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Theme 2. Managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems

Input from National Geographic Society

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There is overwhelming scientific evidence for the need to protect at least 30% of the ocean by 2030, if we are to prevent an ecological and humanitarian disaster. But today, less than 8% of the ocean is somehow protected. If we scale fully protected areas that ban fishing and other damaging activities, the 30% of the ocean will help regenerate the other 70%, as long as we manage the 70% responsibly. But some will say that we can't protect more of the ocean because we need to fish more to feed more people. That's a fallacy, because over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the fish stocks are exploited to the limit or overfished. Spending more hours fishing isn't going to give us more fish. Marine reserves will, because they allow marine life to recover – fish biomass increases on average 6 times in no-take areas – and that produces a spillover of eggs, larvae and adult fish that can help increase catches around them. More living biomass also means more carbon sequestration and more resilience to ocean warming. And when the fish come back, the divers come in, helping to create jobs and bringing in much greater economic revenue. A healthy ocean benefits everybody through increases in food security, climate change mitigation, and many other benefits that are not typically measured in dollars. But some will say that we can't afford to protect more of the ocean. Today governments subsidize overfishing with more cash than the amount needed to manage a network of marine reserves covering 30% of the ocean. The world spends more on ice cream than we spend in protecting our ocean life support system! And we know that every dollar invested in marine reserves produces \$10 in economic output. Therefore, 30x30 is a no-brainer: it has enormous ecological, social, economic and climate benefit. And there is massive public demand for it. What we need now is political leadership and financial responsibility.