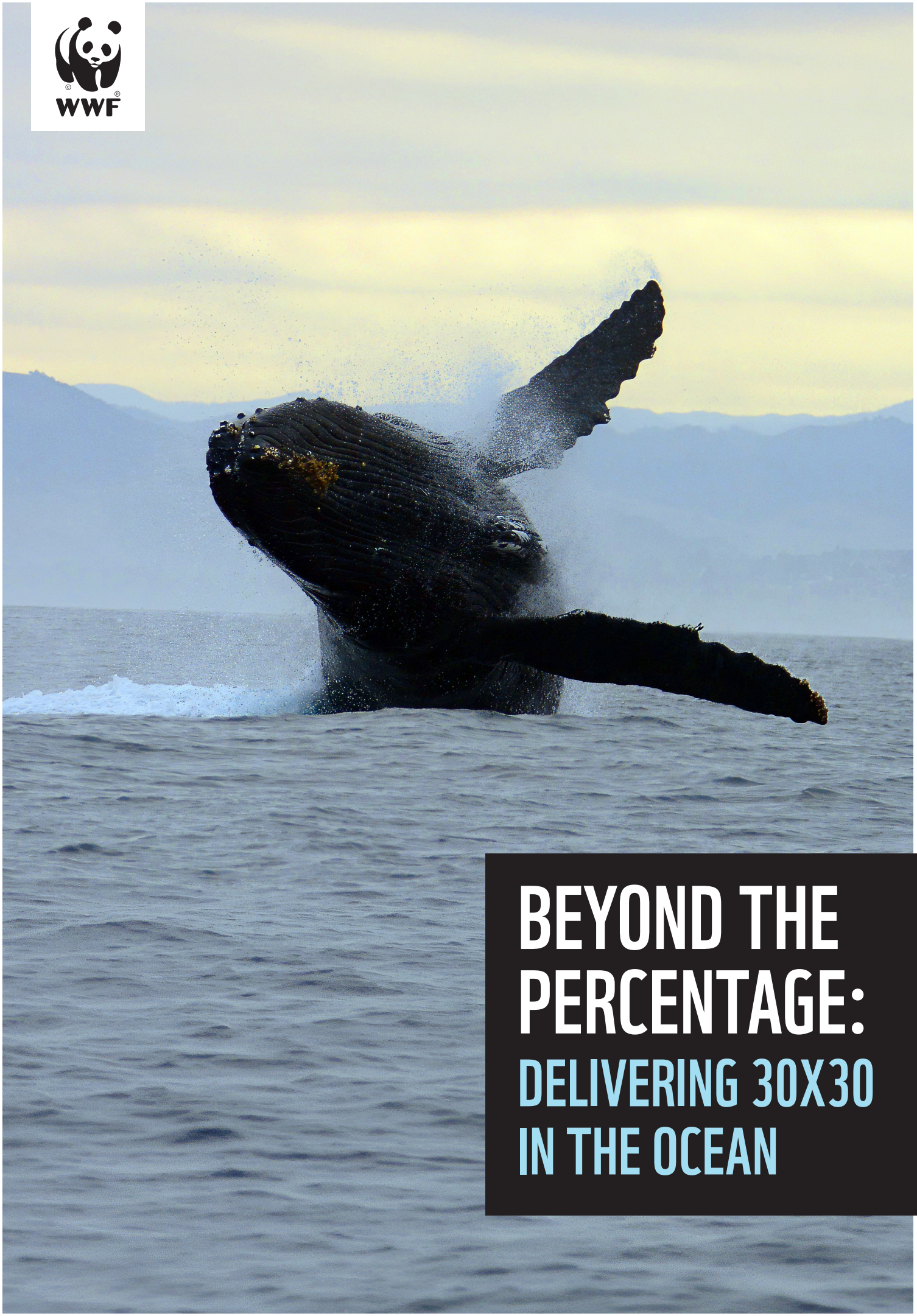


BEYOND THE PERCENTAGE:

DELIVERING 30X30 IN THE OCEAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been developed by WWF, with thanks to the Marine Conservation Institute, Wildlife Conservation Society and The Nature Conservancy for their contributions to the case studies it features. We would also like to thank UNEP-WCMC, the Friends of Ocean Action and Together for the Ocean for their collaboration.

Authors:
Caterina Quadrio Curzio (WWF) and Camille Loth.

WWF Contributors:
Ana Henriques, Carlos Drews, Christopher Johnson, Domoina Rakotomalala, Eduardo Videira, Eider Graner, Emma Gemal, Erin Keenan, Hernan Yecid Barbosa Camargo, Jia Ling Lim, John Morrison, Klaas Jan Teule, Louise Heaps, Mahery Randrianarivo, Marina Gomei, Martin Sommerkorn, Matt Spencer, Mauro Randone, Nathan Bennett, Pauli Merriman, Robin Davis, Stéphane Rivière, Thomas Kirk Sørensen, Yacqueline Montecinos.

External contributors:
Daniela Diz and Gretchen Lyons.

Copyediting, design and production:
Evan Jeffries, Catherine Perry
(www.swim2birds.co.uk)

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Collaborating partners:

Marine Conservation Institute
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TOGETHER FOR THE OCEAN
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The Nature Conservancy
UN environment programme WCMC



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FOREWORD



Kirsten Schuijt
Director General,
WWF International

In 2022, the world came together around a bold, shared vision: the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. As a global community, leaders pledged to conserve and restore at least 30% of the world's land, freshwater and ocean by 2030, recognizing the essential role nature plays in sustaining biodiversity, regulating our climate and supporting human well-being and sustainable development.

The deadline was ambitious by design. It reflected the scale of the challenges before us and the growing recognition that we can no longer afford to delay action. But as 2030 draws closer, the urgency of delivering on these commitments grows ever clearer.

As is shown in WWF's Living Planet Report 2026, biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate, climate impacts are intensifying, and communities around the world are facing the consequences. Each year of delayed action or half-measures narrows our options, increases the costs of action, puts more lives and livelihoods at risk, and pushes species and ecosystems toward tipping points from which they may never recover.

The challenge is immense, but so too is the opportunity.

The ocean must be central to our response. Covering about 70% of our planet, it regulates our climate, supports livelihoods and food security for billions of people, and sustains an extraordinary diversity of life. Despite this, marine conservation has lagged behind terrestrial conservation, with only around 10% of the ocean currently within protected and conserved areas. Healthy marine ecosystems help coastal communities adapt to a changing climate, support livelihoods and food security, and provide essential services that underpin human well-being. Marine protected and conserved areas are among the most effective tools available to secure these benefits, helping biodiversity recover, storing carbon, and strengthening the long-term health and stability of both natural and human systems. The benefits are clear, and research shows that protecting at least 30% of the world's land and ocean will deliver returns that far exceed the costs of continuing with business as usual.

Realizing those benefits, however, will require more than ambition alone.

As this report makes clear, achieving 30x30 is about far more than reaching a percentage target. Success will depend not only on how much ocean we protect, but on whether those protections are effective, equitable, and capable of delivering lasting outcomes for both people and nature.

This requires recognizing that conservation is ultimately about people as well as places.

> **Marine protected and conserved areas must respect the rights, knowledge and leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including the coastal communities that often face a disproportionate share of biodiversity loss and climate impacts.**

They must also reflect the interconnected nature of the ocean itself, from coastal waters that support communities and economies to the high seas that connect ecosystems across the globe, conservation efforts must contribute to representative, connected and resilient networks.

There is much more to marine 30x30 than tallying up hectares. **Going beyond the percentage means building representative, connected and resilient networks while prioritizing the quality, integrity and effectiveness of conservation efforts. It means matching ambition with implementation and commitments with outcomes.**

The tools, knowledge and experience needed to do this already exist, and around the world, governments, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, scientists and practitioners are demonstrating what works. The task before us is to apply these approaches and solutions at the scale and pace required. If we succeed, 30x30 can help create a future in which healthy oceans support thriving communities, resilient economies and a rich diversity of life for generations to come.

Kirsten Schuijt
Director General, WWF International



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With 2030 fast approaching and 10% of the ocean covered by marine protected and conserved areas (MPCAs) today, governments must accelerate their expansion to achieve the Global Biodiversity Framework's '30x30' ambition. However, achieving 30% ocean coverage alone will not necessarily deliver the outcomes that 30x30 was created to achieve. Where areas are located, and how well they are managed, connected and governed will determine whether they produce lasting benefits for nature and people.

As climate change and other pressures intensify, ecologically representative, well-connected and effectively managed conservation systems can help maintain ecological functions and strengthen the resilience of marine ecosystems and the people who depend on them.



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The path to 2030 must advance the coverage, quality and integrity of conservation together. This is why Target 3 combines the ambition of at least 30% coverage with qualitative dimensions that are crucial to delivering these outcomes: systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures should be in areas of particular importance for biodiversity, ecologically representative, well connected, effectively conserved and managed, and equitably governed, while respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and integrating conservation into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean. The implementation of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) creates a new frontier for ocean conservation – a vital opportunity to extend this approach beyond national jurisdictions.

There is a solid foundation of knowledge, tools, standards and approaches needed to support effective implementation that are already being applied in practice across diverse marine and coastal contexts. The priority now is to apply them at the scale and pace required, supported by the capacity, financing and international cooperation needed for effective implementation.

Effective implementation of 30x30 is also an investment in ocean resilience. As climate change and other pressures intensify, ecologically representative, well-connected and effectively managed conservation systems can help maintain ecological functions and strengthen the resilience of marine ecosystems and the people who depend on them.

FIVE PRIORITIES TO GUIDE ACCELERATED, HIGH-INTEGRITY IMPLEMENTATION OF 30X30 IN THE OCEAN TOWARDS 2030:

1. **Make every new hectare count.** Direct expansion towards marine and coastal areas where conservation can deliver the greatest biodiversity benefits and strengthen ecologically representative, well-connected and climate-resilient networks.

2. **Turn existing coverage into conservation outcomes.** Address gaps in protection, management capacity, compliance, monitoring and long-term finance so that existing MPCAs deliver effectively for biodiversity and people.

3. **Make 30x30 work for and with people.** Place rights, equity and inclusive governance at the centre of the design and implementation, recognizing Indigenous Peoples and local communities as rights holders, governance partners and conservation leaders, and ensuring that conservation costs and benefits are shared fairly.

4. **Deliver 30x30 as part of a healthy ocean.** Integrate biodiversity objectives across marine spatial planning, fisheries management, ecosystem restoration, pollution reduction and environmental assessment so that conservation gains within MPCAs are not undermined by pressures beyond their boundaries.

5. **Use the BBNJ Agreement to advance global ocean conservation.** Use its implementation to establish effective MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction as part of representative and connected conservation networks, supported by adequate capacity-building, technology transfer and accessible finance.

Delivering 30x30 requires more than increasing coverage of MPCAs; success will ultimately be measured not only in percentages, but in the conservation outcomes those areas deliver for nature and people. Governments and partners must now mobilize the political commitment, capacity, finance and cooperation needed to turn global ambition into effective conservation in the water. Delivering this ambition will require governments to work hand in hand with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, conservation organizations, finance, the private sector and other partners.

The remaining years to 2030 must therefore be used to accelerate coverage while ensuring that new and existing MPCAs have the ecological, management, governance and enabling conditions needed to deliver meaningful and lasting outcomes well beyond 2030.



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INTRODUCTION: MOVING BEYOND 30X30

FROM COVERAGE TO QUALITY

2026 marks the 'halfway' point of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF); we have limited time to deliver this landmark global agreement, including the '30x30' ambition set out in Target 3: to conserve at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas by 2030.[1]

10%
OF THE GLOBAL OCEAN IS CURRENTLY WITHIN MARINE PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS (MPCAS)

US$85 BILLION
POTENTIALLY UNLOCKED IN RETURNS AND AVOIDED COSTS BY 2050

With 2030 rapidly approaching, now is the time for a significant acceleration of implementation. As of September 2026, just over 10% of the global ocean is currently within marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)*.[2] This shortfall has been highlighted in the first Global Review of Collective Progress under the GBF, which finds that implementation remains insufficient to achieve the 2030 targets, while marine and coastal ecosystems remain consistently underrepresented in national action compared with terrestrial ecosystems – despite the ocean covering over 70% of the planet and the critical role that marine and coastal biodiversity plays in food security, livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, and broader sustainable development.[3]

Yet the case for accelerating implementation is compelling. Estimates from the Ocean Protection Gap Report show that investing in 30x30 in the ocean could unlock around US$85 billion annually in returns and avoided costs by 2050 from just three benefits: preserving natural coastal defences, avoiding emissions from seagrass loss, and recovering overexploited fisheries.[4] Effective and equitable implementation of 30x30 in the ocean will also bring numerous non-quantified benefits beyond these three alone. Recent initiatives, such as the 30x30 Action Plan, have identified actions to accelerate the expansion of marine conservation towards the 30% coverage target.[5]

In addition, the entry into force of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)[6] creates new opportunities to contribute to 30x30 in areas beyond national jurisdiction and to strengthen ecological coherence and connectivity across the global ocean.

In light of this, while much of the attention and progress to date has focused primarily on increasing coverage, it is important to remember that Target 3 was carefully negotiated to include a range of elements necessary to secure meaningful conservation outcomes. Area-based coverage is only one indicator, and is far from the sole measure of success for 30x30. How the target is achieved is just as important as tallying up hectares.

*Throughout this brief, the term 'marine protected and conserved areas (MPCAs)' is used as a collective shorthand for marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). This terminology is adopted for readability and does not imply that MPAs and OECMs are interchangeable or subject to the same recognition criteria.


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KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK TARGET 3: 30X30

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.[7]

Scientific evidence shows that the extent of biodiversity outcomes from MPAs vary considerably depending on factors such as their size and ecological design, levels of protection, effective enforcement, equitable governance, management capacity and adequate resourcing.[8] Yet the quality and integrity of existing ocean protection and conservation remains uneven. Only around 3.5% of the global ocean is currently within fully or highly protected MPAs,[9] while many do not yet adequately represent important ecosystems, or have the management capacity and resources needed to deliver lasting outcomes.

Reflecting this, Target 3 combines the 30% coverage ambition with qualitative conditions for area-based conservation. Governments have committed not only to expanding coverage of MPCAs, but also to ensuring that MPCAs are ecologically representative, well-connected, effectively managed and equitably governed, so that they deliver meaningful and lasting outcomes for nature and people. Without adequate attention to these dimensions, 30x30 risks becoming a measure of area rather than outcomes.

DIVERSE HABITATS, DIVERSE CHALLENGES

Marine and coastal ecosystems are highly connected and dynamic, presenting specific considerations for 30x30 implementation. Ocean currents transport larvae across vast distances, migratory species move between habitats and jurisdictions, and many species depend on different areas and habitat types throughout their life cycles. Pressures are similarly mobile and interconnected. Pollution and activities occurring far beyond the boundaries of an individual MPCA can affect the biodiversity within it, while restricting an activity in one area may simply displace pressures elsewhere if they are not addressed at a wider scale.

Very large or remote MPCAs present their own complications, as monitoring, management and enforcement can be challenging and costly. Fisheries, shipping, tourism, energy and other ocean uses interact alongside protected and conserved areas in the same seascapes. Governance may span sectors, levels of government and jurisdictional boundaries, and must recognize the rights, livelihoods, knowledge and stewardship of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and small-scale fishers. Delivering 30x30 in the ocean requires attention to each of these considerations.

The coming years are critical to realizing the promise and potential of the 30x30 target. As attention shifts from setting ambition to accelerating implementation, it is essential that quantity and quality go hand-in-hand – since where and how the expansion of MPCAs takes place will determine the outcomes in the water for nature and people. Effective implementation of 30x30 will also strengthen ocean resilience by helping maintain ecological functions and processes in the face of climate change and other growing pressures.

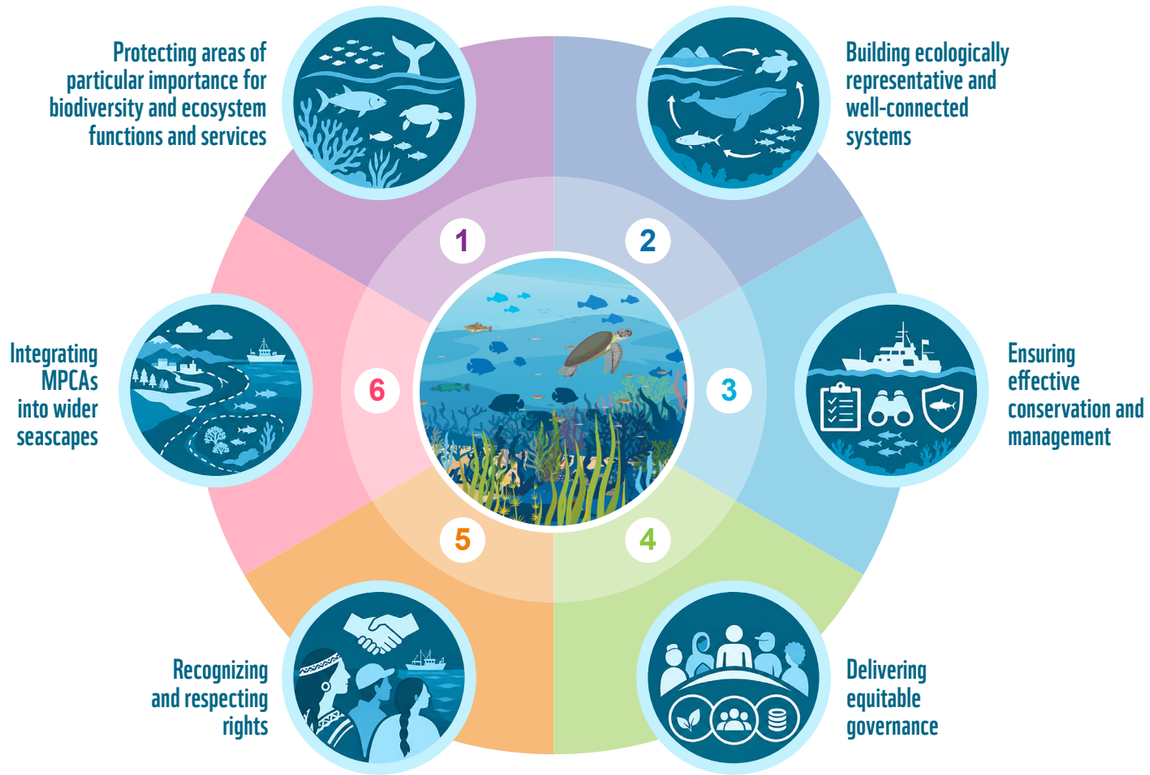
This report translates that ambition into practice. It explores the importance of each qualitative dimension of Target 3 in the marine context, and highlights the tools, standards, guidance and approaches already available to support implementation. Drawing on examples from across the globe, it demonstrates that high-integrity implementation is not an aspirational concept, but a practical approach that is already underway.

PART I

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THE HEART OF THE TARGET: UNDERSTANDING THE QUALITATIVE DIMENSIONS OF 30X30

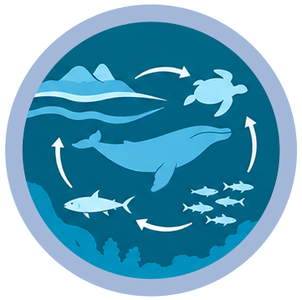
The qualitative dimensions of Target 3 are mutually reinforcing: no single dimension alone is sufficient to ensure that expanding marine conservation delivers biodiversity outcomes.[10] Each dimension provides a vital contribution to the impact that 30x30 can deliver.





1. PROTECTING AREAS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE FOR BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES

Marine biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services are unevenly distributed across the ocean. Spawning and nursery grounds can support fish populations that spend most of their lives elsewhere; feeding and aggregation sites are critical for migratory species; deep-sea features can support distinctive and vulnerable species and habitats; and many coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses, support biodiversity, fisheries, carbon storage and coastal protection. Strategically locating MPCAs in these important areas can deliver high returns on investment in both biodiversity and ecosystem services from relatively limited spatial coverage.[11]



2. BUILDING ECOLOGICALLY REPRESENTATIVE AND WELL-CONNECTED SYSTEMS

The ocean is a fluid, three-dimensional environment in which species, populations and ecological processes are connected across space and depth. These connections often extend from coastal habitats to offshore waters, meaning that isolated MPCAs may be insufficient to sustain migratory populations and ecological processes.[12] Ecological representation ensures that conservation systems encompass the diversity of ecosystems, habitats and species within a region, spreading risk and supporting resilience in the face of climate change. Connectivity maintains the ecological flows, species movements and dynamic processes that link places and populations across the ocean.[13]

Together, representation and connectivity enable networks of MPCAs to sustain populations and ecological processes over time and across dynamic seascapes, therefore MPCAs must be considered at network scale, rather than as individual sites. As climate change continues to alter species distributions, habitats and ecosystem processes, these dimensions will become increasingly important and need to be revisited periodically.[14]



3. ENSURING EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Delivering lasting conservation outcomes requires durable measures to reduce pressures backed by the regulations, management capacity, monitoring, enforcement and sustained financing needed to implement them over time.[15] Long-term monitoring is particularly important to track ecological and socioeconomic outcomes and provide the evidence needed for adaptive management. Yet many MPCAs globally still lack the resources and capacity required for effective management and enforcement.[16] Management measures also need to be sustained over the long term: by reducing or removing pressures, effectively managed MPCAs can enable passive restoration and ecological recovery, but these can take many years.[17]

The level of protection – which activities are permitted or prohibited within an MPCA – influences pressures in the area and therefore conservation outcomes.[18] Where sustainable use occurs, Target 3 requires that such use remains fully consistent with conservation objectives. Well-designed and effectively protected MPCAs can also generate benefits beyond their boundaries, including through the spillover of fish biomass into surrounding waters.[19] Effective management is what transforms a designation on paper into measurable conservation outcomes in the water.



4. DELIVERING EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE

Equitable governance requires attention to both fair processes – representative, inclusive, transparent and accountable – and to the fair distribution of costs and benefits, including for women and other groups whose roles in marine resource use, livelihoods and stewardship are often underrepresented in formal decision-making. Beyond being a moral imperative to consider the voices of those affected by conservation and how they will be impacted, these dimensions can influence the legitimacy of, support for and long-term durability of conservation efforts.[24] When managers work with local communities as partners and allies to steward marine conservation initiatives, this can significantly strengthen implementation and improve outcomes.[25]



5. RECOGNIZING AND RESPECTING RIGHTS

Recognition of and respect for human rights, Indigenous Peoples' rights and the rights of small-scale fishers are explicit requirements of the GBF that are underpinned by international human rights law and must be accounted for in marine conservation.[20] Indigenous Peoples, traditional local communities and small-scale fishers have distinct rights, including tenure, access and resource rights derived from their historical and ongoing connection to and reliance on coastal and marine areas, habitats and species. Conservation measures can affect the exercise of these rights, as well as associated livelihoods, cultural practices, and established systems of stewardship and governance.[21]

Recognizing and respecting these rights is therefore a requirement of 30x30.[22] In marine and coastal contexts, this requires recognizing customary marine tenure and access rights, respecting sustainable uses that meet cultural, food and livelihoods needs, incorporating Indigenous and community governance and stewardship, facilitating participation in planning and management, and ensuring free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).[23]



6. INTEGRATING MPCAS INTO WIDER SEASCAPES

Neither ecological processes nor human pressures respect the boundaries of MPCAs. Activities occurring outside an area, including those on land, can affect biodiversity within it,[26] and restricting activities in an MPCA may displace them elsewhere if the underlying pressures are not addressed at a broader scale.[27] Integrating MPCAs within wider sustainable ocean governance frameworks is therefore essential to both address pressures that originate beyond protected area boundaries, and to preserve the ecological connectivity on which individual sites and wider conservation networks depend.[28]

PART II



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DELIVERING THE QUALITATIVE DIMENSIONS OF TARGET 3

While the Global Review of Collective Progress shows that the expansion of protected and conserved area coverage is not yet on track to hit 30x30,[29] important progress is nevertheless being made. Across diverse marine and coastal contexts, from intensively used coastal waters and community-managed areas to large and remote offshore marine areas, countries, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, practitioners and partners are already applying the qualitative dimensions of Target 3 in practice. These experiences demonstrate that high-integrity implementation is both achievable and scalable, while providing valuable lessons for accelerating progress towards 2030.

The qualitative dimensions of Target 3 apply to both MPAs and OECMs, although their implementation will differ according to their distinct objectives, governance arrangements and recognition criteria.[30] The scientific knowledge, standards, guidance and practical tools and approaches needed to support delivery already exist. The challenge now is not how to develop new approaches, but to learn from experiences in implementation, identify and refine what works in different contexts, and scale up effective approaches.

The resources highlighted in the following pages illustrate different ways in which implementation can be supported, and should be applied according to ecological, social, legal and governance contexts.



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1. PROTECTING AREAS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE FOR BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES

Areas of particular importance can be identified through different dimensions of ecological significance. Depending on the ecological and geographic context, these may include areas important for threatened or endemic species; spawning, nursery or feeding grounds; migratory routes and aggregation sites; rare or vulnerable habitats; areas of high productivity or biodiversity; and ecosystems providing important ecological functions and services.[31] What constitutes a priority will therefore depend significantly on local, national and regional ecological contexts and conservation objectives, and should be identified using the best available science, drawing on national and regional datasets as well as Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge.

At the international level, complementary scientific frameworks can help identify areas meeting different dimensions of ecological importance. The **Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs)** process established under the CBD identifies areas that meet internationally agreed ecological and biological criteria. The **Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)** identifies sites recognized as globally significant for conservation and persistence of biodiversity across taxa and ecosystems, while initiatives such as **Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)**, **Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs)** and the emerging **Important Marine Turtle Areas (IMTAs)** identify priority areas for particular taxonomic groups.[38]

These approaches are complementary rather than interchangeable and were developed to identify different dimensions of marine biodiversity, using criteria and identification processes suited to different taxa, ecosystems and ecological processes. Their identification does not in itself determine where MPCAs should be established or what their boundaries should be, but it can provide importance evidence to inform conservation planning.[39] The identified important areas can be combined with national and regional biodiversity information and the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to strengthen the evidence base for conservation decisions. They can inform systematic conservation planning approaches, including the identification of future MPAs under the BBNJ Agreement.[40] Important knowledge gaps nevertheless remain in many marine areas, particularly where ecological data and monitoring are limited.

PRIORITIZING AREAS OF HIGH BIODIVERSITY FOR PROTECTION IN NOSY HARA, MADAGASCAR

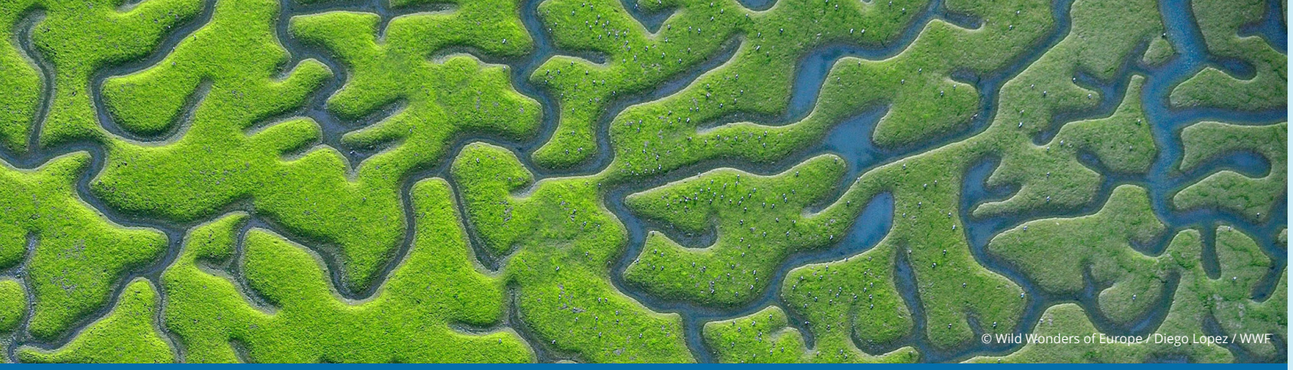

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Nosy Hara National Park spans 1,250 km² in the Northern Mozambique Channel off northwest Madagascar, a region holding what is considered the second-most diverse shallow coral reef ecosystem in the world. It protects a mosaic of coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass meadows and islets with fringing reefs, as well as key habitats for threatened and critically endangered species, including Madagascar's largest sea turtle nesting site with roughly 100 hawksbill turtle and 500 green turtle nests annually.[32]

Conservation priorities were identified through a combination of criteria. Six conservation targets were selected for management planning – coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, marine turtles, the Madagascar fish eagle, and nesting seabirds – based on representativeness, ecological integrity, rarity, endemism and threats.[33] The biological significance of the area is independently recognized: the park encompasses a Key Biodiversity Area and sits within an Important Shark and Ray Area and an Important Marine Mammal Area.

This broad prioritization was complemented by a finer-scale assessment of ecological functions. A reef-resilience assessment designed to inform zoning identified reefs in particularly good condition, with the potential to supply coral and other larvae to more impacted reefs, and recommended these for full protection to support reef recovery.[34] Nosy Hara's reefs have also been identified through a global analysis of climate-resilient coral reefs as being the most resilient to climate change and supporting the regeneration of surrounding reefs.[35]

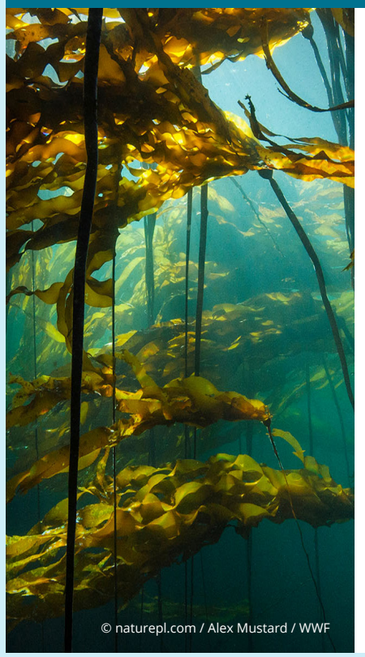
Prioritization has continued as management has evolved. In 2023, Madagascar National Parks and community representatives identified a further 63 km2 of coral reefs for enhanced protection, now covered by four locally managed marine areas.[36] In 2026, Nosy Hara received a Blue Park Award, in recognition of its biodiversity value alongside the effectiveness of its protection and management.[37] The experience illustrates a practical progression from setting conservation targets, to assessing ecological condition and function, to identifying spatial priorities for stronger protection in areas of greatest importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.


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2. DELIVERING ECOLOGICALLY REPRESENTATIVE AND WELL-CONNECTED SYSTEMS

MPCA networks should capture the diversity of marine ecosystems and habitats while maintaining the ecological processes that connect populations and places across the ocean. This requires considering not only which areas are protected, but how different areas complement and connect with one another across ecological and geographic scales.

ECOLOGICALLY REPRESENTATIVE AND WELL-CONNECTED SYSTEMS: CALIFORNIA'S MPA NETWORK


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California's coastline stretches approximately 1,770 km from Mexico to Oregon and encompasses some of the world's most biologically productive marine waters. When the state passed the Marine Life Protection Act in 1999, it set a mandate to design MPAs intentionally as an ecologically connected and representative network. By 2012, that process had produced a statewide network of 124 MPAs covering 16% of California's state waters.[41]

Science was deliberately built into the network's design. A science advisory team translated the best available science into concrete design guidelines: MPAs were designed so that key habitats were protected in several locations across the coast, while their size and spacing were intended to allow species to remain connected between protected areas. As a result, average habitat representation within MPAs rose from 6% to 23%.[42] A 2023 analysis found evidence that this connectivity is benefiting populations of several species.[43]

California's experience demonstrates the value of considering representativity and connectivity together during the network design, rather than after individual sites have been designated. In 2025, the network became the first ecological network to be included on the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas, in recognition of both the quality of its design and the rigour of its ongoing management.[44]

CONNECTING MPAS ACROSS THE EASTERN PACIFIC


© Benjamin Silverback / Netflix

Marine species and ecological processes in the Eastern Pacific extend across national boundaries, creating a need to consider connectivity beyond individual protected areas. Through the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR), Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador cooperate across a seascape containing more than 400,000 km² of MPAs, with the aim of strengthening conservation and ecosystem-based management at a regional scale.

Scientific evidence has helped reveal how protected areas across this seascape are ecologically linked. Modelling of coral dispersal across 30 Eastern Pacific MPAs identified Malpelo and Gorgona islands as potential stepping stones between coastal and offshore protected areas.[45] Research on highly migratory species has also documented movements between oceanic sites, helping build the evidence base for protecting the migratory routes connecting Cocos, the Galápagos Islands, and Malpelo and Coiba islands.[46] In 2021 at UNFCCC COP26, the four CMAR countries committed to strengthen protection of these interconnected areas and migratory routes.

This commitment has been followed by a substantial expansion of protection across the seascape. In 2022, Ecuador established the 60,000 km² Hermandad Marine Reserve, extending protection from the Galápagos Islands towards Costa Rica, while Costa Rica expanded protection around Cocos Island towards Ecuador. Colombia and Panama have also expanded MPAs within CMAR.

The experience illustrates how different forms of connectivity evidence can complement one another at network scale, and how sustained cooperation can enable countries to progressively strengthen protection across jurisdictional boundaries rather than manage ecologically connected sites in isolation.

Migratory species show why this cooperation needs to extend further still: satellite tracking shows Southern Hemisphere humpback whales travelling more than 8,000 km between breeding areas along the west coast of South America and feeding grounds around the Antarctic Peninsula. CMAR is complemented at a wider regional scale by the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS) Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas of the Southeast Pacific (RAMPAS), which brings together Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Peru, with Costa Rica participating as a collaborating country, to strengthen coordinated management, regional collaboration, capacity and knowledge exchange across more than 120 protected areas in the region.

Systematic conservation planning provides a structured framework for identifying networks of MPCAs that collectively contribute to biodiversity conservation, and can account for human uses, costs, and other planning constraints.[47] It considers how different areas complement one another in achieving conservation objectives, supported by planning tools such as **Marxan** and **prioritizr** and ecological information such as the **Marine Ecoregions of the World** for assessing representation.

Connectivity science, meanwhile, helps identify the ecological flows, species movements and dynamic processes linking populations and habitats across marine systems. Depending on the ecological context, this may draw on larval dispersal and oceanographic models, genetic information, tagging and movement data, habitat analysis, and Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge. For highly migratory species, initiatives such as **Blue Corridors** help visualize movements across jurisdictions, while the **IUCN WCPA Marine Connectivity Working Group** provides practical guidance for incorporating connectivity into the design of MPA networks.[48]

As climate change increasingly influences marine ecosystems, guidance on climate-smart MPA design can also support the incorporation of ecological resilience, climate refugia and shifting species distributions into conservation planning.[49] These approaches, used together, provide complementary sources of evidence that can help countries design conservation systems adapted to their ecological, governance and socioeconomic contexts.



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3. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Effective conservation and management depend on several interrelated conditions that build on one another. Appropriate levels of protection provide the foundation for reducing pressures; management capacity enables implementation; compliance and monitoring help ensure effectiveness; and sustainable financing underpins conservation over the long term. These requirements can be particularly demanding in marine environments, where conservation may extend across large or remote areas characterized by multiple users, mobile pressures and complex governance arrangements.

3A. SETTING APPROPRIATE LEVELS OF PROTECTION

Effective conservation begins with clear, measurable objectives based on the biodiversity values of the area and the pressures affecting them. Management measures should then be designed to address those pressures at a level capable of achieving the intended outcomes: a highly sensitive ecosystem exposed to extractive pressures may require strict protection, while other areas may accommodate particular activities where these remain consistent with conservation objectives.[50]

Several existing frameworks can help clarify this relationship. The **MPA Guide**[51] provides a science-based framework for assessing an MPA's stage of establishment and level of protection, based on whether management is operational, and on the nature, scale and intensity of activities occurring within the area. These characteristics are linked to expected conservation outcomes rather than directly measuring outcomes. **MPAtlas** applies the **MPA Guide** framework to individual MPAs, providing assessments and data on their stage of establishment and expected level of protection. Similarly, the **Marine OECM Guide** offers a clear, evidence-based approach to assess whether a marine area is likely to conserve biodiversity. The **IUCN Protected Area Management Categories** classify protected areas according to their primary management objectives; these can be correlated with activities and pressures, but they are not always perfect proxies for levels of protection.[52]

For OECMs, sustained in situ conservation of biodiversity is required as one of the criteria for recognition under the CBD guidance, irrespective of the area's management objectives.[53] Ensuring appropriate levels of protection will also be crucial in the establishment of MPCAs under the BBNJ Agreement.

3B. BUILDING MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

Appropriate conservation measures only produce results when they are translated into operational management plans and supported by functioning management systems. This requires clearly assigned responsibilities, operational planning, adequate staffing and expertise, access to ecological and socioeconomic information, coordination with relevant authorities and stakeholders, and the practical capacity to implement and enforce agreed actions.

TURNING PROTECTION INTO EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AT TUBBATAHA REEFS, PHILIPPINES



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Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park is a 970 km² no-take MPA in the Sulu Sea, at the centre of the Coral Triangle. Fully protected since 1988, it earned a Blue Park Award in 2017 for effective marine conservation.[54] Maintaining that protection over time, however, requires institutions and management capacity able to withstand changing conditions.

Management is anchored in the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board, which brings together national and local government and other stakeholders to set policy. Stakeholder involvement and extensive local representation are built into the park's governance as a founding principle for park management, and a dedicated Tubbataha Management Office is responsible for day-to-day implementation.[55]

A major test came with COVID-19. Tubbataha's budget relied heavily on dive tourism fees, and visitor numbers collapsed from 3,477 in 2019 to just 30 in 2021. Building on a track record of evidence-based adaptive management and comprehensive compliance strategies, managers diversified funding across the park's governing board, national government agencies, a corporate foundation, and military partners. This allowed them to keep enforcement effectively unchanged: at least 120 patrols annually, radar surveillance every three hours, and inspection of every boat entering the park.[56]

Management continued to be informed by ecological monitoring, tracking indicators including fish biomass, coral recruitment, and reef shark density.[57] The park's 2022–2031 management plan is complemented by dedicated plans for compliance and enforcement, tourism, and finance, providing a framework for translating monitoring and management needs into action.[58]

Monitoring in 2021 recorded continued high coral recruitment and shark density, while a 2023 review confirmed that Tubbataha continued to meet the Blue Park Standard. That year, the park's ranger team also received the International Ranger Award for its enforcement work.[59]

Tubbataha's experience shows how long-term institutional capacity, adaptive financing, sustained enforcement and ecological monitoring can enable effective protection to continue even through major disruption.

The required capacity will differ between areas and governance contexts. Managing a small coastal MPCA with strong community institutions presents different requirements than managing a large-scale remote offshore area. Capacity may reside with government agencies, Indigenous Peoples or local communities, shared governance bodies or other recognized actors. What matters is that those responsible have the authority, knowledge, resources and institutional continuity needed, as well as the ability to respond to emerging challenges. Existing management effectiveness assessments can help identify capacity and implementation gaps, with the **Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME)** providing a global repository of reported assessments.[60]

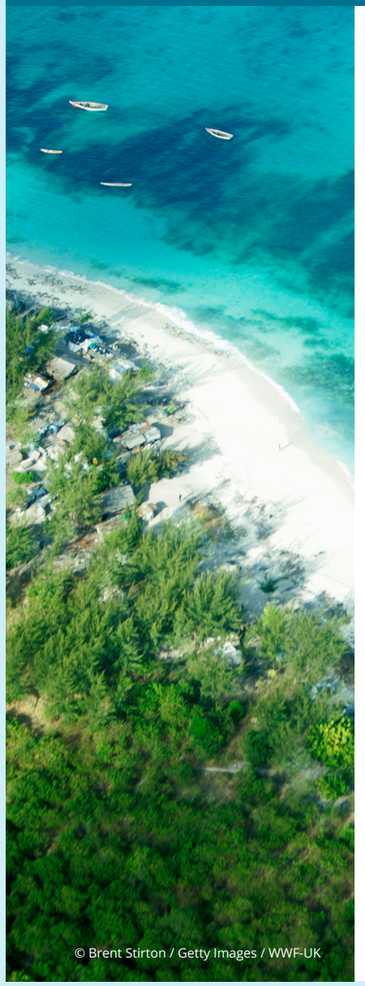
3C. ENSURING COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Compliance relies on clear and legitimate rules, communication with users, surveillance and proportionate enforcement. In coastal waters, involving communities in the co-design of regulations and sharing responsibility for their implementation and patrolling enhances legitimacy, ownership and compliance. In large and remote marine areas, detecting activities across extensive waters and multiple jurisdictions can be particularly challenging, making vessel tracking, satellite remote sensing and other technologies important complements to at-sea patrols and community-based approaches. **Global Fishing Watch's Marine Manager** portal, for example, combines near-real-time vessel tracking, oceanographic and biological data in a single interface, allowing managers to monitor fishing and other activity within and around an MPCA, and compare activity levels before and after protection measures are introduced. Participation in the development of rules, their perceived legitimacy and awareness can also influence adherence.



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REBUILDING FISH BIOMASS THROUGH EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT IN TANGA, TANZANIA



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The Tanga Marine Reserves System protects coral reefs off northern Tanzania, including reefs exposed to relatively stable thermal conditions that may provide refugia as ocean temperatures rise. Yet illegal and destructive fishing, limited enforcement capacity, and dependence on marine resources were undermining the conservation of these ecosystems.

WCS, working with Tanzania's Marine Parks and Reserves Unit, Beach Management Units and fishing communities, combined stronger MPA management with support for coastal livelihoods. Management capacity was strengthened through staff training, a new ranger station and the demarcation of reserve boundaries with buoys, alongside strengthened community governance. Complementary and alternative livelihood activities were developed to reduce economic vulnerability and support household incomes.

Monitoring recorded substantial ecological recovery. Fish biomass at monitored sites within the reserves increased tenfold, from approximately 50 to 500 kg/ha, alongside positive spillover effects in adjacent control areas and a marked decline in illegal fishing infractions.[61] Yet socioeconomic indicators did not respond at the same pace: despite increased revenues for coastal communities and Beach Management Units from livelihood support, catch per unit effort and Basic Necessities Survey scores remained largely unchanged.

The experience highlights an important lesson for effective MPCA management: ecological recovery can be achieved through sustained investment in management capacity, enforcement and community engagement, but improvements in ecosystem condition may take time to translate into ecosystem services and livelihood benefits. Livelihood support may therefore be important during the recovery process. Monitoring ecological and socioeconomic outcomes together can reveal these different trajectories and help set realistic expectations for long-term management.

Monitoring should therefore assess both whether agreed actions are being implemented and whether they are producing the intended biodiversity outcomes. Management effectiveness is dynamic and context-dependent, requiring clear objectives, indicators and baselines against which outcomes can be assessed over time.[62] The **IUCN WCPA Framework** for assessing management effectiveness[63] is the basis for several useful tools, including the **Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT)** and the **Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET).** Findings should inform adaptive management, including changes to management measures, priorities and resource allocation where outcomes are insufficient or conditions change.

3D. ENSURING LONG-TERM INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Delivering conservation outcomes and addressing risks takes time and requires sustained institutional and financial capacity. This can be particularly challenging in the marine environment, where monitoring, surveillance and enforcement across large or remote areas can generate substantial and recurrent costs. Yet MPCAs currently receive only a small share of international funding – around 14% of the total for protected and conserved areas – underscoring the importance of ensuring that expanding marine conservation is matched by adequate resources for effective long-term management.[64]

The **IUCN WCPA Practice Guidance for Protected and Conserved Area Finance**[65] provides a useful overarching framework and emphasizes understanding costs and needs, reducing inefficiencies of existing expenditures, strengthening enabling conditions, and developing diversified portfolios of revenue and financing mechanisms.

Depending on the context, such portfolios may include public budgets, conservation trust funds, tourism fees or user revenues, payments for ecosystem services, philanthropic support, Project Finance for Permanence, and blue or blended finance mechanisms. Bringing these sources together may involve governments, conservation trust funds, development finance institutions, philanthropic and private investors, conservation organizations and rights-holders, with the mix of actors and coordination arrangements varying according to context. Suitability varies considerably between contexts; tourism fees depend on visitor access that large or remote MPCAs may not have, while trust funds and blended finance structures typically require a level of institutional capacity and governance that may not always be in place.

THE BAHAMAS: TURNING DEBT SAVINGS INTO LONG-TERM CONSERVATION FINANCE



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The Bahamas has one of the Caribbean's largest MPA networks, protecting coral reefs, seagrass meadows and mangroves that support biodiversity, livelihoods and coastal resilience. But expanding protection also requires that sufficient resources are available to effectively manage these areas over time. In 2024, The Bahamas addressed this challenge through a US$300 million debt conversion project for marine conservation, developed with support from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) through its Nature Bonds Program, and other partners.

The government refinanced existing external sovereign debt with a new, lower-cost loan from Standard Chartered to support concrete commitments to strengthen the conservation and management of its marine and nearshore environment. Guarantees and credit insurance from financial partners reduced financing costs, while TNC helped to develop the conservation commitments and bring together the partners needed to deliver the transaction.[66]

The resulting savings are expected to unlock approximately US$124 million over 15 years for marine conservation, supporting improved MPA management, marine spatial planning and a national mangrove management plan. Part of the saving will also build an endowment expected to grow by US$8 million by 2039, helping to sustain conservation funding beyond the life of the transaction alone.[67]

The experience shows how countries can turn debt refinancing into predictable long-term finance for conservation, while linking that finance to concrete conservation commitments for improved ocean management.

Financing approaches for OECMs remain comparatively nascent and will need to reflect their diverse governance and management contexts, including by ensuring that the costs of delivering sustained conservation outcomes do not fall disproportionately on Indigenous Peoples and local communities or other local rights-holders.

Matching the right mechanisms to the right context is therefore critical. Diversification of income streams can reduce vulnerability to the loss of a single funding source, but no financing mechanism can be a substitute for sustained public responsibility and effective institutional arrangements.



4. DELIVERING EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE

Delivering equitable governance requires attention to equity throughout the design, implementation and management of MPCAs, including how decisions are made, whose voices are represented, and how conservation costs and benefits are distributed.[68] In marine and coastal environments, this requires particular attention to the diverse rights-holders, users and governance arrangements interacting across the same seascape.

Equity should be considered throughout the 30x30 process, from design and decision-making through to implementation, monitoring and adaptive management. Meaningful participation goes beyond consultation: rights-holders and stakeholders should have genuine opportunities to influence decisions, while recognizing that access to decision-making is not necessarily equal. Women, youth and other vulnerable groups often play important roles in marine livelihoods and stewardship while remaining underrepresented in formal governance processes.[69]

Being attentive to distributional equity requires consideration of both the potential benefits and the potential harms that conservation measures might create, and identification of actions that could mitigate harms and increase benefits during planning and management. This might include adapting network designs, introducing compensation mechanisms, localizing financial mechanisms, or supporting alternative livelihood opportunities. Impacts on different groups within local communities should also be considered, so that no group bears an undue burden.

Equitable governance also requires transparency and accountability. Practical guidance available from IUCN can support manager-led or participatory assessments of stakeholder perceptions of different dimensions of equity, identify governance gaps, and inform adaptive management over time.[70] Governance assessments can also be reported through the **Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME)**, which stores information on assessments of both management effectiveness and governance quality.[71] Target 3 accommodates diverse governance arrangements; the priority should be to strengthen governance quality in context.[72]

PUTTING COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTRE OF MPA DESIGN IN NEW IRELAND, PAPUA NEW GUINEA



In New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, growing pressures on marine resources led to efforts to establish two large MPAs in Lovongai and Murat Local Level Government (LLG) jurisdictions. Communities were not simply asked whether they supported a proposed conservation plan: their priorities helped shape what would ultimately be protected and how. Beginning in 2017, consultations across 168 communities identified locally perceived threats to marine resources and interest in spatial management.

WCS, working with Ailan Awareness Inc. and the Lolieng Sustainable Programme, subsequently undertook a three-phase engagement and FPIC process to translate these perspectives into MPA design. Communities assessed and ranked the threats affecting their marine resources, working in separate groups of men, women and youth so different perspectives could be heard. The highest-ranked threats informed the rules communities selected for the MPAs, as well as penalties for non-compliance. Boundaries were similarly grounded in local knowledge: community elders and leaders travelled by boat to the furthest extent of their customary marine tenure, where GPS coordinates were recorded to inform the outer MPA boundaries. Rules and boundaries were subsequently taken back to communities for review and consensus, and their feedback was incorporated into the management plans.

In November 2023, LLG laws formally established the two MPAs, collectively covering approximately 16,000 km². Community participation continues through Marine Environment Management and Conservation Committees (MEMCCs), whose appointed members include women, youth, church and LLG representatives. Communities are visited annually so they can provide feedback and raise concerns, while the MEMCCs work with LLGs to oversee implementation. The management plans will be reviewed in late 2026 and early 2027 based on community feedback. The experience shows how participation can move beyond consultation when local priorities are translated into the rules, boundaries and management arrangements that ultimately govern a protected area.



5. RECOGNIZING AND RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Implementing a rights-based approach to marine conservation requires rights to be respected throughout conservation planning, governance and management, in accordance with international obligations and national legal frameworks. Beyond legal obligations, a growing body of evidence increasingly demonstrates that respecting human rights can strengthen the legitimacy, effectiveness and long-term durability of marine conservation by building trust, supporting stewardship and reducing conflict.[73]

Conservation should build upon existing rights, governance systems and stewardship arrangements wherever they contribute to biodiversity conservation, rather than replacing them. This includes recognizing customary marine tenure as well as access and use rights where applicable, and ensuring FPIC where relevant, including in the recognition of marine OECMs.

Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge can also complement scientific knowledge in conservation planning, implementation and management.[76]

Particular attention is needed for small-scale fishing communities, whose access to fishing grounds, livelihoods, food security and cultural practices may be affected by conservation measures. At the same time, these communities often hold extensive ecological knowledge and play longstanding stewardship roles. When conservation measures are co-developed and implemented with these communities, they can strengthen local stewardship and governance, support sustainable livelihoods, and help sustain the marine resources on which communities depend. The communities should not bear a disproportionate share of the costs of delivering global conservation commitments.[77]

PUTTING INUIT RIGHTS AT THE HEART OF MARINE CONSERVATION IN TALLURUTIUP IMANGA, CANADA



Home to iconic Arctic species such as narwhals, polar bears and many species of seabirds, Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) in Canada's Arctic encompasses 1.9% of Canada's marine areas (109,000 km^2).[74] Following decades of Inuit interest in protecting the region from oil and gas exploration, the NMCA was operationally established in 2019 when the government of Canada and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) signed an Inuit Impact Benefit Agreement (IIBA).[75] QIA is one of three Inuit organizations representing Inuit rights-holders in Nunavut, Canada, under the Indigenous land claim which established the territory of Nunavut (the Nunavut Agreement). The Nunavut Agreement guarantees specific rights to Nunavut Inuit, including the right to harvest in protected areas.

As the designated Inuit representative, QIA maintained that upholding Inuit rights included providing investments in Inuit stewardship programmes, local job creation, community infrastructure, fisheries development within the region, support for local harvesters, and – crucially – establishing an Inuit governance model.

Tallurutiup Imanga NMCA is cooperatively managed by a joint QIA and Canadian government body that oversees the development and implementation of a management plan and day-to-day operations. The focus on Inuit governance and local job creation and other economic benefits throughout the negotiation process has resulted in a protected area that goes beyond conventional ecosystem conservation to foster traditional Inuit values and create Inuit stewardship opportunities at all levels, while generating regional economic benefits.





6. INTEGRATING CONSERVATION INTO WIDER SEASCAPES

Since pressures and ecological processes do not recognize MPCA boundaries, delivering 30x30 will require MPCAs to be embedded within broader systems of ocean governance. This includes addressing cumulative pressures, including those originating on land, maintaining ecological connectivity, and integrating biodiversity objectives across sectors, jurisdictions and scales. Effective implementation of Target 3 will therefore depend in part on progress towards other GBF targets, particularly Target 1 on integrated spatial planning and Target 2 on ecosystem restoration.

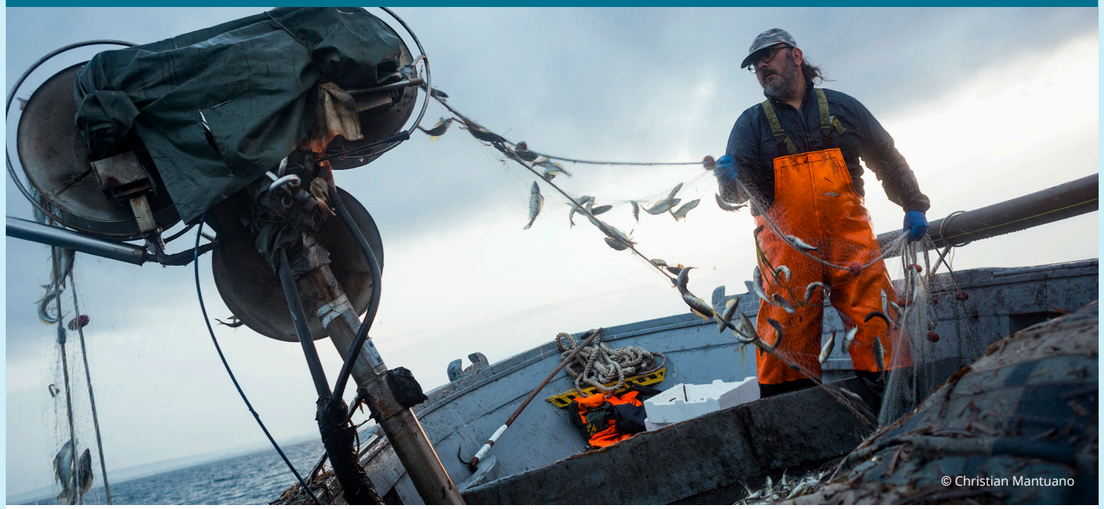
An ecosystem-based approach to **Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)** can support 30x30 by identifying where protection, restoration and ecological connectivity are most needed to maintain ecosystem integrity and resilience and placing these conservation priorities at the heart of spatial decision-making. Within this framework, MSP can guide where fishing, shipping, energy and other activities can take place in ways that minimize conflicts with conservation objectives and with one another.[82]

Ecosystem-based management can further address cumulative pressures across sectors, while restoration can rebuild ecological integrity and connectivity.

Sector-specific measures and strategies remain essential to reinforce these spatial objectives. Spatial and community-based fisheries management can reduce fishing pressures within and beyond MPCA boundaries, while **Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs)** and **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)**[83] can help prevent developments and activities from undermining conservation outcomes. These measures should be designed to support, rather than substitute for, effective spatial protection and ecosystem-based management.

Integration must also operate across jurisdictions. As MPAs are established in areas beyond national jurisdiction under the BBNJ Agreement, their effectiveness will depend on ecological connectivity and coherence with conservation and sectoral management across national boundaries and the wider ocean.[84]

INTEGRATING MARINE PROTECTION INTO SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE NORTHWESTERN MEDITERRANEAN


© Christian Mantuano

The northwestern Mediterranean is a heavily used transboundary seascape shared by France, Italy and Monaco, where local MPAs sit within the wider Pelagos Sanctuary. Important habitats and highly mobile species coexist with pressures from shipping, fisheries and tourism that cannot be addressed within individual MPA boundaries alone.[78]

The EU-funded MSP4BIO project[79] used this 130,000 km2 seascape to test how biodiversity priorities could be more systematically integrated into marine spatial planning (MSP), in support of the EU's target to strictly protect 10% of EU waters by 2030. The pilot considered ecological priorities, including connectivity for marine mammals and protection of deep-sea vulnerable marine ecosystems, alongside human activities across the wider seascape.[80]

Marine planners, MPA managers, NGOs and sectoral representatives worked collaboratively to examine the trade-offs between conservation and other uses. Using the participatory mapping platform SeaSketch, they visualized overlaps between ecological values and human activities and explored management scenarios, including placing spatial restrictions on fisheries and modifying shipping lanes to prevent collisions.[81]

The pilot illustrates how MSP can help to look beyond MPCA boundaries by bringing conservation priorities and sectoral activities into the same spatial decision-making process, helping identify where action beyond protected areas is needed to manage pressures and maintain ecological connectivity across the wider seascape.

The northwestern Mediterranean was one of six pilot sites where MSP4BIO tested this approach across different ecological and legal contexts in European sea basins. The project built a common framework for embedding biodiversity considerations into MSP, with three linked components: an ecological assessment identifying critical habitats and connectivity corridors, a socioeconomic assessment of coastal communities' dependence on ecosystem services, and a structured trade-off process for resolving spatial conflicts between them. Designed to be adapted to different contexts, the framework provides a practical blueprint for integrating conservation in MSP.

PART III



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A MARINE TOOLBOX FOR IMPLEMENTING TARGET 3

Marine conservation challenges do not occur in isolation: ecological and climate pressures, shifting species distributions, governance capacity and social considerations interact across seascapes. A wide range of organizations, initiatives and expert bodies have developed complementary tools, standards, frameworks and guidance to support implementation of Target 3. Used together, these resources can help governments and partners move beyond site-by-site approaches towards more integrated and adaptive conservation planning and management. Together, these resources provide a practical foundation for translating the qualitative dimensions of 30x30 into action across diverse marine and coastal contexts.

The figure on the next page highlights selected examples referenced throughout this brief and illustrates how they can contribute to different qualitative dimensions of Target 3. It also reflects the range of organizations and actors contributing knowledge, standards, data and practical approaches to support implementation. However, it is intended as an illustrative overview rather than an exhaustive inventory. The tools are complementary in nature and can be used together to support planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of MPCAs.



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TOOLS AND STANDARDS SUPPORTING TRANSPARENCY, MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACROSS ALL DIMENSIONS OF TARGET 3

COVERAGE OF MARINE PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS

UN environment programme WCMC · protected planet · SKYTRUTH

QUALITATIVE DIMENSIONS OF TARGET 3

1 Protecting areas of particular importance

- EBSAs
- IMMAs
- IMTAs
- KBAs
- ISRAs

CBD · KBA · IMMA · ISRA · IUCN SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group

2 Ecologically representative and well-connected systems

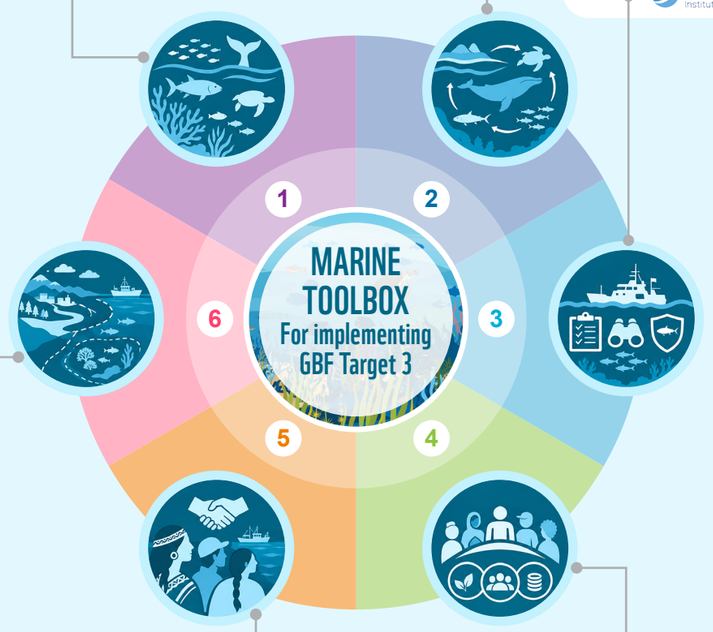
- Systematic conservation planning (e.g. Marxan, prioritizr)
- Connectivity science
- Climate-smart planning

IUCN · MARXAN conservation solutions · UN environment programme WCMC

3 Effective conservation and management

- Conservation Standards - adaptive management
- MEE / METT / IMET (GD-PAME)
- MPAtlas
- Marine Manager
- Conservation finance

IUCN · MARINE PROTECTION ATLAS · Global Fishing Watch · WWF · Marine Conservation Institute · protected planet



6 Integrating MPCAs into wider seascapes

- Conservation standards - strategic planning
- Ecosystem-based MSP
- Sectoral strategies
- SEA / EIA

IUCN · UNESCO · UN environment programme

5 Recognizing and respecting rights

- FPIC
- Rights-based approaches
- Community stewardship

CBD · FAO · ICCA Registry

4 Delivering equitable governance

- Participatory planning
- Stakeholder engagement
- Co-management

IUCN · WWF

CROSS-CUTTING STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Several standards provide integrated frameworks for defining what effective and equitable PCAs should look like and for supporting the delivery and assessment of conservation outcomes. As a result, they address many of the same elements reflected in the qualitative dimensions of Target 3, including effective governance, sound ecological design, effective management, and conservation outcomes. These standards are complementary, while differing in their scope, criteria and intended application.

Two particularly relevant examples are the IUCN Global Standard for Effective and Equitable Protected and Conserved Areas, which provides an integrated framework applicable across terrestrial, freshwater and marine protected and conserved areas,[85] and the Blue Park Standard for Effective Ocean Conservation, which applies similar principles specifically to MPAs.[86]

IUCN GLOBAL STANDARD FOR EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS

An integrated global standard for assessing and strengthening the conditions needed for protected and conserved areas to achieve effective and equitable conservation outcomes. Version 2.0 updates the former IUCN Green List Standard and is designed for broader application beyond Green List certification.

GOVERNANCE QUALITY AND VITALITY

Legitimate, equitable and transparent governance that is accountable and adaptive.

CONTEXT AND DESIGN

Sound understanding of context, values, objectives and threats informs effective design.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Effective management strategies, adequate capacity, monitoring and adaptive management.

PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREA OUTCOMES

Conservation of nature and culture, benefits for people and effective threat reduction.

THE BLUE PARK STANDARD

BLUE PARKS™

Reflecting a synthesis of marine protected area science, the Blue Park Standard identifies a benchmark for conservation effectiveness with criteria organized around six themes.

DESIGNED FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Sites are ecologically important and well designed to support biodiversity conservation.

EQUITABLY AND DURABLY GOVERNED

Governance is conservation-focused, durable and respects Indigenous and community rights.

PROTECTED FROM HARMFUL ACTIVITIES

The most harmful activities are excluded or tightly controlled.

ACTIVELY MANAGED WITH AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

Management is guided by the best available evidence and is effectively adaptive.

RESPECTED AND MAINTAINED WITH A COMPLIANCE STRATEGY

Rules are clear, communicated and enforced, and compliance evidence is tracked.

IMPLEMENTED WITH ADEQUATE CAPACITY

Sufficient human, institutional and financial capacity supports long-term implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS



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ACCELERATING HIGH-INTEGRITY IMPLEMENTATION TOWARDS 2030 DELIVERY

With the deadline to achieve the 2030 target fast approaching, governments must accelerate the expansion of MPCAs while ensuring that every new and existing MPCA is set up to deliver meaningful conservation outcomes. The knowledge, tools, standards and approaches needed to do so increasingly exist. The challenge now is for governments and partners to apply them at scale – supported by the capacity, financing and international cooperation required for effective implementation. This report identifies five implementation priorities for delivering Target 3 with high integrity.

1 MAKE EVERY NEW HECTARE COUNT

Accelerate conservation expansion towards the areas where it can deliver the greatest biodiversity benefits, while building coherent, representative and well-connected networks rather than collections of isolated sites.

Governments should use the best available science and knowledge, including Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge, to guide where new and expanded MPCAs are established and how networks are designed. This should include consideration of climate refugia and areas important for ecological resilience as conditions change. Progress towards 30% should be measured not only by additional coverage, but also by the extent to which that expansion strengthens the representation, connectivity and conservation of areas of particular importance for biodiversity, ecosystem functions and services. Public and private finance for conservation expansion should align with these strategic priorities and network-level planning.

2 TURN EXISTING COVERAGE INTO CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

Close the management, capacity and financing gaps that prevent existing MPCAs from delivering effectively for biodiversity and people.

Governments should identify where inadequate protection levels, permitted activities, insufficient management capacity, weak compliance and monitoring systems, or inadequate financing are limiting conservation outcomes, and prioritize investment to address these constraints. International and domestic finance, capacity development and technical cooperation must keep pace with expanding conservation commitments so that countries are equipped not only to designate MPCAs, but to manage them effectively over the long term.

3 MAKE 30X30 WORK FOR AND WITH PEOPLE

Place equity, rights and inclusive governance at the centre of MPCA design, implementation and management.

Governments should recognize applicable tenure, resource and governance rights and ensure FPIC where relevant. Indigenous Peoples and local communities should be supported and resourced as rights-holders, governance partners and conservation leaders, rather than be treated simply as stakeholders to be consulted. Implementation should also recognize the rights and safeguard the livelihoods, food security, cultural values and well-being of communities, including for small-scale fishers, while ensuring that the costs and benefits of conservation are shared fairly.

4 DELIVER 30X30 AS PART OF A HEALTHY OCEAN

Align Target 3 implementation with decisions governing the wider ocean so that conservation gains within MPCAs are not undermined by pressures beyond their boundaries.

This requires coordination across authorities and actors responsible for ocean planning and management, including marine industries, placing biodiversity objectives at the heart of marine spatial planning and integrating them across fisheries management, ecosystem restoration, pollution reduction and environmental assessment processes, while ensuring coherent implementation of GBF Targets 1, 2 and 3. Effective marine conservation depends on addressing cumulative pressures across entire seascapes and, where relevant, connected landscapes, not only within MPCAs.

5 USE THE BBNJ AGREEMENT TO ADVANCE GLOBAL OCEAN CONSERVATION

Operationalize the BBNJ Agreement to advance the identification, establishment and management of MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction as part of ecologically representative and well-connected networks across national waters and areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The BBNJ Agreement provides a historic opportunity to strengthen global ocean conservation and advance delivery of Target 3 at scale. Capacity-building, technology transfer and adequate, predictable and accessible finance from Parties, international institutions, finance and other partners will be essential to enable developing countries to participate fully in shaping and delivering this new generation of ocean conservation.



The path to 2030 is not a choice between expanding coverage and improving conservation quality. Both are essential to deliver meaningful outcomes for nature and people. Achieving Target 3 will require an expansion of MPCAs at the scale and pace needed to reach 30%, while ensuring that networks of MPCAs are ecologically representative, well connected, effectively managed, equitably governed, rights-based, and integrated within wider systems of ocean governance. Doing so by 2030 can secure the foundations for biodiversity recovery and lasting biodiversity outcomes over time.

The tools, knowledge and experience required to deliver this high integrity 30x30 in the ocean exist. What is needed now is the political commitment to use them, alongside the capacity, finance and cooperation needed to enable implementation at scale. The remaining years to 2030 must therefore be used not simply to increase the area conserved, but to build marine conservation systems capable of delivering for nature and people long beyond 2030.



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IN PURSUING MARINE 30X30 AS OUTLINED HERE, WE CAN SECURE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR OUR OCEAN AND ALL WHO DEPEND ON IT.



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WWF, 28 rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111
CH-550.0.128.920-7

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