



WWF Ocean-Climate COP31 EXPECTATIONS

August 2026

WWF Ocean-Climate Expectations for COP31

From Recognition to Coordinated Action and Implementation

- **Embed ocean action across Paris Agreement delivery**, integrating oceans into mitigation, adaptation, finance, transparency, loss and damage, just transition processes, and preparations for GST2.
- **Recognize that limiting any temporary exceedance of 1.5°C requires accelerated implementation** of ambitious NDCs, including a rapid transition away from fossil fuels, onshore and offshore, and reductions in methane emissions, to safeguard the ocean and cryosphere and support long-term climate resilience.
- **Integrate the ocean across COP31 outcomes** – recognizing, preferably in a cover decision that healthy ocean ecosystems underpin effective climate mitigation, adaptation and sustainable development, and that efforts to accelerate implementation of the outcomes of the global stocktake should be undertaken in a manner that strengthens the integrity of ocean ecosystems.
- **Translate ocean commitments into delivery**, using the Ocean Breakthroughs and the Blue NDC Challenge, and working through relevant regional governance frameworks including the Regional Seas Conventions, to turn ocean actions in NDCs and NAPs into investable national and regional implementation pathways.
- **Mobilize accessible, accountable ocean-climate finance**, through the 2026 SCF Forum, NCQG implementation, climate funds and sustainable and regenerative blue economy finance and investment instruments, with particular attention to SIDS, LDCs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and vulnerable coastal states.
- **Strengthen the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue** - through a delivery-oriented multi-year workplan aligned with the Paris Agreement ambition cycle, with clear links to negotiations, finance processes and the Global Climate Action Agenda.
- **Advance the protection of the ocean's climate-regulating systems** - safeguarding and restoring blue carbon ecosystems, coral reefs and marine carbon sinks, while reaffirming that rapid, deep and sustained emissions cuts remain the primary means of reducing climate and ocean risks.
- **Apply a precautionary approach to unproven ocean 'solutions'** including carbon removal technologies, marine geoengineering, ocean fertilization, offshore carbon dumping and deep seabed mining.
- **Align climate, biodiversity and ocean governance** – Strengthen coordination and coherence across the Rio Conventions and the BBNJ Agreement, acknowledging the interconnected climate and environmental obligations reinforced by the 2024 ITLOS and 2025 ICJ Advisory Opinions, and using 30x30, Sustainable Ocean Plans and Regional Seas work programmes as practical pathways for implementation.
- **Deliver inclusive, human rights-based, locally-led action** - embedding meaningful participation, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), traditional knowledge, community governance and equitable access to finance across ocean-climate action at all levels.

A stable climate depends on a healthy ocean. By absorbing around a quarter of global carbon dioxide emissions and more than 90% of excess heat, the ocean regulates our climate, drives weather systems, and underpins food security, energy, livelihoods and economies worldwide. Protecting and restoring it is inseparable from delivering the Paris Agreement. However, ocean-based action can only succeed alongside rapid, deep and sustained emissions reductions and a just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels, consistent with the first Global Stocktake. Every fraction of a degree matters to Small Island Developing States and many other coastal communities, for whom keeping 1.5°C within reach is a survival imperative: each incremental increase adds sea-level rise, marine heatwaves, ecosystem loss and irreversible loss and damage.

Yet the ocean's own capacity to buffer the climate is weakening - coral reefs are under unprecedented stress, polar systems are changing rapidly and, in many cases, abruptly, and evidence of major ocean tipping points, including disruption of global circulation, is growing. At the same time, 2026 presents a rare opportunity for coordinated action: the first implementation cycle of the Paris Agreement after the 2025 NDC round coincides with CBD COP17, a strengthened Global Climate Action Agenda, and follows the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement. The shared COP31 Presidency, with Türkiye hosting and leading the World Leaders Summit and Action Agenda, Australia leading the negotiations, and the Pacific hosting the pre-COP, provides a further opportunity to make ocean-climate implementation a visible priority across the Presidency.

COP31 should be remembered as the moment ocean-climate action moved from broad recognition to coordinated action and implementation. Success will not depend on creating new institutions for their own sake, but on making existing instruments work together: negotiated outcomes that integrate the ocean, an Ocean Dialogue that connects technical work to decision-making, an Action Agenda that turns

commitments into investable pipelines, and finance systems that reach the countries and communities already delivering ocean stewardship in an inclusive, rights-based and equitable manner that is informed by science and traditional knowledge.

WWF's ocean-climate expectations for COP31 are therefore practical: ocean implementation should be visible in COP31 decisions and Presidency outcomes; countries should have clearer pathways, partnerships and finance to deliver ocean actions in NDCs and NAPs; and progress should be trackable through the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue, GST2, the Global Climate Action Agenda and regional implementation platforms. Building on the foundations laid at COP30, COP31 should help translate ocean-enhanced national plans, ocean finance commitments, ecosystem protection goals, climate justice priorities and Action Agenda initiatives into measurable implementation and accountable delivery. This is how COP31 can turn a shared Presidency into shared outcomes for the ocean, climate, nature and people.

1. Embed Ocean Action Across the Paris Agreement

COP31 should move ocean action from recognition to implementation by establishing it as a core delivery pathway for achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. The latest round of NDCs demonstrates that the ocean is now firmly embedded in national climate action, with 92% of coastal and island states including at least one ocean-based climate measure. The challenge for COP31 is to translate this progress into implementation while increasing ambition. Parties should use decision text, preferably in a cover decision, to recognize healthy ocean ecosystems as both climate solutions and an enabling condition for effective mitigation, adaptation, resilience and a just transition, while ensuring ocean priorities, listed below, are reflected across

relevant UNFCCC workstreams. Well-designed ocean-based solutions could deliver up to one-third of the emissions reductions needed to keep 1.5°C within reach, but only alongside rapid, deep and sustained emissions reductions and a just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels, which remain the primary means of safeguarding ocean systems and the people who depend on them.

1.1. Accelerate implementation of ocean-based mitigation and adaptation

- **Accelerate the implementation of ocean commitments** through NDCs, NAPs and long-term strategies, prioritizing measures that deliver climate, biodiversity and sustainable development benefits together, including blue carbon protection and restoration, ecosystem-based adaptation, sustainable fisheries, sustainable blue foods, socio-environmentally responsible offshore renewable energy, and ocean decarbonization.
- **Scale under-represented high-impact ocean climate solutions** - zero-emission shipping, socio-environmentally responsible offshore renewable energy, sustainable blue food systems, the protection and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems, and actions to maintain climate resilient coral reefs.

Climate-resilient coral reefs Priorities for COP31

- **Prioritize protection of climate-resilient coral reefs**, using the best available science to strengthen MPAs and locally managed marine areas, reduce local pressures and direct action where reefs have the greatest potential to withstand and recover from climate impacts.

- **Embed climate-resilient reefs in climate and biodiversity implementation**, including NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs, 30x30 implementation and national development strategies, backed by accessible finance for reef nations and community-led stewardship.
- **Build political momentum through the High-Level Political Commitment on Climate-Resilient Coral Reefs**, aiming for 31 government signatories representing more than 80% of the world's coral reefs by COP31.

- **Strengthen implementation support for vulnerable countries and communities** through finance, technology transfer, capacity building, project preparation and knowledge sharing, with particular attention to SIDS, LDCs and vulnerable coastal states.
- **Ground ocean-action in science and precaution** - strengthening ocean observation, early warning, research cooperation and adaptation preparedness, and applying a highly precautionary approach to unproven marine carbon dioxide removal, geoengineering and emerging activities with potentially irreversible impacts, including deep-seabed mining.

1.2. Mainstream ocean action across UNFCCC processes

- **Mainstream ocean priorities across relevant UNFCCC bodies, work programmes and decisions**, ensuring ocean-climate considerations are systematically integrated across mitigation, adaptation, finance, transparency, loss and damage and just transition processes. COP31 should invite

relevant constituted bodies and work programmes to nominate ocean focal points, reflect ocean-based action in their workplans and mandates, and report on progress at the following SB session.

- **Strengthen the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue as the UNFCCC's implementation hub** by adopting, in the SBSTA conclusions at COP31, a delivery-oriented multi-year workplan aligned with the Paris Agreement cycle, with a standing integration item and clear pathways for its outputs to inform the cover decision, CMA agenda and Global Climate Action Agenda.
- **Position GST2 as a catalyst for ocean ambition and implementation**, inviting the Ocean Dialogue co-facilitators to prepare a technical synthesis on ocean-based mitigation and adaptation and implementation barriers, marine and cryosphere resilience, ocean-climate risks and carbon sinks to inform future NDCs and NAPs.
- **Strengthen coherence between ocean science and climate policy** by reviewing the Glasgow Climate Pact's ocean mandate, ensuring just transition discussions encompass maritime and coastal sectors (including fisheries, shipping, socio-environmentally responsible offshore energy, coastal tourism and sustainable blue economy pathways), and inviting the IPCC to consider extending greenhouse-gas inventory guidance to additional blue carbon ecosystems where the evidence base is sufficient.

2. Build Coherence Beyond the UNFCCC

Climate, biodiversity and ocean challenges are deeply interconnected, yet implementation remains fragmented across international agreements and national plans. COP31 should

send a clear signal that coherence across climate, biodiversity and ocean governance is an essential condition for delivery, and encourage stronger alignment between the UNFCCC, CBD, BBNJ Agreement and national planning frameworks (NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs and Sustainable Ocean Plans), in support of a sustainable and regenerative blue economy that delivers benefits for climate, nature and people.

2.1. Strengthen cooperation across international frameworks

- **Acknowledge the key findings of the 2024 ITLOS and 2025 ICJ Advisory Opinions**, which reinforce the interconnected nature of States' climate and environmental obligations, including that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions constitute pollution of the marine environment under UNCLOS and that States have obligations to prevent, reduce and control such pollution.
- **Build on CBD COP17 outcomes and the Rio Conventions cooperation agenda**, aligning NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs, Sustainable Ocean Plans and other national implementation frameworks through integrated ocean planning and ecosystem-based approaches.
- **Encourage closer cooperation between the UNFCCC and the BBNJ Agreement, using the BBNJ Agreement's entry into force** to strengthen coherence between ocean, climate and biodiversity action, supporting the protection of globally important carbon sinks and climate-relevant ocean systems, and enhancing cooperation between the UNFCCC, UNCLOS and its implementing agreements, and other relevant international bodies and frameworks as appropriate.

30x30: a flagship opportunity for integrated implementation

- **Recognize 30x30 as an opportunity for integrated climate and biodiversity**

implementation, with well-designed, effectively managed and connected networks of MPAs, OECMs and other ABMTs helping to align delivery across NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs and Sustainable Ocean Plans and support adaptation, resilience, food security, blue carbon and biodiversity outcomes.

- **Promote equitable and effective 30x30 implementation**, supported by sustainable long-term finance, governance and management, including through relevant Global Climate Action Agenda initiatives, while advancing community-led stewardship and human rights-based approaches, meaningful participation, FPIC, secure tenure rights and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

2.2. Advance sustainable and regenerative blue economy pathways

- **Recognize the sustainable and regenerative blue economy as a core pathway** for delivering climate, biodiversity and sustainable development objectives, integrating mitigation, adaptation, resilient coastal communities and a just transition through nature-positive and socially responsible offshore renewable energy, sustainable fisheries, sustainable blue foods and low-carbon maritime sectors.
- **Promote a just and equitable transition in ocean-dependent sectors**, including inclusive community engagement and benefits, biodiversity safeguards, decent work and resilience for coastal and maritime workforces, while redirecting harmful subsidies and public finance away from activities that undermine ocean resilience and towards nature-positive, community-led solutions.
- **Recognize and resource Indigenous Peoples and local communities as partners in ocean stewardship**, supported by traditional knowledge, community governance systems and

equitable participation in decision-making, implementation and benefit-sharing.

3. Unlock Finance and Accelerate Ocean Implementation

As the UNFCCC enters an era of implementation, delivery depends on mobilizing finance, partnerships and non-Party stakeholders to translate commitments into measurable outcomes. COP31 should connect ocean priorities to the evolving climate finance architecture and use the Global Climate Action Agenda, regional platforms and implementation partnerships to turn ocean actions in NDCs and NAPs into investable projects, regional delivery pathways and long-term resilience outcomes. The sustainable and regenerative blue economy should serve as a principal delivery pathway, linking climate ambition with finance, implementation and inclusive, locally led development.

3.1. Mobilize and track ocean-climate finance

- **Mobilize accessible and accountable finance for ocean action** by encouraging multilateral climate funds, development finance institutions and private finance to expand investment in high-impact ocean solutions, including coastal restoration, sustainable fisheries, resilient infrastructure and sustainable blue economy pathways, alongside the establishment and effective management of protected and conserved marine areas as a platform for delivering these. Ocean priorities should be reflected across the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance, Climate Finance Work Programme, Baku-to-Belém Roadmap, Article 2.1(c) discussions, the Veredas Dialogue and relevant climate funds.
- **Strengthen transparency, tracking and access to ocean-climate finance** by improving definitions, reporting and

accountability, building on the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles and using the 2026 Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) Forum on Financing Climate Action in Water Systems and the Ocean to generate practical recommendations.

- **Expand implementation support and innovative finance mechanisms to complement grant-based and debt sensitive finance, including** through project preparation, technical assistance, direct-access channels and high-integrity financing instruments, including blue bonds, debt-for-nature and debt-for-ocean swaps, blended finance and parametric insurance, while ensuring finance remains inclusive, gender-responsive and rights-based for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, SIDS and vulnerable coastal nations.

3.2. Position the ocean at the heart of the Global Climate Action Agenda

- **Recognize the ocean as a flagship implementation priority**, using the Blue Package (Ocean Breakthroughs) as headline delivery targets and the Blue NDC Challenge and its Taskforce as a primary mechanism for translating ocean commitments, such as the Coral Commitment, into NDC and NAP implementation.
- **Strengthen delivery pathways** that connect national ocean commitments with regional initiatives, implementation accelerators, non-Party stakeholders and investment partners, helping countries move from ambition to bankable projects and measurable outcomes.
- **Use COP31 and related milestones to showcase, catalyze and track progress**, including through the World Leaders Summit, pre-COP, Subsidiary Bodies (SB) sessions, and relevant finance dialogues.

Progress should be tracked through the Ocean Breakthroughs, with updated implementation pathways and reporting ahead of the second Global Stocktake.

- **Position the ocean as a priority within initiatives capable of driving transformative change across climate, biodiversity and sustainable development**, including through Presidency-led platforms, implementation accelerators and regional partnerships that can help scale delivery and generate positive tipping points for people, nature and climate.

3.3. Strengthen regional delivery and accountability

- **Empower regional implementation platforms** by recognizing the leadership of Pacific Island countries, Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, and other regional partnerships in connecting global frameworks with national implementation, facilitating knowledge exchange, mobilizing finance and accelerating delivery across regions.
- **Position Sustainable Ocean Plans and whole-government approaches** as practical models for aligning climate, biodiversity and sustainable development objectives, drawing on experiences such as the Pacific Resilience Facility and Regional Seas platforms to accelerate regional implementation.
- **Strengthen accountability** by connecting governments, finance institutions, technical partners, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and non-Party stakeholders around measurable outcomes, improving the tracking of ocean-climate finance and implementation to build a shared evidence base, identify investment gaps and accelerate delivery.



© Mehmet Tural / WWF

For further information contact:

Pauli Merriman, Interim Senior Director – Oceans, WWF-International; pmerriman@wwfint.org

Fernanda Carvalho, Head of Climate and Energy Policy, WWF-International; fcarvalho@wwfint.org



Working to sustain the natural
world for the benefit of people
and wildlife.

together possible™

panda.org

© 2026

© 1986 Panda symbol WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature
(Formerly World Wildlife Fund)

© “WWF” is a WWF Registered Trademark. WWF, 28 rue
Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111. Fax.
+41 22 364 0332. Website: www.panda.org/oceans