits should be recognised. Private capital committed to nature has grown fivefold in a decade, reaching US\$63 billion from 2016 to 2025.³⁷ However, marine protection remains a small subset of a market dominated by terrestrial investments like sustainable forestry, agriculture and NatureTech. Growing institutional interest has not yet translated into material flows to ocean conservation specifically.

Most MPAs will not generate sufficient revenue to cover their costs. The core functions of effective protection, such as enforcement, monitoring, management planning, community engagement, governance and scientific review, are public-good functions with no direct revenue model. Private finance will not fund these functions at scale until the market properly accounts for the resilience benefits and dividends from reduced physical risk and avoided losses and/or clearer regulatory signals are in place.

Private capital committed to nature has grown fivefold in a decade, reaching US\$63 billion from 2016 to 2025. However, marine protection remains a small subset of a market dominated by terrestrial investments like sustainable forestry, agriculture and NatureTech. Growing institutional interest has not yet translated into material flows to ocean conservation specifically.

Private finance should therefore be understood as a targeted complement to public finance, deployed where cashflows and commercial structures genuinely exist, not as a solution to a gap that is fundamentally a question of public fiscal commitment.

However, protected areas are productive natural infrastructure, which creates real financing opportunities. Healthy reefs, mangroves and fisheries support food security, coastal protection, tourism and macroeconomic resilience. Where these economic benefits can be quantified, verified and structured, private capital can play a genuine role. The task for governments is to build the enabling frameworks that make this possible. Five models are already showing proof of concept. For example:

- **Sovereign debt conversions** are one of the most proven models to date. The model's success has inspired new efforts to scale up its use, including through the Debt for Nature Coalition, which The Nature Conservancy helped found with six other international organizations. TNC's Nature Bonds Program has six projects in implementation – in Seychelles, Belize, Barbados, Gabon, The Bahamas and Ecuador – expected to unlock approximately US\$1 billion for participatory conservation and climate action. The model uses MDB, DFI and private credit enhancement to obtain better borrowing terms (such as lower interest rates), redirecting fiscal savings into legally binding, milestone-linked conservation commitments over 15-20 year periods. Seychelles reached its final conservation commitment in 2025 with the completion of a marine spatial plan for its ocean, which included the protection of over 30%. The Belize Blue Bonds project, a US\$364 million debt conversion with associated conservation commitments, is approaching its own significant milestone of 30% protection through the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan.³⁸

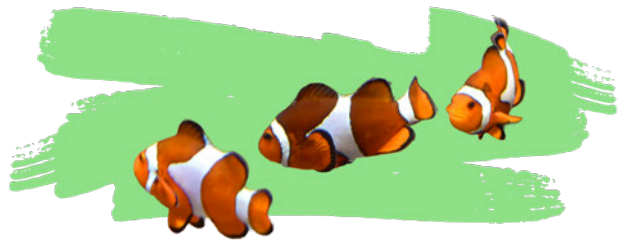
Since 2016, total sovereign conversions have unlocked more than

US\$1.4 billion

- **Parametric insurance** is making ocean ecosystems legible as economic assets. Pre-agreed payouts triggered by storm events fund reef restoration brigades; since Mexico's 2019 pilot, the model has been replicated in Hawaii and Colombia and is now being designed for Indonesia's Gili Matra reefs with triggers linked to sea surface temperature to cover bleaching events. The model works by characterising reef ecosystems as natural infrastructure, with tourism dependent on reef health, and insurance premiums offset by the value of post-storm recovery.
- **Impact debt facilities and blue bonds** are beginning to move private capital at the project level. BNP Paribas and Blue Alliance's US\$35 million impact facility, launched in 2024, provides patient capital to reef-positive businesses within MPAs, including ecotourism, community aquaculture and sustainable fishing, with interest rates indexed to ecosystem impact outcomes. Revenues from these businesses contribute to MPA operating costs, creating a partial revenue model for protection. Marine biodiversity credits are emerging as a further mechanism: the EU's July 2025 Nature Credits Roadmap establishes a strategic framework for stimulating private investment in coastal and marine ecosystems through verified, tradeable biodiversity outcomes.³⁹



- **Project Finance for Permanence (PFP)** offers a model for securing long-term funding beyond changing political or philanthropic priorities that may affect funding allocations. In Canada, 17 First Nations worked with federal and provincial governments, conservation organisations and philanthropic partners to establish the Great Bear Sea PFP. The landmark agreement is backed by CAN\$335 million in initial funding for marine conservation, stewardship and Guardian programs. The financing combines a CAN\$167 million capital-preserving endowment, designed to generate income indefinitely without drawing down the principal, which provides funding for First Nations' marine stewardship work, including MPA implementation, monitoring and governance; a CAN\$120 million Community Prosperity Fund, to be deployed over 10–15 years for community development, cultural programming, stewardship infrastructure, and conservation-based economic development; and a CAN\$48 million fund to implement marine protection plans. The program was funded through a combination of federal and provincial government funding as well as philanthropic contributions.⁴⁰
- **Marine genetic resources can also create non-extractive revenues for pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, cosmetics and other related sectors.** The entry into force of the High Seas Treaty codifies the access and benefit-sharing of marine genetic resources found in areas beyond national jurisdiction into a binding international framework and financing mechanism. The Cali Fund, launched at CBD COP16 in 2024, was designed with the ambition to receive contributions from large companies commercially benefiting from genetic data, with 50% of its resources allocated to the self-identified needs of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. As a voluntary mechanism, the Fund has struggled to raise funds since its inception, underscoring the need for enhanced private sector ambition.



The world has made progress in setting targets and increasing reported protection. But without finance, ambition will not translate into effective protection.

The annual ocean protection gap is approximately

US\$14 billion



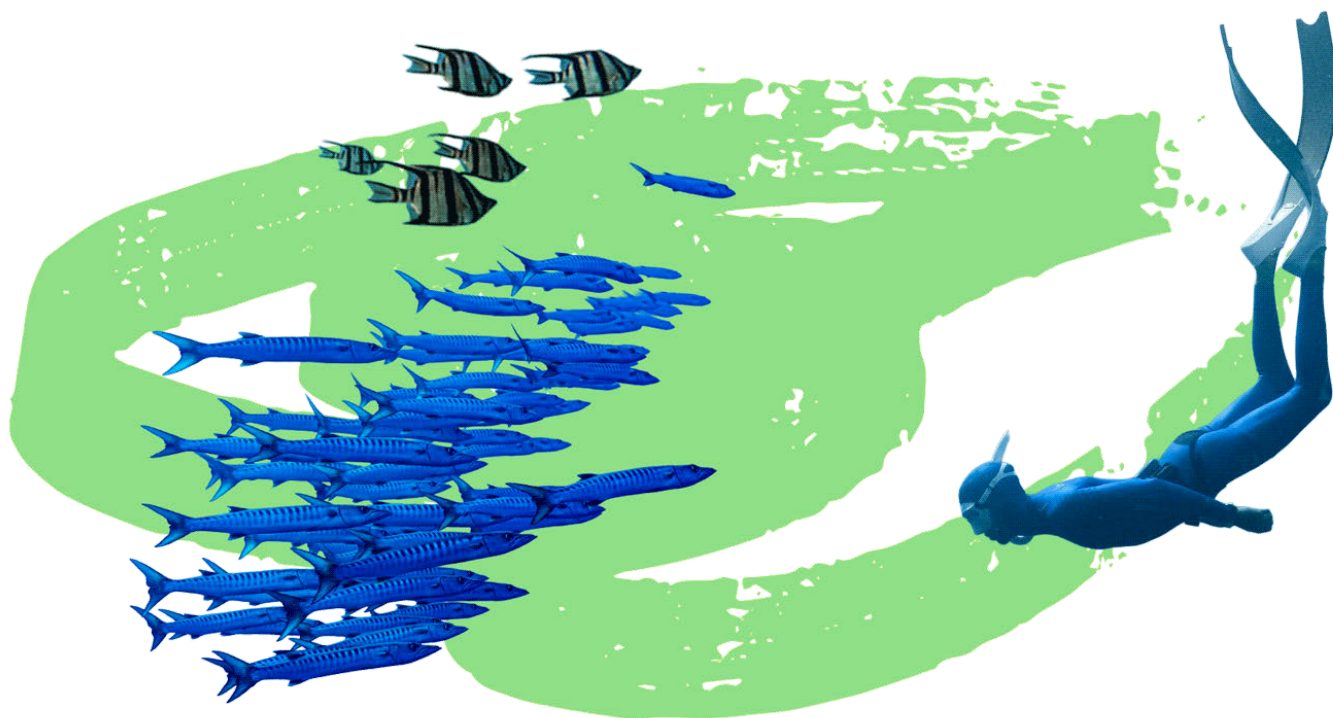
These examples demonstrate that finance can move when ecosystems are treated as natural infrastructure delivering economic value.

Blended finance structures using public or philanthropic capital to absorb first-loss risk are the most proven route to mobilising private investment. DFI credit enhancement, catalytic philanthropy and concessional tranches can bring private participation within acceptable risk bounds. Scaling them requires governments to build the enabling conditions through clear policy and regulatory signals, e.g. through mandating private financial contributions (e.g. through levies, tourism concessions, visitor fees), repurposing harmful public subsidies, and through clear and credible policy frameworks (e.g. adopting mandatory nature-related financial disclosures).

Recent commitments increasingly recognise the financing gap, but remain small relative to global need. At this year's Our Ocean Conference in Mombasa, governments and organisations committed US\$6.4 billion, but less than 6% was

directed to MPAs specifically. The EU's €338 million commitment, the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund's Actioning Blue initiative, MedFund and WIOMSA all show growing recognition. But even taken together, these commitments remain small relative to the US\$14 billion annual gap.

The direction is clear: long-term public finance must anchor delivery, with philanthropy, development finance and private capital deployed strategically to catalyse and complement public investment. The world has many of the tools needed. It now requires fiscal and political commitment at a scale that matches the ambition. The world has made progress in setting targets and increasing reported protection. But without finance, ambition will not translate into effective protection. Closing the finance gap will require governments to recognise ocean protection as an investment in resilience, food security, economic productivity and fiscal stability.



CONCLUSION



The next phase of 30x30 must focus on quality, durability and delivery

The next phase of 30x30 must be judged by delivery. The world has passed 10% reported ocean protection, more countries have adopted measurable targets, and the High Seas Treaty has created a historic pathway to protect areas beyond national jurisdiction. These are important gains. But they have not yet produced a credible route to 30% effective protection by 2030.

Greater ambition remains necessary, but implementation will determine whether 30x30 delivers meaningful outcomes. Governments must continue expanding protection, particularly on the High Seas, but area coverage alone is no longer an adequate measure of progress. Protected and conserved areas must have clear objectives, equitable governance, effective restrictions, operating institutions, transparent monitoring and finance that lasts for decades. Without these conditions, the world risks reaching 30% on paper while ignoring biodiversity loss in the ocean.

CBD COP17 and BBNJ COP1 must turn this diagnosis into a delivery agenda:

- Governments should strengthen and implement national targets; adopt credible plans for converting designated areas into effective protection; and redirect harmful subsidies towards management, enforcement and community stewardship.
- Governments that have not yet ratified the High Seas Treaty should do so without delay ahead of COP1; start preparing for implementation through support for developing high seas MPA proposals; and ensure COP1 establishes the institutions and processes to support delivery of 30x30 on the High Seas.

- High-income countries should increase international support for biodiverse countries with limited fiscal space.
- Philanthropy should fund the science, participation and early-stage preparation that unlock larger public flows.
- Private capital should be deployed selectively where genuine revenues, risk-reduction benefits or outcome payments exist.

The finance required is modest relative to the value at stake and to the public money still supporting ocean degradation. The world now needs to convert political ambition into durable institutions, operating budgets and protection on the water. By 2030, success should be measured not by the area announced, but by the ocean effectively protected and the benefits delivered for biodiversity, climate and people.

CBD COP17 and BBNJ COP1 will be defining moments for the next phase of 30x30. Together, they provide an opportunity not only to strengthen ambition, but to accelerate implementation by mobilising finance, operationalising the Treaty and supporting countries to translate commitments into lasting protection.

ENDNOTES

1. SkyTruth analysis using Protected Planet data on reported protection and the Marine Conservation Institute's MPAtlas data on fully/highly protected areas, and habitat extent layers from UNEP-WCMC and Global Mangrove Watch. See footnote XX for methodology and full list of sources.
2. Protected Planet, MPAtlas.
3. Based on protection as reported to WDPCA / Protected Planet.
4. Together for the Ocean, Ocean Protection Gap, 2025.
5. Agnew et al. 2009.
6. Katherine D. Millage, Juan Mayorga, Sara Orofino, Trisha B. Atwood, Alan M. Friedlander, Louise S.L. Teh, Maria L.D. Palomares, U. Rashid Sumaila, Enric Sala, The value of bottom trawling in Europe, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Volume 278, 2026.
7. This report uses the term "High Seas Treaty" as short-hand for The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, which is known as the BBNJ Agreement or High Seas Treaty. We acknowledge that the scope of the BBNJ Agreement encompasses all Areas beyond national jurisdiction, including the seafloor and water column. This choice of wording is intended to ease understanding for broad audiences and does not convey a prioritization among the components or principles of the BBNJ Agreement.
8. Correct at the time of publication.
9. The conditions set out here are critical to ensuring that individual protected areas deliver their intended conservation outcomes but do not represent all factors relevant to achieving Target 3 at the system-level, including ecological representativeness, connectivity and coverage of areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions.
10. CBD, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
11. Agnew, D.J., Pearce, J., Pramod, G. et al. (2009). Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing.
12. Financial Transparency Coalition, 2022.
13. Sumaila et al. 2020.
14. Albania, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Cuba, East Timor, El Salvador, Federated States of Micronesia, Germany, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Republic of the Congo, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Spain, Tuvalu, Ukraine, and Uruguay.
15. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Honduras, Malta, Pakistan, and Uruguay.
16. The rest of the difference to last year's 49 countries with quantified 2030 targets is explained by a further three countries that have since last year extended the timelines of their targets beyond 2030 and are hence no longer counted as aligned (Dominican Republic, Panama, and the Philippines). One country has deleted their target entry as it is currently defining a new target (France). 5 countries' CBD entries were reclassified since last year, of them five that now qualify as 2030-timebound and quantified (Azerbaijan, Cuba, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, and Spain) as well as two that no longer qualify as 30x30-aligned (South Africa and Suriname).
17. In addition, a small number of countries were assessed as no longer having a timebound and quantified target, either through a reassessment of target data (5) or because of adjustments to their targets (4). In the latter group, France already protects more than 30% of its waters and has in the past submitted a timebound and quantified target; Panama extended its timeline to 2035, meaning it does not meet the 2030 criteria, but did double its target to 60%.
18. The High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People is an intergovernmental group aiming to conserve and manage at least 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030. It currently has 124 member countries, of which 103 are coastal. The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy is a commitment to achieve 100% sustainable ocean management of areas within national jurisdiction by 2025 (or within five years of joining), currently with 19 member countries. There is a substantial member overlap with HAC.
19. Australia (all waters): 30% target, 51% protection (WDPCA); Argentina (all waters): 30% target, 44% protection; Belgium: 30% target, 38% protection; Comoros: 10% target, 28% protection; UK (all waters): 30% target, 64% protection.
20. The rest of the difference to last year's 49 countries with quantified 2030 targets is explained by a further three countries that have since last year extended the timelines of their targets beyond 2030 and are hence no longer counted as aligned (Dominican Republic, Panama, and the Philippines). One country has deleted their target entry as it is currently defining a new target (France). 5 countries' CBD entries were reclassified since last year, of them five that now qualify as 2030-timebound and quantified (Azerbaijan, Cuba, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, and Spain) as well as two that no longer qualify as 30x30-aligned (South Africa and Suriname).
21. Share of protected waters based on marine protection as reported to WDPCA.
22. The 30x30 Target does not call for 30% to be fully or highly protected. To date, only Australia has set a target of 30% of waters to be in highly protected zones.
23. Campaign for Nature, 30x30 Assessment Gap, 2026.
24. Three marine protected areas covering approximately 3.6 million sq. km have been proposed for designation by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) in the Southern Ocean. See the 30x30 Assessment Gap report for more detail on assumptions and methodology.
25. MPAtlas definitions.
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