



# Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water

**In 2015 the world's governments agreed to a set of global Sustainable Development Goals, including [UN Ocean Goal Number 14](#), to set their focus for the coming decades on efforts to fight poverty and create a greener, fairer planet. SDG 14 recognises the critical role of the Ocean for our planet and humanity. ACTION is the key word here. The Ocean is everybody's business and all of us (Joe Public, governments and businesses) need to take concrete action and invest in its future health, ensuring that the Ocean SDG's 17 goals and 169 targets become a reality. With 2020 on the horizon and at least 4 of those targets maturing, there is no time to lose in taking global action to drive action on SDG 14. It will help Ocean life regenerate, having benefits that extend across communities and beyond borders for generations to come.**

**SDG 14 is a critical first step towards recovery. In 2020, the most comprehensive and ambitiously practical plan to regenerate Ocean health was released by globally diverse stakeholders working around the world. RISE UP is a prescription for Ocean health providing a blueprint for the ambitious actions that must be taken to recover the blue heart of our Ocean Planet**

## **Talking Points:**

- In September 2015, world leaders adopted new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to combat poverty and promote a greener, fairer future, replacing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expired at the end of 2015.
- The 17 goals and 169 targets were debated by UN member states, civil society and business representatives for three years. Implementation of the sustainable development agenda began on 1 January 2016.
- The UN has estimated that the new goals could cost as much as US\$172.5tn over the 15-year timeframe.
- The Ocean was given a marginal role within the MDGs, despite its significant contribution to sustainable development. However, things have changed. Led by Small Island States, SDG 14 is singularly focused

on the Ocean: “Conserve and sustainably use the Oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.

- SDG 14 recognises that poverty eradication and sustainable development cannot be ended without safeguarding our Ocean and seas.
- The targets under the goal reflect common sense. Translated into plain English, they are (click [here](#) for the full UN text):
  - Reduce sea pollution
  - Protect and nurture all sea life so that the Ocean can continue to support us [by supporting at least 30% of the Ocean strongly protected by 2030]
  - Reduce the damage caused by Ocean acidification, which results from CO<sub>2</sub>
  - Look after stocks of fish so that they continue to feed us into the future
  - Use scientific knowledge and existing laws to protect life in the most vulnerable areas of the seas and invest in and build coastal resilience
  - Stop governments supporting overfishing and illegal fishing though their use of fisheries subsidies
  - Help the poorest countries use the sea’s resources wisely so that it brings them benefits well into the future
  - Improve scientific understanding of the Ocean, to maximise its health and contribution to world economies
  - Help local fisherman have their share
  - Make sure that existing laws are used to conserve Ocean resources and make new ones to close the gaps
- The Ocean SDG14 is relevant to many other goals. Without a healthy Ocean we won’t be able to:
  - end hunger, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
  - promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
  - promote sustainable infrastructure and industrialization and foster innovation;
  - make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
  - ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns or halt biodiversity loss.

## **The Importance**

- An Ocean SDG places the critical role of the Ocean to our planet and humanity squarely in the post-2015 development agenda, and provides a framework to orient development of new measures to tackle existing governance gaps like those for the high seas.
- An Ocean SDG alone is not enough to guarantee a secure future for the global Ocean but it garners valuable recognition of the importance of the Ocean, and helps build momentum and the need to prioritise resources.
- By reducing the pressure from many of the direct stressors on Ocean life from human activities - like industrial fishing - the SDG Ocean targets will help to support resilience and abundance, regenerating Ocean life with benefits that extend across communities and beyond borders.
- The Ocean is like the earth's circulatory system; it provides us with food, fresh water, energy, medicine and the oxygen in every second breath we take. It links peoples and culture, countries and lives and allows goods and services to be transported around the world.
- What we also tend to forget, is that the Earth is one living system. Both the physical and biological processes of the Ocean play a key role in the water cycle, the carbon cycle, and climate variability. The microscopic plants that live in the Ocean are responsible for almost half the oxygen we inhale.
- As a natural carbon sink, the Ocean absorbs more than 25% of all the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by human activities. Scientists now understand that this comes with a cost to its overall health. The increasing amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the air is reacting with the Ocean to alter its chemistry. See talking points (insert link) on Ocean and climate for more details on the effect climate change is having on our Ocean.
- Prompt action to combat climate change will be the single most important action we can take to help secure its health. We need to curb carbon emissions and limit climate change damage to ensure a healthy, productive Ocean and to be able to deliver upon the other goals.
- Saving the Ocean, 70 per cent of the planet, and those who live from and by it, requires monumental shifts in thinking and action. The Ocean has an amazing ability to regenerate itself. We need to help it, and the targets set in the Ocean SDG will help us do just that. The SDG 14 target to protect 10% of the Ocean by 2020 while an excellent milestone, does not mesh with the current best available science which supports strongly protecting at least 30% of the Ocean by 2030. In this case, we must all strive to follow the science and view the 10% target as a milestone towards this bigger goal.
- We also must address the fragmented approach that is currently driving Ocean decline. A concerted effort is required, underpinned by key reforms in global Ocean governance and implemented by governments, civil society and the private sector so that the words on paper become action in the water.

- Achieving these global goals is not an option: they are a prerequisite for promoting a safer, healthier and fairer world. By giving our Ocean and seas a break from the current trend of business-as-usual and designing a new way forward, we can benefit from it without stripping bare its assets.

## **ACTION is the key word**

- While the SDGs are not legally binding, they do represent the overarching development norms and priorities of the international community, adopted by consensus.
- The implementation of the Ocean SDG could prove vital in providing pathways for more effective “systems of governance” for the global Ocean commons.
- In June 2017, a high-level UN gathering in New York, known as ‘The Ocean Conference’ was hosted by the governments of Fiji and Sweden, to talk about how to support further the implementation of Ocean SDG 14 and they agreed to a [“Call for Action”](#).
- A follow-up UN Ocean conference was originally scheduled to take place in 2020 in Lisbon, hosted by Portugal, but due to delays because of the corona virus, it will take place at a later date
- ACTION is the key word here. The Ocean is everybody’s business and all of us (Joe Public, governments and businesses) need to take concrete action and invest in its future health. The clock is ticking... Making commitments is fine, making sure they are followed through on is critical.
- In 2020 a number of SDG deadlines will be up- including eliminating perverse fisheries subsidies, reducing adverse impacts on marine and coastal ecosystems, including by strengthening their resilience; ending overfishing and IUU fishing and ensuring the protection of 10% of the Ocean.
- Real commitments need to be made that include the financing and resources to deliver the targets, as well as regular accountability moments that show that we are walking the walk and acting on our commitments.
- We need to be ambitious and safeguard food security, people's livelihoods and marine life, and build resilience to climate change by strongly protecting at least 30% of the Ocean by 2030, and ensuring the remaining 70% is sustainably managed.
- We need to end perverse subsidies that enable illegal fishing and overfishing and secure sustainable access for coastal and indigenous communities dependent on the Ocean for their food security and livelihoods.
- We need to achieve net zero emissions and 100% renewable energy by 2050 at the very latest, and bring legal protection to high seas

biodiversity through a new UN Treaty that is hopefully finalised by 2020. We don't need to debate what needs to happen anymore – we just need to get on and do it!

- We need to RISE UP- go to [riseupfortheocean.org](http://riseupfortheocean.org) for more information
  - Restore Ocean life
  - Invest immediately in a net-zero carbon emissions future
  - Speed the transition to a circular and sustainable economy
  - Empower and support coastal people
  - Unite for stronger global ocean governance
  - Protect at least 30% of the ocean by 2030
  
- To find out more about how the world is doing in implementing the SDG 14 check out the [SDG tracker](#).