



WCS Recommendations for The Ocean Conference

February 2017

Background

The United Nations will hold the *high-level UN Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14* ("The Ocean Conference") from 5-9 June, 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York, to focus global attention on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14) and its targets. The three expected outcomes from the Conference are: (1) a "Call for Action," the high level political outcome document; (2) a Report on the seven high-level Partnership Dialogues being held in conjunction with the eight plenary sessions; and (3) the launching of new initiatives in support of SDG14.

WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is an international wildlife conservation organization with programs in more than 60 countries around the world, working in partnership with local and national governments, civil society and intergovernmental organizations including the UN and its organizations, to design and implement conservation programs. WCS brings field-based scientific research to conservation design and policy decision-making. The WCS marine conservation program operates in 23 countries and all five oceans, with particular focus on conserving key habitats through marine protected areas (MPAs), supporting sustainable fisheries, and protecting key marine species such as marine mammals, and sharks and rays. WCS recently launched its \$15 million MPA Fund to assist countries to achieve their SDG14 target of establishing 10% of their marine and coastal waters as protected by 2020. WCS's marine program prioritizes areas of the highest biodiversity value facing the greatest threats; for example, our priority seascapes cover 90% of coral diversity. WCS operates the New York Aquarium, as well as four New York city zoos, opening its doors to more than four million visitors annually, and reaching millions more through its education and outreach programs.



WCS Landscapes, Seascapes and Global Priority Regions

SDG Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

WCS is active in helping to deliver on almost all of the SDGs in different ways, and is committed to working closely with governments and other partners to implement SDG 14. Today 90% of all fishers operate in small-scale coastal fisheries, live in developing countries, and are dependent for protein and livelihoods on a sustainable catch from the ocean. Through our science-based work, we endeavor to improve the sustainability of the catch by the small-scale fishers operating in tropical developing countries, where biodiversity is highest and economies are highly dependent on healthy marine ecosystems. WCS seeks to increase fish biomass because this will restore ecosystem health and fisheries production, as well as to improve the overall sustainability and resilience of local livelihoods. We also aim to improve marine resource governance, and significantly expand protection for critical habitat and species to protect at least 10% of the oceans.

WCS Programs and Our Recommendations for the Call for Action

WCS is working in multiple countries with government and other partners on the following SDG 14 targets, and recommends including associated elements in the Call for Action.

Target 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

Our Work: WCS works to ensure habitat protection and sustainable land-use in watersheds upstream from critical coral and other coastal ecosystems where we work. For example, WCS' innovative ridge to reef approach was pioneered in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Madagascar and is being replicated in these countries.



Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States, on Target 14.1, commit to prioritize the reduction and prevention of pollution of all kinds in watersheds upstream of critical coastal ecosystems.

Target 14.2: By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration, to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

Our Work: WCS emphasizes improved community resilience through sustaining or enhancing the provision of ecosystem services from marine and coastal ecosystems. We encourage an integrated approach to coastal and ocean management, that incorporates ecological, social, cultural and economic values and uses of natural resources. We invest in mangrove protection and restoration, conservation of intact seagrass beds and the identification and protection of climate refugia for coral reefs. We support the development and implementation of guidelines to ensure critical mangrove habitat is not impacted by economic development and can continue to support coastal fisheries and coastal protection. Lastly, we work with coastal communities throughout the world to ensure that nearshore, coastal fisheries are sustainable through improved knowledge, sound management, and development of alternative livelihoods.

Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States, on Target 14.2:

- commit to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems both within and outside of protected areas, taking a more integrated approach to land/sea and ocean management; and
- commit to end overfishing and ensure that all fisheries are sustainably and equitably managed, decision-making is based on sound science and inclusive, participatory processes, and there are clear benefits both for marine resources and local communities.

On whales and shipping routes (also to halt biodiversity loss, as per Goal 15):

- commit to implement the recommendations of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on shipping routes in order to protect whales from ship strikes;
- commit to go beyond IMO recommendations when necessary, and re-route vessels under their jurisdiction or in their waters to minimize risks to whales from ship strikes;
- commit to reduce vessel speeds to 10 knots in biologically important areas for whales, particularly where co-occurrence/overlap is greatest; and generate and utilize the best available science to implement the most responsible and best practices to mitigate impacts to marine species.



Target 14.3: Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels.

Our Work: WCS conducts research on coral reefs around the globe, to track the changing status of pH vulnerable reef-building corals and investigate the impact of a rising temperatures and dropping calcium carbonate (aragonite) levels on corals in general. We work to identify the planet's most climate resilient corals and reef systems and advocate for their protection from non-climate related threats.

Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States, on Target 14.3:

- increase investment in scientific research to identify marine refugia, in particular coral reef systems, which will be most resilient to climate change, including ocean acidification; and
- commit to using and expanding the latest scientific research on corals, to focus their protection and threat mitigation on the most climate resilient corals and reef systems

Target 14.4: By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting, and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics.

Our Work: WCS works with coastal communities throughout the world to ensure that nearshore, coastal fisheries are sustainable through improved knowledge, sound management, and development of alternative livelihoods. WCS is working with government partners to triple fish biomass to the optimum level.

The countries where WCS works produce, in aggregate, over 20% of global fish catch, and support the super-majority of poor small-scale coastal fishers. We conduct research to improving understanding of fisheries catch, building capacity for more effective and equitable fisheries governance, and help local and government managers to reduce IUU fishing and improve local benefits from well-regulated fisheries. We support government efforts to reform both artisanal and commercial fisheries sectors, helping significantly reduce IUU fishing and overcapacity in the nearshore fleet. We support coastal community efforts to improve management of nearshore fisheries and improve overall ecosystem health. Our program on sharks and rays works to help countries develop and implement sustainable, well-managed programs.



Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States, on Target 14.4, commit to:

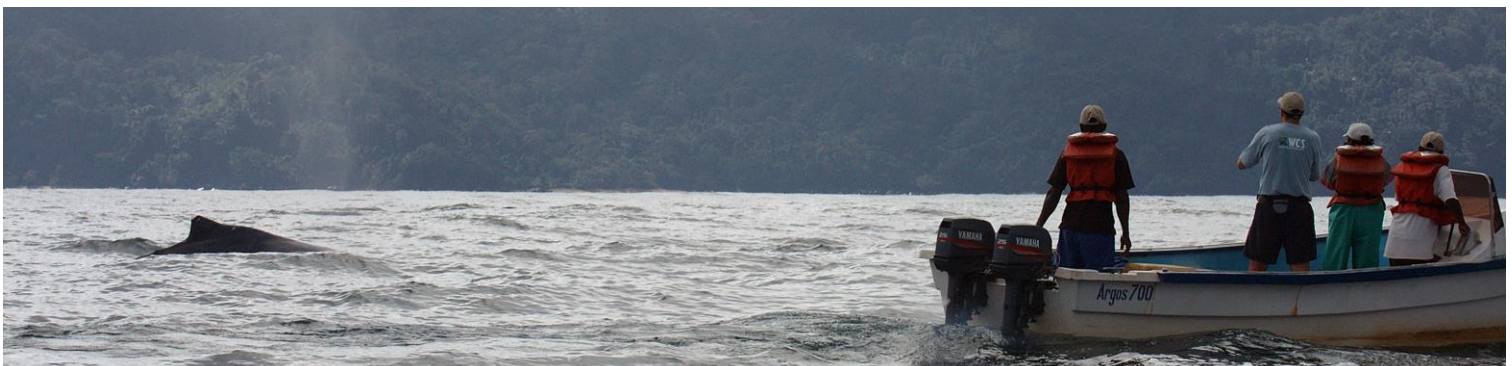
- end overfishing and ensure that all fisheries are sustainably and equitably managed, based on sound science, effective management and governance, inclusive and participatory processes, and input from and benefits for all members of local communities; and
- reform both their artisanal and commercial fisheries sectors, if needed, to reduce IUU fishing and ensure sustainable and equitable management.

Target 14.5: By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on best available scientific information.

Our Work: WCS works with governments to meet their Aichi and SDG commitments of protecting 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020. Through the WCS MPA Fund, we work in 20 countries with the goal to establish 3.7 million km² of newly declared marine protected areas. Within these MPAs, WCS is committed to reaching biomass targets that approach pristine levels in coral reef ecosystems. In recent years our efforts have supported the expansion of MPAs in multiple countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States, on Target 14.5, commit to:

- establish MPAs based on sound science and participatory planning, and identify places of high biodiversity value;
- effectively manage their MPAs, with the goal of maintaining or recovering intact, functional marine ecosystems;
- ensure that, in designating MPAs, there is a process for ensuring strong community and other stakeholder participation and support, and there is a management plan with effective systems for monitoring and enforcement; and
- ensure that when managing MPAs, they will strive to ensure a “quieter ocean”, to avoid adverse impacts of human-made noise on marine species.



Madagascar's Antongil Bay, Julie Larsen Maher © WCS



Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to SIDS and LDCs from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.

Our Work: WCS works with a combined 13 SIDS and LDCs to improve their sustainable management of marine resources, particularly fisheries. Our programs measure the impact of improved fisheries management on the livelihoods, health and wellbeing of coastal communities, and adapt our conservation strategies in response to what we learn.

Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States, on Target 14.7, commit to:

- (for developed country member States) provide technical assistance and capacity building, upon request, to SIDS and LDCs to enable sustainable fisheries management and improved livelihoods, health, and wellbeing for local coastal communities; and
- (for SIDS and LDCs) improve management measures in small-scale, coastal fisheries through improved data, managed access and where appropriate, defined tenure, and increased traceability, and development of alternative livelihoods for coastal communities.

Integration with Goal 15, Target 15.7: Legal and illegal trade in marine species

Our Work: WCS believes it is important to show synergies between targets. Goal 15 includes a commitment to halt biodiversity loss that is also applicable to marine species; Target 15.7 states: take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna, and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products. We believe that commitments under Goal 14 in the Call for Action should include elements of the illegal trade in marine species.

Our Recommendation: We recommend that member States commit:

- to include marine species in their work to combat wildlife trafficking;
- to combat illegal trade in marine as well as terrestrial wildlife (for species including cetaceans, marine turtles, sharks, rays, corals, giant clams, and other fish and invertebrates);
- to effectively implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for marine species, including through enhanced enforcement and adoption and implementation of strong national legislation and regulations to implement CITES effectively; and
- to go beyond CITES (as allowed under the CITES treaty) when necessary to ensure that marine species are not threatened by illegal or unsustainable exploitation or trade.