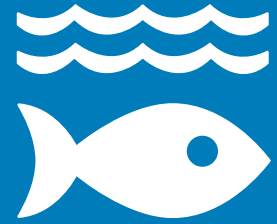




14 LIFE  
BELOW WATER



# LIFE BELOW WATER: WHY IT MATTERS

## What's the goal here?

To conserve and sustainably use the world's ocean, seas and marine resources.

## Why?

Oceans are our planet's life support and regulate the global climate system. They are the world's largest ecosystem, home to nearly a million known species and containing vast untapped potential for scientific discovery. Oceans and fisheries continue to support the global population's economic, social and environmental needs. Despite the critical importance of conserving oceans, decades of irresponsible

exploitation have led to an alarming level of degradation. Current efforts to protect key marine environments and small-scale fisheries, and to invest in ocean science are not yet meeting the urgent need to safeguard this vast, yet fragile, resource. The drastic reduction in human activity brought about by the COVID-19 crisis, while rooted in tragedy, is a chance for oceans to recuperate. It is also an opportunity to chart a sustainable recovery path that will ensure livelihoods for decades to come in harmony with the natural environment.

Over  
**3 billion**  
people  
depend on  
marine and  
coastal  
biodiversity  
for their  
livelihood

## So what's the problem?

The ocean absorbs around 23 per cent of annual CO2 emissions generated by human activity and helps mitigate the impacts of climate change. The ocean has also absorbed more than 90% of the excess heat in the climate system. Ocean heat is at record levels, causing widespread marine heatwaves, threatening its rich ecosystems and killing coral reefs around the world.

Increasing levels of debris in the world's oceans are also having a major environmental and economic impact. Every year, an estimated 5 to 12 million metric tonnes of plastic enters the ocean, costing roughly \$13 billion per year – including clean-up costs and financial losses in fisheries and other industries. About 89% of plastic litter found on the ocean floor are single-use items like plastic bags.

About 80% of all tourism takes place in coastal areas. The ocean-related tourism industry grows an estimated US\$ 134 billion per year and in some countries, the industry already supports over a third of the labour force.

Unless carefully managed, tourism can pose a major threat to the natural resources on which it depends, and to local culture and industry.

## How is the ocean connected to our health?

The health of the ocean is intimately tied to our health. According to UNESCO, the ocean can be an ally against COVID-19 – bacteria found in the depths of the ocean are used to carry out rapid testing to detect the presence of COVID-19. And the diversity of species found in the ocean offers great promise for pharmaceuticals.

Furthermore, marine fisheries provide 57 million jobs globally and provide the primary source of protein to over 50% of the population in least developed countries.

## So what can we do?

For open ocean and deep sea areas, sustainability can be achieved only through increased international cooperation to

protect vulnerable habitats. Establishing comprehensive, effective and equitably managed systems of government-protected areas should be pursued to conserve biodiversity and ensure a sustainable future for the fishing industry.

On a local level, we should make ocean-friendly choices when buying products or eating food derived from oceans and consume only what we need. Selecting certified products is a good place to start.

We should eliminate plastic usage as much as possible and organize beach clean-ups.

Most importantly, we can spread the message about how important marine life is and why we need to protect it.

To find out more about Goal #14 and other Sustainable Development Goals visit:

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>



**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**