

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Just 2.8% of the world's ocean is protected “effectively”

Governments far short of pledge to conserve 30% of the ocean by 2030

Two years after the world's nations committed to conserve at least 30% of the Earth's land, freshwater, and ocean by 2030, only 2.8% of the ocean is assessed as likely to be effectively protected, reveals a report launched today by a consortium of nature NGOs and funders.

Released ahead of the COP16 UN Biodiversity Conference¹, [‘On track or off course? Assessing progress toward the 30x30 target in the ocean’](#) reveals that countries are significantly falling short of that pledge. Only 8.3% of the world's ocean is designated as marine protected areas (MPAs), and most are either protected in name only or so loosely regulated that substantial harmful activities are allowed to continue within them. Moreover, as of 23 September 2024, just 19 countries and the EU had submitted NBSAPs with national marine biodiversity targets to the CBD Secretariat² - a critical first step in the biodiversity conservation process.

The “30x30” target, agreed at the COP15 UN Biodiversity Conference in 2022, is the most ambitious conservation commitment ever made. However, the report finds that the global marine area under some form of protection has increased by just 0.5% since then. At that rate of progress, just 9.7% of the ocean will be protected by 2030.

In a foreword to the report, **John Kerry, former US Secretary of State** and **José María Figueres, Former President of Costa Rica**, call on governments to “act together with urgency” to meet the 30x30 target.

They say: “Protecting and conserving at least 30% of the world's ocean is vital to safeguard marine biodiversity and the billions of people who depend on it for their livelihoods and food security. It is also essential to preserving the ocean's ability to act as our greatest climate ally by absorbing billions of tonnes of carbon emissions every year.”

‘On track or off course? Assessing progress toward the 30x30 target in the ocean’, was written by Metabolic Consulting with support from the Bloomberg Ocean Fund and developed in partnership with Campaign for Nature, the Marine Conservation Institute, and SkyTruth.

It warns that the broad definition of MPAs is inconsistently applied by countries, leaving scope for “blue washing”. Many MPAs allow the continuation of activities that are incompatible with effective biodiversity conservation such as industrial-scale fishing and harmful fishing methods, oil and gas extraction, mining, dredging, and dumping. Even where countries state the goal of high or full protection, the MPA may not be implemented or sufficiently resourced in a way that is likely to achieve this.

The report is based on analysis led by the Marine Conservation Institute, with data shared by ocean experts around the world who are evaluating MPAs in their countries. They assessed nearly 90% of



the global MPA area and found that just 2.8% is implemented and “fully” or “highly” protected – the levels defined as “effective” protection by a global standard called The MPA Guide.

Beth Pike, Director of Marine Protection Atlas at the Marine Conservation Institute, said: *“Two years after the aspirational increase of the global conservation target to 30% of our ocean by 2030, quality continues to lag behind quantity: less than 3% of marine areas are truly protected. The gap between pledge and action is vast, and without urgent, meaningful protection, the 30x30 goal will remain unrealized. The time to turn commitments into real, meaningful change is now - because our ocean can’t wait.”*

Lack of effective protection is a global problem

In countries where The MPA Guide has been applied to a portion of the country’s reported MPAs, the report finds MPA quality lagging behind quantity. The **UK** is a clear example of the gap between designating areas and protecting them effectively: while 47% of its domestic waters (excluding Overseas Territories) are in MPAs, less than 1% has been assessed as likely to be effective. This is largely because only specific features or species are protected, not the entire MPA sites. This creates a loophole that allows some of the most destructive fishing methods, including bottom trawling, to legally continue in more than half of these MPAs.

This lack of effective protection is seen worldwide, even in regions that appear to be making the most progress in marine conservation. While **Latin America and the Caribbean countries** have designated 27% of their collective nations’ ocean waters as MPAs, only 2.5% has been assessed and classified as likely to be effective. **North America** has protected 22% of marine waters under national jurisdiction, with 17% of them assessed and classified as likely to be effective. **Europe** has protected 20%, but only 7% were assessed and classified as likely to be effectively protected. Although these three regions have been leaders in designating MPAs, they have yet to announce any plans to increase coverage by 2030.

Melissa Wright, Bloomberg Ocean Initiative lead at Bloomberg Philanthropies, said: *“The 30x30 target is a historic opportunity to secure a sustainable future for the ocean. Despite a few bright spots and some progress on the push for high seas treaty ratification, this new report shows that not only has progress been almost non-existent since 2022, but the majority of existing and new marine protected areas are unlikely to provide meaningful protection to marine biodiversity. Fortunately, there is still time for governments to make good on their commitment if they act with urgency. The COP16 Biodiversity Conference provides a key opportunity to announce new contributions and finance for 30x30 and keep us on track. With momentum for ocean protection growing, the time to act is now.”*

The report reveals that:

- Just 14 countries have designated more than 30% of their waters as protected areas: **Monaco** (100%); **Palau** (99%); **UK** (68%); **Kazakhstan** (52%); **New Zealand** (49%); **Australia** (48%); **Argentina** (47%); **Germany** (45%); **Chile** (41%); **Colombia** (40%); **Belgium** (38%); **France** (33%); **Seychelles** (33%); and the **Netherlands** (32%).



- However, just two countries have been found likely to have effectively protected more than 30% of their waters, **Palau** (78%) and the **UK** (39%). Over 90% of the **UK's** MPAs are in its overseas territories, such as the Pitcairn Islands, Tristan da Cunha, and South Georgia, which enjoy much higher levels of protection than its domestic waters.
- Only four countries have significantly increased protection since 2022: **Comoros** has protected an additional 28%; **Oman** an extra 16%; **France** 11%; and **Australia** 5%.
- The goal of protecting 30% of the world's ocean by 2030 is still achievable if governments take urgent action in **five key areas**.

The following actions by governments are identified in the report as necessary to achieving 30x30 in the ocean:

- 1. Increase the extent and number of protected areas in national and international waters.** Governments need to establish networks of inshore and offshore MPAs protecting a range of ecosystems and species and providing “ecological connectivity”, for example allowing salmon to migrate between freshwater rivers and across vast regions of the ocean. As a basis for establishing countries’ contributions to the global marine 30x30 goal, each government must urgently set a strong national marine conservation target as part of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Plans submission under the GBF.

Governments should also ratify the High Seas Treaty as soon as possible, to enable the legal framework for the establishment of MPAs in international waters. The high seas constitute two-thirds of the global ocean but only 1.4% is under some form of protection, and just 0.8% is likely to be effectively protected. Governments need to set up and resource institutions to conserve these High Seas MPAs.
- 2. Ensure protection is effective.** Designating MPAs is not enough – they must be implemented and actively managed to fulfil the outcomes intended by their level of protection. Governments should also prioritize increasing the coverage of “highly” or “fully” protected MPAs in their countries’ contributions toward the global 30x30 target. The MPA Guide framework provides a metric to standardise MPA quality reporting and should be applied at the national and regional levels to gain insight into progress at this scale.
- 3. Empower Indigenous Peoples and local communities.** Governments should recognize and restore the rights of Indigenous Peoples to create and manage conservation areas, devolve coastal conservation management to local communities, and direct resources to support these efforts. In all cases, Indigenous Peoples should have free, prior, and informed consent in decision-making about creating and managing areas to conserve marine biodiversity in their waters.
- 4. Finance effective protection.** Rich countries should support those with fewer resources so they can fund effective protection of biodiversity. Developed countries must make good on their commitment to deliver at least \$20 billion per year to developing countries by 2025 and \$30 billion by 2030.



- 5. Improve reporting and data collection.** Governments should standardise data collection to monitor progress against the 30x30 target, including details on MPAs' stage of establishment and their protection levels. Current self-reported data often includes MPAs that are not implemented or lack effective protection.

Jason Schatz, CTO of SkyTruth, a nonprofit conservation technology organisation that created the 30x30 Progress Tracker, said: *"It's vital that 30x30 data is accessible, transparent, and easy to use so that all stakeholders can clearly see how far we've come and how to accelerate the momentum toward protecting the world's biodiversity. When everyone has access to the same information we can make collective decisions about how to move forward in a way that's inclusive and effective. This report shows we still have a long way to go."*

The report draws on the latest data from the Marine Conservation Institute's Marine Protection Atlas (MPAtlas) and from SkyTruth's 30x30 Progress Tracker (which draws on data from MPAtlas, the World Database on Protected Areas, and other sources), combined with case study research and expert interviews. In exploring the pace and likely effectiveness of marine protection, it aims to complement UNEP-WCMC and IUCN's Protected Planet Report, which tracks progress towards global targets for protected and conserved areas based on government data. See Annex I of the report for more details.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1 The COP16 UN Biodiversity Conference is scheduled to take place October 21- November 1 in Cali, Colombia.

2 Ahead of the COP16 conference, countries are expected to submit their revised and updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to achieve the 30x30 target and other commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at COP15 in 2022 under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

About Bloomberg Ocean Initiative

The Bloomberg Ocean Initiative is Bloomberg Philanthropies' effort to protect the world's ocean from climate change, overfishing, and pollution threats. Since 2014, Bloomberg Philanthropies has invested over \$366 million to restore and protect critical ocean ecosystems to support the global goal of protecting 30% of the world's ocean by 2030. The Bloomberg Ocean Initiative supports local and global partners in advocating for data-driven solutions, community involvement, and policy change that can help safeguard marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, and the billions of people who



depend on them. To date, these efforts have helped pass over 100 new policies at the local and national level that have strengthened the protection of 10.8 million square miles of ocean – nearly three times the area of the United States. Learn more [here](#).

About Campaign for Nature

Campaign for Nature is a not-for-profit organisation whose aim is to: support the successful implementation of the ambitious global goal to protect 30% of the world's land and sea by 2030; ensure that biodiversity conservation is conducted in a way that fully integrates and respects Indigenous peoples rights and leadership; help mobilise financial resources to ensure protected areas are properly managed in perpetuity. For more information, visit <https://www.campaignfornature.org/>.

About the Marine Conservation Institute

Founded in 1996, Marine Conservation Institute works in the U.S. and globally to protect at least 30% of the ocean by 2030—for us and future generations. We focus on safeguarding the ocean's most vital areas by identifying and advocating for strong marine protected areas (MPAs), enhancing laws and tools to conserve marine biodiversity, recognizing excellence in MPAs through our Blue Parks initiative, and providing accurate reporting on global conservation efforts via our Marine Protection Atlas (MPAtlas.org). For more information, visit marine-conservation.org.

About Metabolic

Metabolic is a systems change agency striving to transition the global economy to a fundamentally sustainable state where people and nature thrive. It guides decision-makers and implements real-world projects that bring ambitious ideas to life. Metabolic has five core areas of operation. It conducts leading research, develops future-facing strategies, builds software tools (such as the nature and biodiversity impact assessment tool, [LINK](#)), scales impactful ventures, and empowers communities on the ground. Metabolic has developed a suite of approaches that allow it to quickly map a system (whether a place, company, or sector), understand how it functions, and identify where it can intervene to make the greatest impact. Learn more [HERE](#).

About SkyTruth

SkyTruth is a nonprofit environmental watchdog that uses satellite imagery and remote sensing data to identify and monitor threats to the planet's natural resources. Its stated mission is to "share the view from space to promote conservation for people and the planet." For more information, visit <https://skytruth.org/>.