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DEPARTMENT OF
**ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

OCEAN ACTION NEWSLETTER

**GLOBAL OCEAN PROCESSES:
LATEST BREAKTHROUGHS
AND UPDATES**

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Introduction



In this issue, in addition to messages from Ambassador Peter Thomson, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, and Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and UN Legal Counsel, we are delighted to share the thrilling advancements and breakthroughs in ocean-related processes on the global stage. Over the past years, remarkable progress has been achieved, including the historic adoption of the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement) in New York, the Global Biodiversity Framework in Montreal, the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies in Geneva, as well as the ongoing negotiations towards a global treaty to combat plastic pollution.

Following the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, co-hosted by Portugal and Kenya in Lisbon, efforts are underway to implement the outcomes of the Conference, including the registered voluntary commitments made by Member States and stakeholders.

The momentum for global ocean action is robust, with international ocean communities set to convene again in Nice, France, in 2025 for the third UN Ocean Conference, co-hosted by France and Costa Rica. Currently, delegations are negotiating the modalities resolution of the Nice Conference, with the goal of adopting it by the year's end.

Join us as we delve into these impactful developments that are shaping the future of our oceans.

Message from Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and UN Legal Counsel

Photo by July Zith Ankin from Getty Images Signature

On 19 June 2023, the United Nations adopted a historic 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, known as the “BBNJ Agreement”.

In an age in which we often hear of the demise of multilateralism, the adoption of this Agreement demonstrates, on the contrary, the continued strength of multilateralism. This is also a significant development for the implementation of international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This development is expected to make substantial contributions to the achievement of the 20230 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14).

After nearly 20 years of discussions, this Agreement is the first comprehensive and cross-sectoral ocean treaty in decades. It provides tools to strengthen the management of activities in over two-thirds of the ocean.

The Agreement represents a collective path towards improving the health and resilience of

marine ecosystems. It is also a path towards greater equity in benefitting from and participating effectively in ocean activities.

As the Secretary-General of the Intergovernmental Conference tasked with elaborating the text of the Agreement, it is immensely gratifying, on a personal level, to have seen the process brought to its conclusion. Given the urgency of taking action to reverse the precipitous decline in ocean health, I am also pleased that the Agreement has been signed by over 80 States since it opened for signature in September.

The BBNJ Agreement becomes the third implementing agreement to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It focuses on achieving the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of the high seas and the international seabed



area for the present and in the long-term.

Up to now, there was limited coordination in implementation and some gaps, leaving cumulative impacts of human activity on these ecosystems largely unaccounted for.

The BBNJ Agreement significantly strengthens the prospects for the effective and cross-sectoral governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The BBNJ Agreement addresses four key elements.

First, the Agreement provides for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from activities with respect to marine genetic resources of areas beyond national jurisdiction and digital sequence information. Marine genetic resources have many potential valuable uses, from bioremediation to medicine, and are a growing area of research, including in the biotechnology sector. The Agreement seeks to address the imbalance in States' capacity to access and carry out research and development in this respect. It does so by providing for obligations to share both monetary and non-monetary benefits.

Second, the Agreement provides for procedures for the establishment and implementation of area-based management tools, including marine protected areas. These are essential tools to manage sectors or activities within a geographically defined area in order to achieve particular conservation and sustainable use objectives. Such measures are vital for protecting and restoring ecosystems and strengthening resilience to stressors,

including those related to climate change. To the extent that certain existing bodies have competence to establish sectoral area-based management tools, the Agreement envisages consultations and cooperation with such bodies.

Third, the Agreement elaborates on obligations under the Convention relating to environmental impact assessments. The potential impacts on the marine environment of planned activities will have to be assessed before such activities are authorized to proceed. The Agreement establishes processes, thresholds and other requirements to that end. Under the Agreement, potential cumulative impacts and impacts in areas within national jurisdiction will have to be considered as part of those processes.

Finally, the Agreement contains significant provisions on capacity-building and the development and transfer of marine technology. These provisions aim to ensure that all States can effectively implement their obligations. Parties are required to cooperate in assisting other Parties to achieve the Agreement's objectives through capacity-building and the development and transfer of marine technology. Modalities for doing so are provided. Significantly, dedicated funding sources for such capacity-building are established under the Agreement. This is expected to level the playing field for States to participate in and benefit from ocean activities and govern ocean space effectively.

The Agreement also establishes a funding mechanism and sets up various institutional mechanisms to support States

Parties in realizing its aims. And it includes the full recognition of the special circumstances of small island developing States and of least developed countries as one of the general principles and approaches guiding the achievement of the objectives of the Agreement. Taken as a whole, this new Agreement strengthens ocean governance in several respects.

First, the Agreement fills certain regulatory gaps or addresses grey areas, for example, with regard to marine genetic resources and marine protected areas. It thus provides regulatory certainty for both States and private actors involved in various sectors.

Second, it provides mechanisms for cross-sectoral cooperation, promising profound impacts towards more integrated and holistic approaches.


Third, the Agreement also recognizes ecological connectivity, thereby acknowledging the ocean as a continuum and the need for coherence between measures within and beyond national jurisdiction.

Fourth, the Agreement marks a turning point in the recognition of the role of traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in global ocean processes, as this is given prominence alongside other scientific information under the Agreement. Participation of other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the scientific community and the private sector, is also embedded in the Agreement.

Fifth, I am also pleased to note that it incorporates gender balance with regard to institutional arrangements and gender responsiveness of capacity-building activities.

As is apparent from this brief overview, the implementation of the Agreement, once it is in force, can make important contributions to the achievement of several targets under SDG 14, either directly or indirectly. It can also support other SDGs, most notably SDGs 5, 10, 12 and 13.

Our ocean, our planet and our livelihoods are under severe strain, including from the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. The rapid entry into force of the Agreement and its effective implementation will be key in tackling that three-pronged threat and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Message from Ms. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization

PHOTO BY FERRY EKA FROM FRDMN

At the 12th Ministerial Conference on 17 June 2022, World Trade Organization (WTO) Members delivered on the mandate contained in the SDG 14.6 target by adopting the binding multilateral **Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies**, the first WTO Agreement with sustainability at its core. By curbing subsidies to illegal, unreported, and regulated (IUU) fishing, fishing of overfished stocks, and fishing in the unregulated high seas, this Agreement will contribute to the sustainability of marine resources, whilst at the same time safeguarding the livelihoods of people that depend on marine resources. The Agreement also provides for the creation of a dedicated WTO Fisheries Subsidies Funding Mechanism to provide technical assistance and capacity building for developing and LDC WTO Members to implement the Agreement.

The Agreement has been greatly welcomed, but **it will only be able to deliver on its environmental and developmental objectives after it enters into force**, when two-thirds of WTO Members deposit their instruments of acceptance. Our aim and

priority are to ensure that this will happen by the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13), to be held in Abu Dhabi in February 2024.



I commend the Members that have already deposited their instruments of acceptance and recognize the immense efforts that several other Members are making to conclude their national ratification process as soon as possible. However, if we are to meet our target to have the Agreement entering into force by WTO MC13, **I call on all remaining WTO Members to ratify the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies as soon as possible.** Having the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies enter into force will be a win for people and our planet.

Let's be on the right side of history.



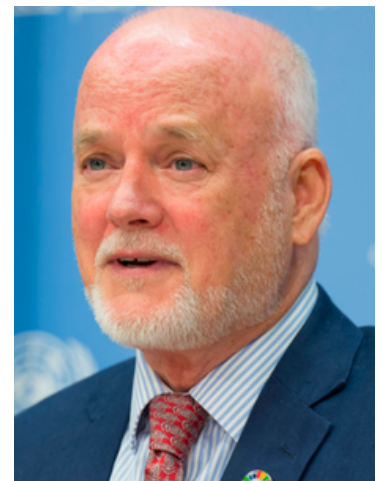
Message from Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean

Photo by Alorzo Photo from Pexels

Of late, we have witnessed a great surge of engagement in ocean conservation and the development of a truly sustainable ocean economy. Ocean-related start-ups and innovation are flourishing; the private sector is embracing the Sustainable Blue Economy; philanthropies, NGOs and civil society are elevating their ocean work; and ocean science is receiving more attention than ever before in human history.

At the UN level, in spite of the geopolitical tensions of our times, remarkable momentum has been experienced on the ocean front. In June this year, the High Seas Treaty was adopted in New York, enabling good governance of the ocean beyond national jurisdictions. In Montreal last December, the Global Biodiversity Framework was consensually agreed to, with its undertaking to protect 30 per cent of the planet by 2030. At the World Trade Organisation in Geneva, work to rid the world of harmful fisheries subsidies is making steady progress, as are the efforts out of Nairobi to negotiate a treaty to control the rampant plastic pollution of our planet.

These are monumental steps in our struggle to meet the triple planetary crisis of our times, but none will have any effect until they have been robustly



concluded, ratified and implemented. Therefore the catch-cry to all countries is, "Agree, Ratify and Implement!" At the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon last June, a profusion of workable, science-based solutions for the ocean's problems were presented, with billions of dollars committed in support, and a robust political declaration adopted. The progress and accountability of these solutions will be examined in full at the next UN Ocean Conference, fast approaching, in Nice in June 2025.

With the 28th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 28) now

upon us, we are focussing on the ocean-climate change nexus.

From rising sea levels, to changing ocean currents; from protection and restoration of blue carbon assets, to marine carbon dioxide removal options; from food security, to the death of coral; the ocean and climate change are inextricably entwined. What is clear is that a massive pivot towards investment in ocean science and the sustainable blue economy is what we now require, all in a nature-friendly world of truly circular economies.

The realities of our planetary responsibilities and the absolute moral imperative of intergenerational justice oblige us to pull out all the stops at COP 28 in order to keep global warming around 1.5 degrees. They oblige us to start living in better balance with the world, to stop making war on Nature, to make peace with it, and thereby to stop the decline in the ocean's health. We must make that pivot as if our grandchildren's lives depend on it, because for many of them, that will be the case.

You are invited to follow the Special Envoy's [X](#), where he shares messages of solutions and strategies for achieving a healthy ocean through implementation of the SDG 14 and fidelity to the Paris Climate Agreement. More information about his work can be found on [the website](#).



Photo by Mikolajus Bader from Pixabay



Updates from the Community of Ocean Action (COA): Coral Reefs

Photo by Johanna Sjöholm from Getty Images

The Coral Reef Breakthrough

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), a network of 45 countries that represent over 75 per cent of the world's coral reefs, has launched the Coral Reef Breakthrough in partnership with the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) and the High-Level Climate Champions (HLCC). The Coral Reef Breakthrough aims to secure the future of at least 125,000 square kilometres of shallow-water tropical coral reefs with investments of at least USD 12 billion to support the resilience of more than half a billion people globally by 2030.

In addition to broad-based climate action, the Coral Reef Breakthrough will be achieved through:

- Action point 1: Stop drivers of loss: Mitigate local drivers of loss, including land-based sources of pollution, destructive coastal development and overfishing.
- Action point 2: Double the area of coral reefs under effective protection: Bolster resilience-based coral reef conservation efforts by aligning with and transcending

global coastal protection targets, including 30x30.

- Action point 3: Accelerate Restoration: Assist the development and implementation of innovative solutions at scale and climate smart designs that support coral adaptation to impact 30 per cent of degraded reefs by 2030.
- Action point 4: Secure investments of at least USD 12 billion by 2030 from public and private sources to conserve and restore these crucial ecosystems.

Achieving the Coral Reef Breakthrough means preventing the functional extinction of one of the world's most threatened, yet most valuable and most biodiverse, ecosystems.

The Breakthrough was launched through the ICRI 37th General Meeting and developed with support from the Government of Sweden and the Principality of Monaco.

Meeting the targets of the Coral Breakthrough will be instrumental for achieving the Sustainable Development

Goals, particularly SDG 14: Life Below Water. Actions to conserve, protect and restore 50 per cent of the world's coral reefs would potentially generate over USD 18 billion in tourism revenues annually, preserve important fishing grounds and spawn aggregations for commercially important species, as well as safeguard USD 5.5 billion of coastal economic value through shoreline protection. Securing the future of coral reefs identified as climate refugia would also provide hope for lasting recovery and potential to resist climate threats in the decades to come.

Read the full press release:
icriforum.org/coral-breakthrough

Global Fund for Coral Reefs

The Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) became operational in 2021 as a blended finance vehicle and it hosts the only UN fund dedicated to SDG 14, as well as a privately managed impact investment fund.

Through an ecosystem-based approach, the GFCR deploys grant, concessional and investment capital to scale financial solutions that aim to bolster the resilience of coral reefs and the communities that depend on them. Early lessons learned from the GFCR and other actors in the SDG 14 finance space include the need for prioritized action and catalytic use of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to identify, incubate and de-risk pipelines of bankable solutions aligned with ocean-positive impact. Although in early stages of portfolio growth, the GFCR has already identified and begun incubation support for more than 40 coral reef-positive enterprises through blended finance programming in ten countries, including small island developing States and least developed countries. GFCR is now working to scale that approach to 23 countries by the end of 2024, with a target of incubation support and unlocked private investment to scale impact for over 200 solutions by 2030.

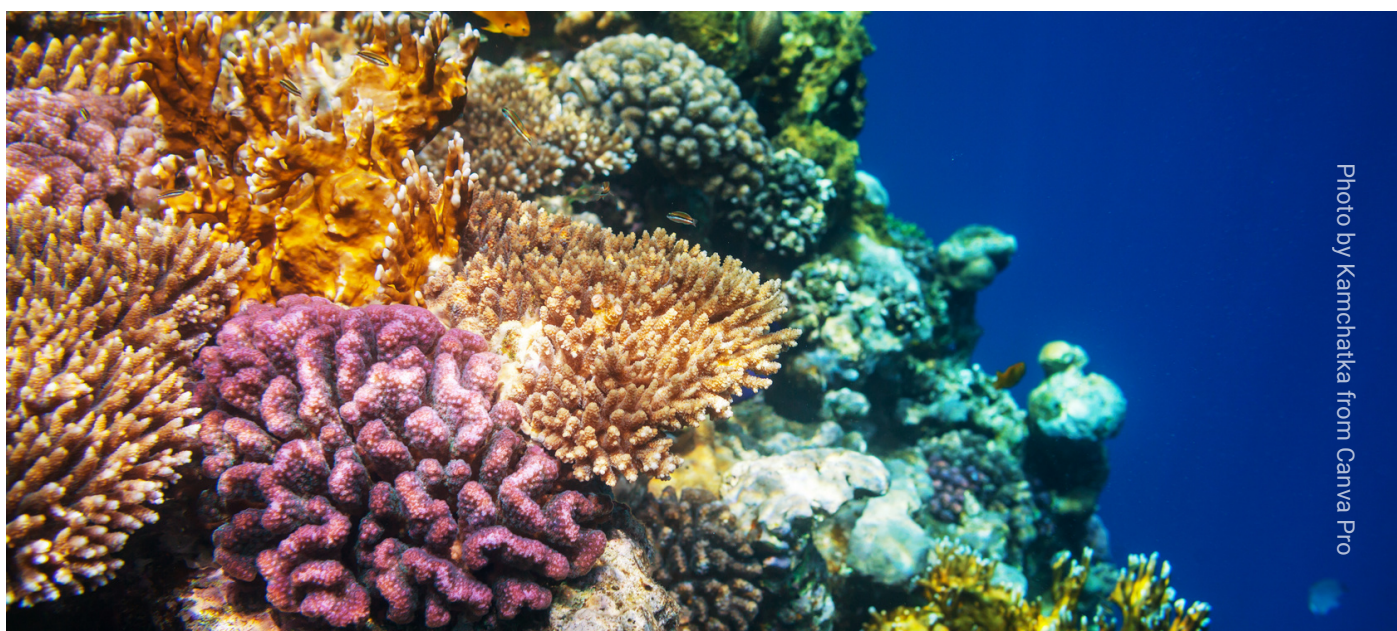


Photo by Kamchatka from Canva Pro



Updates from the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030

Photo by Ahmed Aattar - Egyptian
Photography from Getty Images

Proclaimed in 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly, the [UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030](#) (the Ocean Decade) seeks to stimulate ocean science and knowledge generation to reverse the decline of the state of the ocean system and catalyse new opportunities for sustainable development of this marine ecosystem. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC/UNESCO) is tasked with coordinating the implementation of the Decade.

2024 Ocean Decade Conference

Join us in Barcelona, Spain, between 8-12 April 2024 and play your part in building the Ocean Decade roadmap to 2030! Following an overwhelming response from the Decade community to the launch of pre-registration and call for Satellite Events, two parallel calls for posters and oral presentations provided interested parties with a golden opportunity to highlight transformative science-driven ocean solutions to the existing and future challenges of the Ocean Decade. Full

registration will open in mid-December – keep an eye on the Conference website!

Call for Decade Actions No. 06/2023 open for co-design support

In its third year of implementation, the Ocean Decade continues to evolve and adapt to the specific needs of under-represented regions with the new Call focusing on Africa and Caribbean SIDS. Recognizing their high dependence on marine resources and multiple challenges on the way to sustainable ocean management, the Call aims to fill gaps in knowledge and capacity development through participatory and tailored process of co-design of Decade Actions. The first part of [Call for Decade Actions No. 06/2023](#) is open until 10 December 2023.

Vision 2030: Progress of Working Groups 1 and 3

Led by 10 expert Working Groups, [Vision 2030](#) is the Ocean Decade's strategic ambition setting process to identify a

common measure of success for the [10 Decade Challenges](#). To date, Working Groups 1 and 3 have outlined their objectives, identified obstacles, and detailed the necessary steps to address [marine pollution](#) and optimize the ocean's role in [sustainably feeding the world's population](#). These efforts will culminate in white papers to be presented during the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference.

Follow the Ocean Decade at COP 28!

With a packed agenda of events at COP 28, the Ocean Decade is working to place the ocean centre stage in global strategies for climate action through two groundbreaking initiatives: sharing a [pavilion with OceanX](#) and partnering with the [Ocean Pavilion](#). Additionally, the Decade is co-organising a set of partner events taking place in Blue Zone and in the margins of COP 28.





From Lisbon to Nice: Implementing SDG 14 with Communities of Ocean Actions

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in collaboration with the UN Office of Sustainable Development (UNOSD) organized a workshop entitled *"From Lisbon to Nice: Implementing SDG 14 with Communities of Ocean Actions"* in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 14 to 15 November 2023. The event brought together representatives from the co-hosts of the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC) and the 2025 UNOC, as well as participants from Communities of Ocean Actions (COAs) and voluntary commitment (VC) holders from governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the UN system.

During the workshop, participants engaged in discussions on enhancing the implementation of the outcomes of the 2022 UNOC, with a specific focus on VCs to contribute to the advancement of SDG 14 and sustainable development as a whole. Participants agreed on the immediate and imperative need to implement the commitments made at the Conference without delay, highlighting the pivotal role

of financing, scientific collaboration, capacity building, the exchange of information and partnership. Two special sessions were set up to gather insights from experts on ocean data and impacts of VCs followed by interactive discussions.

The second day of the event was dedicated to reviewing of VC implementation with COA and VC holders. Representatives from nine COAs and VC holders delivered presentations on the progress of VC implementation, exchanging best practices and identifying key challenges. Participants collectively advocated for the development of a more streamlined system that enables VC holders to monitor and report their progress more efficiently. They emphasized the need for enhanced coordination and mobilizing funding as well as the importance of effective partnerships among the communities.

The workshop also featured video messages from Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA, Mr. Myeong-dal Song, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Oceans and



Fisheries, Republic of Korea, Ambassador Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, Special Envoy of the French President for the third UN Ocean Conference, Ambassador Georgina Guillén, Director-General of Foreign Policy, Costa Rica, and Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean.

More information about the workshop can be found [here](#).



Voluntary Commitments in the Spotlight

Photo by Dmitry Ankin from Pexels

➤ ***Ending the directed hunts of small cetaceans, 47366***

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) is committed to working with international partners and governments to prevent the continued directed hunts of small cetacean species.

Worldwide, approximately 100,000 small whales, dolphins and porpoises are intentionally killed each year. In most cases, these are unregulated, or even illegal, hunts and a worrying acceleration of their use as bait, and the practice of 'assisted bycatch', is being documented. Typically, all takes are unsustainable and poorly documented and their impact on populations is unknown, however, globally, several small cetacean species inhabiting coastal (and riverine) areas have been identified as at risk of imminent extinction. In addition, emerging scientific studies suggest that small cetaceans have important functions in the ocean ecosystem, and a decline in their numbers could have unknown detrimental effects on other oceanic species and ecosystem functioning.

WDC is working internationally to advocate for closer cooperation between international and regional conventions to (1) protect and conserve small cetacean populations, (2) advance international efforts to address the aquatic wild meat crisis, (3) address the health and safety issues associated with human consumption of

small cetacean meat and other products, given high levels of toxins in small cetaceans and contaminants in the marine environment, and (4) harmonise national, regional and international measures to halt the extensive exploitation of small cetacean populations.

➤ ***GloNoise – global partnership for mitigation of underwater noise from shipping, 48193***

The overall objective of GloNoise project is to establish a global partnership among developing countries and help raise awareness, build capacity, define baselines and promote international policy dialogue on mitigation of underwater noise from shipping. GloNoise Partnership aims to create a partnership of Lead Pilot Countries (LPCs) and support them through engagement with the International Maritime Organization, private sector and strategic partners from developed countries to tackle the major environmental issue of underwater noise pollution from commercial shipping.

➤ ***World Association of Marine Stations: mobilising global capacity and facilitating networking and capacity building, 46352***

It is estimated that nearly a thousand coastal laboratories and institutes are located around

the world's oceans. These laboratories have accumulated knowledge and data for decades but until the present initiative, their joint potential has been far too little exploited.

The purpose of World Association of Marine Stations (WAMS) is to provide a forum for marine stations from all regions of the world to establish inclusive partnerships and strengthen collaboration among marine scientists to foster marine scientific research internationally.

WAMS will enable better identification of global capacity and facilitate coordination on a range of issues including:

- education and training;
- citizen science and public outreach;
- interdisciplinary research;
- survey, monitoring and long-term observations.

This global network will provide the marine scientific community with a common voice on marine research matters and marine

policy, which in turn will foster the use of science to inform policy at the international level. This will facilitate an integrated global response to climate change impacts on marine ecosystems, their sustainability and biodiversity. Ultimately, WAMS will help the marine scientific community to better support global goals for the ocean and provide a stronger voice to champion the role of marine stations.

Other Voluntary Commitments

- Do Away With Plastics in Schools, [46090](#)
- Worldwide expansion and implementation of protected areas for whales and dolphins, [47363](#)
- Sustainable Brazilian Ocean and Coasts Initiative, [43529](#)
- InResST (the Ocean Cleaner), [54024](#)
- Community-led waste management in remote regions in Indonesia, [47938](#)
- Promoting ocean education: Ocean Bachelor – meet the ocean now!, [46768](#)





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