



# Charting the course: Elements of a roadmap for achieving the 30x30 target in the Ocean

**Julien Rochette (IDDRI), Timothée Cook (BlueSeeds),  
Margaux Janin (BlueSeeds), Marie-Aude Sévin (BlueSeeds)**

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Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are one of the most effective tools for protecting ecosystems and species, rebuilding marine life, increasing resilience to climate change, enhancing ecosystem services and supporting economic development. The 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and its Target 3 call for the conservation and management of 30% of coastal and marine areas through “protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures” by 2030. Global coverage of MPAs currently stands at approximately 8% and the international community is therefore confronted with a significant challenge in achieving the 30x30 target within the next six years. To maximize our chances of reversing the biodiversity crisis, there is an urgent need to establish an agreed-upon, actionable, and global roadmap for attaining the 30x30 target in the ocean.

This *Issue Brief* aims to propose elements for such a roadmap with recommendations for implementing the 30x30 target in the ocean.

## KEY MESSAGES

Despite decades of experience that have equipped managers, scientists, and experts with the enhanced knowledge necessary to ensure the establishment of well-designed and effectively managed MPAs, the full potential of these tools has yet to be realized. With considerable ground yet to cover to achieve the 30x30 target, the international community cannot afford to merely await a hypothetical surge in national initiatives: proactive organization is imperative.

To effectively and promptly contribute to the 30x30 target, States should include a national roadmap for the establishment of MPAs into their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), to be submitted by CBD COP16 in October 2024, based on the proven four-step process: (i) promoting a science-based approach; (ii) establishing participatory processes; (iii) developing a relevant legal framework; (iv) securing funding. Such a roadmap should

outline specific objectives, both quantitative and qualitative, and timeframes to contribute to the implementation of Target 3

States should not wait for the BBNJ treaty to enter into force but start immediately to identify potential high seas MPA sites, launch consultative processes and anticipate implementation perspectives, including through the drafting of management plans.

States should set up a specific mechanism to assess the implementation of the 30x30 target in the ocean to feed into the 2028 discussions at CBD COP18 and potential UNOC4, closing the gap left by the Kunming-Montreal agreement. This mechanism would enable the assessment of progress and, if necessary, adjustments to the trajectory between 2028 and 2030.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a protected area is "a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values". If designed and managed following the internationally recognized standards<sup>1</sup> and the best available science, they offer in the ocean the most effective tools for protecting ecosystems and species, rebuilding marine life, increasing resilience to climate change, enhancing ecosystem services and supporting economic development.<sup>2</sup>

The 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and its Target 3 call for the conservation and management of 30% of coastal and marine areas through "protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures" by 2030. Efforts should be directed towards achieving not only the quantitative objective but also ensuring the representativeness of the designated marine protected areas (MPAs) and the effectiveness of conservation measures.

As of today, around 8% of the global ocean is currently designated as protected: it does not mean however that the MPAs established are all well-designed and effectively managed. A wide range of factors often limit their effectiveness. These include e.g. a failure to integrate scientific knowledge and use agreed standards, inadequate consultation with relevant stakeholders, insufficient financial and human resources, and weak governance and enforcement mechanisms. There are also major disparities between marine regions, and very limited protection in the high seas.

Therefore, the international community is confronted with a significant challenge in achieving the 30x30 target within the next six years. To maximize our chances of reversing the biodiversity crisis, there is an urgent need to establish an agreed-upon, actionable, and global roadmap for attaining the 30x30 target in the ocean. This paper aims to initiate discussion on this topic by presenting concrete perspectives for action.

## 2. MPAS COVERAGE AND EFFECTIVENESS: WHERE DO WE STAND?

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Global coverage of areas reported as MPAs currently stands at approximately 8%. States have thus fallen short of the 10% target set for 2020 by both Aichi Target 11 and Sustainable Development Goal 14. Beyond these figures, the status of MPAs worldwide underscores diverse and contrasting realities.

Firstly, in recent years, there has been a trend in national waters towards gigantism through the establishment of large

MPAs, often situated in remote areas. These tools, which can be powerful drivers for marine biodiversity conservation, are sometimes used at the expense of, and not in addition to, creating coastal MPAs, where the challenges of regulating uses are nevertheless crucial.<sup>3</sup> There is also a wide disparity in ambition levels among the established MPAs:<sup>4</sup> currently, only 2.9% of the ocean is covered by fully or highly protected MPAs. This trend is particularly pronounced in certain marine regions: for instance, the Mediterranean is covered by 6% of MPAs, but the areas where fully or highly protection is applied represent only 0.23%.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in many MPAs, difficulties are observed in regulating industrial activities, not following international standards: in European MPAs, for example, the average trawling intensity is 1,4 time higher compared to non-protected zones and trawling continues to occur in around 60% of MPAs.<sup>6</sup> Many MPAs are also considered "paper parks," designated but lacking in planning and management structures. Finally, in most countries, essential safeguards for the effectiveness of MPAs are not in place. This is evident in insufficient funding, limited human capacity, inadequate monitoring tools and enforcement mechanisms, and absence of supportive national legal frameworks.<sup>7</sup>

The situation is not better in the high seas, which cover almost half of the world's surface, 64% of the global ocean, and host exceptionally rich but threatened biodiversity. To date, only a handful of MPAs have been created in these areas, in the North-East Atlantic and Southern Ocean notably, whose management has long suffered from the absence of an international mechanism.<sup>8</sup> All in all, despite decades of experience that have equipped managers, scientists, and experts with the enhanced knowledge necessary to ensure the establishment of well-designed and effectively managed MPAs, it is striking that the full potential of these tools has yet to be realized.

## 3. KEY ELEMENTS FOR NATIONAL ROADMAPS ON 30X30

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To effectively and promptly contribute to the 30x30 target, States should develop EEZ-wide plans and adhere to the proven four-step process for establishing MPAs, leveraging lessons learned from successful experiences and best practices.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. IUCN Standards and Green List, MPA Guide.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Duarte *et al.* (2020). Rebuilding marine life. *Nature*, 580(7801), 39–51. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2146-7>.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, P.J.S., De Santo, E. (2016). Is the race for remote, very large marine protected areas (VLMPPAs) taking us down the wrong track? *Marine Policy*, Volume 73, November 2016, pp. 231-234.

<sup>4</sup> Pike, E. *et al.* (2024). Ocean protection quality is lagging behind quantity: Applying a scientific framework to assess real marine protected area progress against the 30 by 30 target. *Conservation Letters* 9 May 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Claudet, J. *et al.* (2020). Underprotected Marine Protected Areas in a Global Biodiversity Hotspot, *One Earth* 2, pp.380-384.

<sup>6</sup> Dureuil, M. *et al.* (2018). Elevated trawling inside protected areas undermines conservation outcomes in a global fishing hot spot. *Science*, Vol. 362, Issue 6421, pp.1403-1407.

<sup>7</sup> Sala, E. *et al.* (2018). Assessing real progress towards effective ocean protection. *Marine Policy* 91, pp.11-13.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, G. *et al.* (2018). Protect the neglected half of our blue planet. *Nature*, Vol. 554, Issue 7691, pp.163-165.

## 1.1 Promoting a science-based approach

The integration of science should be a constant requirement, extending from the initial designation of MPAs to their everyday management. Various sources of knowledge should inform decision-making processes. In addition to traditional scientific research and monitoring programs, indigenous/local ecological knowledge (LEK) offers invaluable insights into local ecosystems, species behavior, and resource management practices refined over generations. By actively seeking input from diverse stakeholders, MPA promoters and managers can ensure that management strategies align with social and cultural contexts, thereby enhancing the success and sustainability of conservation efforts.

MPA management inherently demands a holistic approach that integrates ecological dynamics and interdependencies within marine ecosystems, alongside socio-economic factors tied to various stakeholders reliant on protected resources. This necessitates a transition from a species- or habitat-centric approach to a more comprehensive perspective, adopting systematic conservation planning approaches and ecosystem-based management principles. Such approaches facilitate the identification and protection of critical ecological processes vital for sustaining ecosystem health and resilience, and the integration of ecological and social objectives.

Science can also play a pivotal role in maximizing ecological connectivity by guiding the design of interconnected networks of MPAs. Such networks facilitate the movement of species, preserve genetic diversity, and bolster ecosystem resilience against anthropogenic impacts, including climate change. Strategically locating MPAs and fostering connectivity between them empowers managers to safeguard biodiversity and foster ecosystem health on a broader scale. This concerted effort contributes significantly to the long-term sustainability of marine ecosystems.

## 1.2 Establishing participatory processes

Stakeholder engagement stands out as a critical factor in the successful achievement of MPAs conservation objectives. Initially, this entails conducting an in-depth analysis of the local social context, taking into account pre-existing socio-economic conditions and disparities. This approach fosters the development of fair conservation strategies and ensures the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, including marginalized communities. Establishing effective procedures for stakeholder involvement is also essential. At the national level, this involves creating legal frameworks, organizational structures, and mandatory processes such as public consultation and conflict resolution procedures. Locally, it requires the careful engagement of various stakeholders, thoughtful facilitation of meetings, and providing adequate financial support and time for local organizations to become well-informed about the decision-making process. More broadly, it requires nurturing, connecting and supporting the demand for MPAs in civil society organizations.

While implementing participatory approaches before the designation of an MPA is crucial, sustaining this engagement

once the MPA is active is equally important. This can be achieved by involving local communities in monitoring and enforcement activities, which not only contributes to building trust but also fosters a sense of collective responsibility. Additionally, co-management arrangements, where local communities or NGOs collaborate with government agencies and other stakeholders in MPA governance, have proven to be complementary approaches that enhance ownership and accountability.

## 1.3 Developing a relevant legal framework

While significant progress has been achieved in recent decades, propelled by international law and regional initiatives, legal frameworks in many countries remain fragmented and often fail to keep pace with advances in scientific knowledge and the threats facing marine environments.

To address these challenges, it is paramount for countries to first develop or regularly update a clear, shared, and transparent strategy for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This strategy should identify short and long-term objectives, serving as a reference for policymakers and managers. Additionally, establishing a national framework law is essential. This law should identify the different tools available and provide the necessary rules to make them effective, including designation processes, management rules, and enforcement mechanisms. Drawing inspiration from the IUCN protected area management categories can assist in defining, recording, and classifying the diverse goals of different protected areas. Beyond these established categories, other classifications based on the level of protection exist. In effectively managed MPAs, the level of protection serves as a significant predictor of success in producing socio-ecological benefits, provided there is enforcement. MPAs benefiting from the highest levels of protection yield the greatest benefits, both to biodiversity and communities, whether they engage in fishing activities inside or outside MPAs. The "MPA Guide" offers the latest standards informing the designation and establishment of MPAs, complementing the IUCN framework. Furthermore, establishing dedicated bodies tailored for the protection and management of MPAs is highly recommended. These bodies can offer focused attention and expertise crucial for effective MPA management.

## 1.4 Securing funding

"Conservation without funding is conversation," a sentiment attributed to the renowned South African conservationist Ian Player, encapsulates the challenge of advancing area-based conservation solutions such as MPAs. Human resources and budget constraints have emerged as critical factors limiting the effectiveness of MPAs. Some "Other Effective Conservation Measures" (OECMs) and MPAs with adequate staffing and management capacity demonstrate ecological effects 2.9 times greater than those without.<sup>9</sup> However, up to 65% of MPAs

<sup>9</sup> Minderoo Foundation, Marine 30x30 Finance.

globally lack sufficient budget for basic management needs, with 91% reporting inadequate on-site staff capacity.<sup>10</sup>

Given these challenges, specific attention must be directed towards securing funding for both the establishment and management of MPAs when planning their development or establishing networks of MPAs. Costs are typically higher during the establishment phase, involving investments in equipment, infrastructure, inventories, and management plan development. These costs tend to decrease over time as activities shift towards surveillance and monitoring, primarily incurring recurrent costs such as salaries and boat fuel. Interestingly, costs decrease per surface area unit as MPA size increases. To address these financial challenges effectively, it is crucial to consider funding requirements from the outset of MPAs establishment when developing the management plan. The resulting business plan, intricately linked to the MPA's management plan, forms the foundation upon which the MPAs financial strategy can be built. This approach ensures that MPAs have the necessary revenues to implement activities outlined in their management plans and achieve their conservation objectives. By prioritizing conservation goals over revenue generation, MPAs can avoid the common pitfall of aligning activities with available funding, as observed in many MPAs worldwide. States should thus harness the full potential of the various available sources of funding for MPAs,<sup>11</sup> as these are increasingly well identified and outlined in guides for administrations and managers.

#### 4. INTEGRATING THE HIGH SEAS INTO THE GLOBAL EFFORTS

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In 2023, States adopted an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). This treaty establishes a mechanism for the creation of Area-based management tools (ABTMs), including MPAs, which was missing until now. Since then, a race has been underway to reach the 60 ratifications required for it to enter into force. As of today, 90 States have signed the agreement, and seven countries (Palau, Chile, Belize, Seychelles, Monaco, Mauritius, and Federated States of Micronesia) have ratified it. Even though many States have signaled their intention to promptly ratify the text, it is likely to take several months, or even years, for it to enter into force. If the international community wants to use high seas MPAs to reach the 30x30 target, States and other interested stakeholders should not wait for the formal start of the BBNJ process via the entry into force of the agreement. Preparatory efforts must begin as soon as possible, on at least three levels.

The first step is to identify candidate sites for future MPAs. In this regard, work has already commenced, primarily led by several champion States and civil society. Some sites have

already been identified, such as the Sargasso Sea, the Costa Rica Thermal Dome and Salaz y Gomez and Nazca Ridges. However, there appear to be geographical gaps in many parts of the ocean. Efforts to identify candidate sites must therefore persist, drawing upon existing studies and assessments (e.g. the Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas described under a CBD-led process), and by funding further work, including scientific expeditions.

Secondly, building upon the previous step, the collaboration and consultation process outlined in Article 19(2) of the BBNJ treaty for the development of MPA proposals can begin. This entails initiating collective discussions on the candidate sites identified, involving governments, relevant intergovernmental organizations and civil society. At this stage, it is crucial to involve one or more States, as they will be able to officially submit MPA proposals. This phase should facilitate the formation of coalitions and the identification of champion countries.

Finally, the coalitions thus created will then be able to make efforts to anticipate the challenges of implementing future MPAs, paying particular attention to the elements required by Article 19(4) of the BBNJ treaty for the submission of proposals, which include, among other things, *"a draft management plan encompassing the proposed measures and outlining proposed monitoring, research and review activities to achieve the specified objectives"*.

Completing these three stages, the precise details and duration of which will depend on each site, will save time before the text comes into force and ensure that the first High Seas MPAs can be submitted promptly.

#### 5. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Implementing the 30x30 target is at the crossroads of political, cultural, technical and financial challenges. With considerable ground yet to cover to achieve it, the international community cannot afford to merely await a hypothetical surge in national initiatives; proactive organization is imperative. The Kunming-Montreal agreement and the BBNJ treaty provide the tools on which States could draw to:

##### **Include national roadmaps for the establishment and management of MPAs into the National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions Plans**

The Kunming-Montreal agreement and its associated COP decisions impose several obligations concerning the monitoring and review of States' contributions. By CBD COP16, to be held in October 2024 in Colombia, each country will have to revise its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and submit national targets aligned with the new global targets. This presents a timely opportunity for countries to bolster their commitment to establishing MPAs by adopting a precise roadmap built on the four pillars above-mentioned. Such a roadmap should outline specific objectives, both quantitative and qualitative, and timeframes to contribute to the implementation of Target 3. This exercise would also prove useful in the preparation of future Nationally determined contributions

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<sup>10</sup> Gill, D.A. et al. (2017). Capacity shortfalls hinder the performance of marine protected areas globally. *Nature* 543(7647).

<sup>11</sup> Including by leveraging private finance, promoting blended finance and stimulating innovative schemes, as requested by Target 19 of the GBF.

(NDCs), due nine to twelve months ahead of UNFCCC COP30 (10-21 November 2025, Belém, Brazil), as MPAs can contribute to both climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives.

The national targets submitted by States will be subject to a “global analysis” to assess their aggregate contribution to the collective ambition at COP16 and at each future COP. This analysis will provide an initial indication of the trajectory taken by the international community. It could be an opportunity to bolster ongoing initiatives and, if commitments fall short, to reinforce them, through technical and financial support for example.

### **Set up a specific mechanism to assess the implementation of the 30x30 target in the ocean to feed into the 2028 discussions at CBD COP18 and UNOC4, closing the gap left by the Kunming–Montreal agreement**

The Kunming-Montreal agreement provides for two global reviews of the collective progress at CBD COP17 (2026) and COP19 (2030). However, only one global review—the one scheduled for 2026—will be truly beneficial in supporting the implementation of the Kunming Montreal Agreement. The second review, set for 2030, runs the risk of serving solely to assess countries’ success or failure in achieving the associated targets. Therefore, there exists a gap in 2028 that the ocean community could effectively fill by establishing a specific review mechanism.

One could envision States requesting an evaluation report on the implementation of the 30x30 target for the ocean by that year, which could feed both the CBD COP18 and the fourth United Nations Ocean Conference that will take place the same year. This approach would enable the assessment of progress and, if necessary, adjustments to the trajectory between 2028 and 2030.

### **Develop a roadmap towards the designation of High Seas MPAs, not waiting for the BBNJ treaty to come into force**

With the adoption of the BBNJ treaty in 2023, the international community now have a dedicated mechanism to establish MPAs in ABNJ. However, and even though many States have signaled their intention to promptly ratify the text, its formal entry into force may take months or years. To utilize high seas MPAs for the 30x30 target, preparatory actions should start immediately and be grounded on the identification of potential MPA sites, the launch of consultative processes and the anticipation of implementation perspectives, including through the drafting of management plans. From a more symbolic standpoint, there is no hindrance for a coalition of States to designate an area of the high seas as an MPA. Such an action could send a powerful message prior to formal deliberations within the BBNJ treaty’s COPs.

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The Oceano Azul Foundation is an international organization that contributes to protecting and conserving the ocean, integrating key areas such as Ocean Conservation, International Ocean Advocacy and Ocean Policies, Frameworks and Economics. The Foundation also promotes raising awareness, involving, and educating society in order to influence a change in behaviour.

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#### **CONTACT**

julien.rochette@iddri.org

Institut du développement durable  
et des relations internationales  
41, rue du Four – 75006 Paris – France

[WWW.IDDRI.ORG](http://WWW.IDDRI.ORG)

[@IDDRI\\_ENGLISH](https://twitter.com/IDDRI_ENGLISH)