



We Need Meaningful Protections for at Least 30% of the Ocean

Humans have put the health and viability of marine biodiversity and the ocean at risk, and we must act urgently to safeguard their future and, by extension, our own. Many nations, aware of the challenge, are working together to establish an ambitious global conservation framework to protect biodiversity. Protected area coverage is a key metric to measure success. The leading science indicates that a minimum of 30% of the global ocean must be protected and conserved to safeguard biodiversity. It is critical that the UN Convention on Biological Diversity adopts the 30x30 goal and unifies nations in this endeavor.

However, this vital increase to our global target for marine protected area (MPA) coverage is meaningless for biodiversity conservation and safeguarding our future on this planet if the MPAs we create are not effective. With over 17,000 MPAs, global coverage is now just 8%. Despite the acceleration in MPA coverage over the past 20 years, the current trajectory puts us at just 15% by 2030. Even more concerning is that only 2.4% of the ocean is currently in fully and highly protected areas with strong enough regulations to deliver significant conservation benefits (MPAtlas.org, 2022). As many as 90% of MPAs have neither the legal, regulatory, management, enforcement, or financing provisions to effectively conserve or restore marine life. A review of our past and current trajectory illustrates that we not only need to accelerate protected area coverage, but we also need to dramatically improve the quality of MPAs.

With this knowledge, we must ask: how do we achieve *effective* protection for at least 30% of the ocean by 2030? We need to consider systemic changes if we are to prevent biodiversity loss in the face of accelerating climate change.

To achieve the 30x30 goal, we must accelerate the designation and strengthening of effective MPAs. This requires incentivization and accountability. We need to create recognition and public excitement for leaders to create not just the biggest but the best MPAs, and we need to hold governments and their leaders accountable for following through on their commitments. We must continue to identify and advocate for high quality MPAs from their governments.

For over 25 years, Marine Conservation Institute has worked for strong ocean protection. We are motivated by a desire for a healthy ocean, vibrant marine life, and climate resiliency, and we emphasize that not all protected areas deliver the intended benefits. Through our cornerstone initiatives, the Marine Protection Atlas (MPAtlas) and Blue Parks, we are driving progress toward effective ocean protection by holding leaders accountable to their promises and celebrating those that make outstanding contributions to marine conservation.

MPAtlas identifies and visualizes MPA information, tracking progress toward conservation goals and holding governments accountable. Working with a global team of scientists and conservationists, MPAtlas operationalized *The MPA Guide*.¹ This pioneering study provides a credible framework to hold governments accountable to their commitments and provides consistency when assessing efforts to plan, establish, manage and monitor MPAs. MPAtlas is building the first global database of *MPA Guide* assessments, tracking not only coverage, but Level of Protection and Stage of Establishment: key indicators of biodiversity outcomes. MPAtlas also coordinates reporting and communications to effectively guide national and international decisions related to marine conservation.

The Blue Parks initiative incentivizes a global ocean refuge system to safeguard biodiversity in at least 30% of the ocean. Blue Parks Awards recognize and celebrate outstanding MPAs and their champions. The Blue Parks standard, based on MPA effectiveness science, provides a blueprint for effective MPAs, and Blue Park Awards incentivize leaders to achieve this standard.

Marine Conservation Institute is proud to contribute to global biodiversity conservation efforts. MPAtlas and Blue Parks build a needed bridge between the lackluster quality of existing protections and the biodiversity conservation that we need for a revitalized ocean with at least 30% protection in quality MPAs. We encourage global leaders to adopt the target of 30×30 quickly so that we can turn our attention to implementing effective MPAs that will safeguard our future.

¹ Grorud-Colvert, K., et al., 2021. The MPA Guide: A framework to achieve global goals for the ocean. *Science* 373(6560): eabf0861.