

2025



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SDG 14:

LIFE BELOW WATER

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



WHERE WE STAND

- Oceans are essential to life on Earth, regulating climate, sustaining biodiversity, supporting livelihoods and food security, enabling global trade, and providing countless ecosystem services. Yet they face growing threats from overfishing, pollution, and climate change.
- Only 8.4% of the ocean is under protected and conserved areas, far from the 30% target by 2030, and just 46% of marine key biodiversity areas are under protection.
- Ocean recovery is possible through strong fisheries management, ecosystem- and science-based approaches, “blue finance”, and bold conservation, which requires greater investment, inclusive and participatory approaches, and innovative partnerships.
- The 2025 UN Ocean Conference in June 2025 has brought renewed momentum, with a bold political declaration focused on marine protection, pollution control, high-seas governance, and support for vulnerable nations as well as over 800 voluntary commitments. Significant progress was made on the Agreement on Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (the BBNJ Agreement), with 19 new ratifications bringing the total to 50—just 10 short of the 60 needed for it to enter into force.



FACTS AND FIGURES

- In 2024, 126 countries and territories were engaged in marine spatial planning initiatives, a tool for implementing ecosystem-based approaches to managing marine areas—up 20% from 2023. However, only 45 have formally approved marine spatial plans.
- Ocean acidification is intensifying due to rising CO₂ emissions with average pH falling from 8.1 in 1985 to 8.04 in 2023. Monitoring stations grew from 178 in 2021 to 765 in 2025, yet major data gaps still hinder impact modelling and ecosystem vulnerability assessments.
- In 2024 ocean heat content reached the highest level in 65 years. Ocean warming drives severe marine ecosystem damage, including the fourth global coral bleaching event, confirmed in April 2024 and still ongoing. It is considered the most widespread and intense on record, affecting 84% of reefs across 83 countries and territories between January 2023 and May 2025.
- Even if global warming is limited to 1.5°C, 70-90% of warm-water reefs could vanish by 2050. At 2°C warming, nearly all reefs would disappear, threatening biodiversity, food security, and climate resilience.
- New global estimates based on expanded stock assessments show that 64.5% of marine fish stocks were sustainably fished in 2021, while 35.5% were overfished. This marks a modest improvement from previous estimates of 62.3% for sustainably fished stocks. The share of overfished stocks continues to grow by about 1% annually, underscoring the urgent need for stronger fisheries management.
- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains a major threat to global fisheries. As of June 2025, 83 Parties (67% of coastal States) had joined the Agreement on Port State Measures, the first binding global instrument to combat IUU fishing. From 2018 to 2024, the global average implementation rating improved from 3 to 4 (medium to high) on a 5-point scale.
- In 2024, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries marked their 10th anniversary. Despite growing adoption, the global average implementation score fell from 5 in 2022 to 4 in 2024 (based on 112 country reports), though overall trends since 2018 remain positive with increased country reporting.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER



To learn more about global progress on the 17 SDGs, [click here](#) to read the latest Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025.

SPOTLIGHT



UNITED NATIONS
OCEAN CONFERENCE
NICE, FRANCE 2025

Under the overarching theme “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”, the Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) was held in Nice, France from 9 to 13 June 2025.

Co-hosted by the Governments of Costa Rica and France, the Conference welcomed approximately 15,000 participants, including 81 VVIPs, of which 53 were Heads of State and Government, 2 Crown Princes/Princesses and 3 Vice Presidents, along with 206 Ministers from 177 Member States. World leaders joined thousands of young people, business leaders, scientists and civil society representatives to usher in a new chapter for ocean action. Three special events, 130 side events in the Blue Zone, as well as over 300 off-site and virtual side events took place in parallel, which further enriched the discussions.

The Conference adopted the Political Declaration “**Our ocean, our future: united for urgent action**”, which brings forth an escalated sense of urgency in tone and calls for immediate transformative action, recognizing the need for three crucial changes: greater investment; enhanced science-policy interface; accelerated implementation of international frameworks. Numerous countries announced ratifications of the **Agreement under UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)**, marking a major step toward its entry into force. It also reaffirms the global community's commitment to develop **an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution** based on a comprehensive approach.

Around 800 **voluntary commitments** were made in the lead up to the Conference in Nice.

To learn more, [visit here](#).



To inform the thematic review of SDG 14 at the 2025 HLPF, UN DESA, UNEP, FAO, supported by other UN partners, organized an **Expert Group Meeting on SDG 14 and its interlinkages with other SDGs** on 12-13 May 2025.

To learn more about the Expert Group Meeting, [click here](#).



UN SYSTEM IN ACTION

- **UNEP and FAO** jointly launched the first **World Restoration Flagships for 2025** at UNOC3, targeting nearly 5 million hectares of marine and coastal ecosystems, aiming to combat pollution, invasive species and overexploitation.
- **FAO, IMO, and UNEP** co-lead **Working Group 43** of the **Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP)**, which provides scientific guidance on sea-based sources of marine litter, especially abandoned and lost fishing gear.
- Led by **IMO** and in collaboration with **UNDP and GEF**, the **GloNoise Partnership Project** addresses the global challenge of underwater radiated noise (URN) from shipping, which poses significant risks to marine ecosystems.
- Led by **IMO and FAO**, the **GloLitter Partnerships** supports developing countries, including Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, in identifying opportunities for the prevention and reduction of marine litter, including both the shipping and fisheries industries. And through the **GloFouling Partnership**, **IMO** aims to address the transboundary introduction of biofouling-mediated Invasive Aquatic Species (IAS). Through **GreenVoyage2050** and **IMO CARES**, **IMO** provides technical support and capacity building to developing countries, including SIDS and LDCs, to reduce GHG emissions in shipping and adopt energy-efficient technologies, fostering a more sustainable maritime industry.
- **UNESCO** partnered with **IOC, NOAA, IAEA, IOCCP, and GOOS** to create the **Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON)**, a collaborative international network to detect and understand the drivers of ocean acidification in estuarine-coastal-open ocean environments, the resulting impacts on marine ecosystems, and to make the information available to optimize modeling studies.
- Initiated by **UNDP** along with numerous partners including **UNCDF, UNESCO, CBD, UNEP, ICRI, UK, Pegasus Capital, and Bloomberg Philanthropies**, the **Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR)** is a public-private coalition deploying a range of financial solutions and support for sustainable businesses to improve the resilience of coastal ecosystems, economies, and communities.
- The **Global Ocean Energy Alliance** was developed by **UNIDO** and Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centres (**GN-SEC**) and launched in collaboration with **SIDS DOCK** at the 2022 UN Ocean Conference.
- The **Ocean Tourism Pact**, supported by **UNWTO, UNEP** under the One Planet Network's Sustainable Tourism Programme, aims to protect marine and coastal ecosystems and shape a sustainable future for blue tourism.
- The **UN-Portugal Ocean Fellowship**, led by **UN DESA** in partnership with the Government of Portugal, aims to build the capacity of high-level ocean policy officials from developing countries to accelerate the implementation of SDG14.

* This is not an exhaustive list of UN system actions to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. For more information, please visit



UN SYSTEM SDG
IMPLEMENTATION
DATABASE