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REPORT

EU

2020

IMPROVING INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE FOR LIFE BELOW WATER

14 LIFE BELOW
WATER



FOREWORD



The Ocean is in trouble. Recent reports from intergovernmental panels on climate change and biodiversity, the most comprehensive assessments of their kind, have illustrated unprecedented impacts from the climate crisis and a rate of species extinction never seen before in human history. Every second breath we take comes from the Ocean and billions of people rely on it to sustain their lives, yet its health is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding marine biodiversity, our shared natural heritage, and the very foundation of our sustainable blue economies, thus we must act to reverse the decline before it's too late.

The good news is we have a plan and it has already been agreed by international governments: I refer to the Sustainable Development Goals and, more specifically, Goal 14 for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean's resources. Four of the ten targets of SDG14 are due for delivery by 2020. These targets start our journey to Ocean recovery, they lead to a truly sustainable blue economy and they are the first steps to support Ocean resilience in the face of climate change.

With this report, WWF provides a comprehensive list of recommendations to lead on delivering the SDG14 agenda and take Ocean governance to the next level. This is the year for decision makers to urgently address the pressures on the Ocean's ecosystem, including habitat degradation and biodiversity losses, ending illegal fishing and overfishing, committing to protecting 30% of the Ocean by 2030, and agreeing to ban harmful fisheries subsidies through World Trade Organisation negotiations.

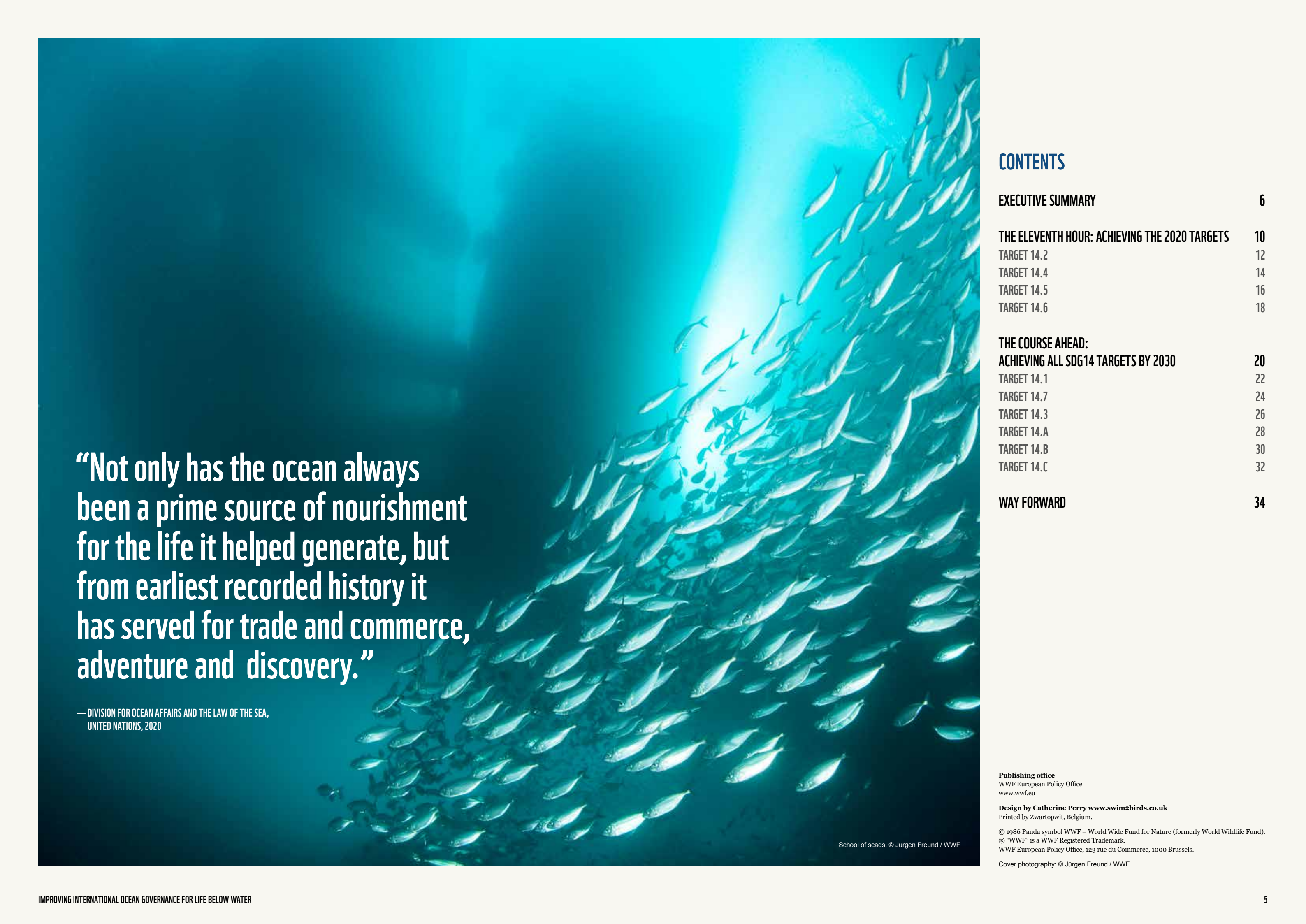
In the meantime, every one of us can make a positive difference. We can choose to only consume seafood that is from sustainable and legally harvested sources, we can eschew single-use and nonessential plastics, and we can seriously address the reduction of our personal carbon footprints. For the sake of our grandchildren and those who come after them, we all have a duty to be on the right side of global efforts to restore a healthy Ocean and achieve a carbon-neutral world by 2050.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Thomson'.

Peter Thomson
UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean



Students learn to snorkel and study coral reefs in Papua New Guinea's Kimbe Bay. © Jürgen Freund / WWF



“Not only has the ocean always been a prime source of nourishment for the life it helped generate, but from earliest recorded history it has served for trade and commerce, adventure and discovery.”

— DIVISION FOR OCEAN AFFAIRS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA,
UNITED NATIONS, 2020

School of scads. © Jürgen Freund / WWF

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the gravity of the biodiversity and climate crises, implementation of the United Nations’ (UN) 2030 Agenda has been slow to achieve global sustainability, protect natural ecosystems and ensure the long-term livelihood and food security of a growing population. 2020 is a crucial year for our ocean with several international deadlines on biodiversity protection, sustainable fisheries and achievement of good environmental status in all European seas.



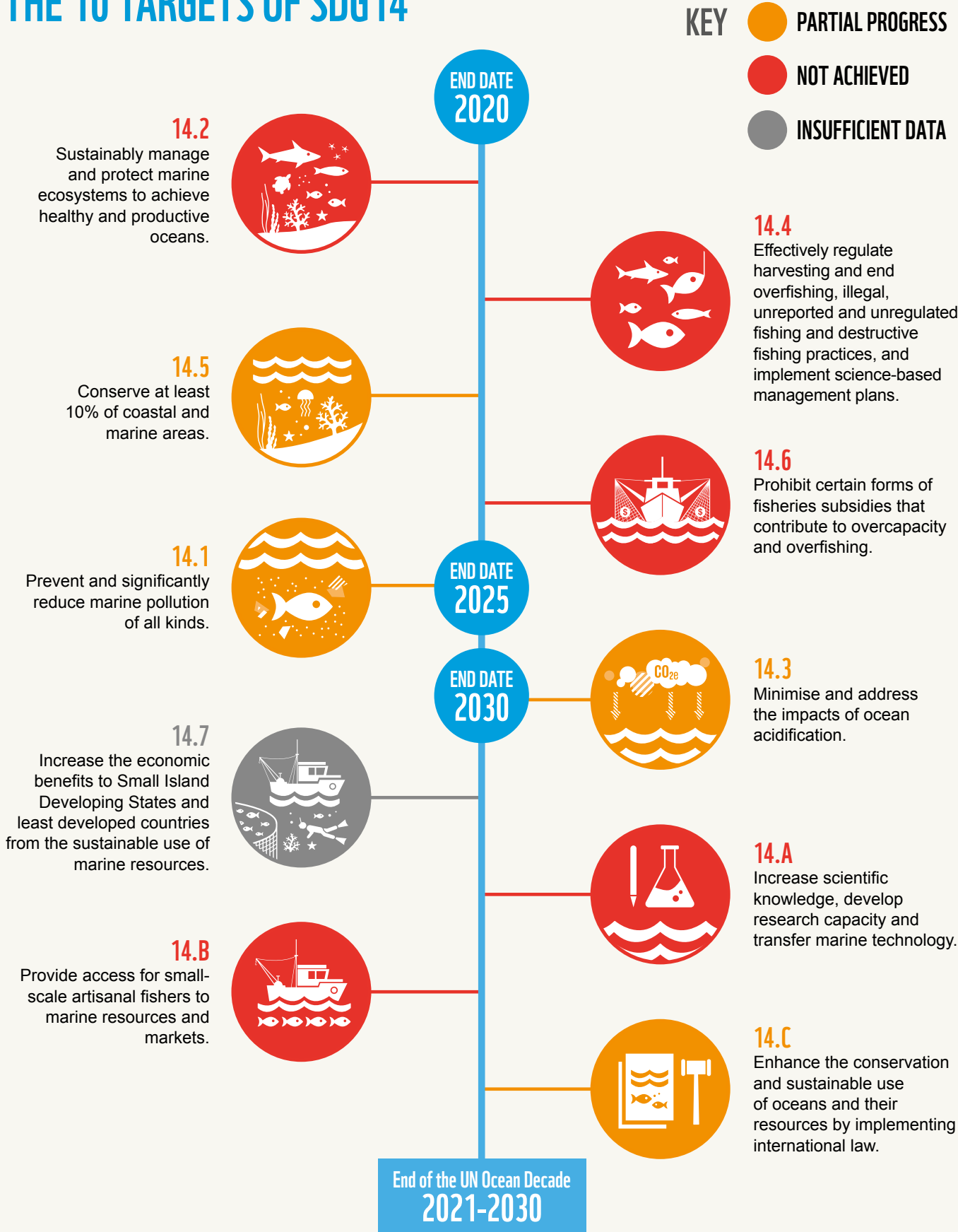
The ocean and seas provide fundamental ecosystem services and sequester carbon, supporting the livelihoods of billions of people worldwide.¹ Fisheries and aquaculture alone support the livelihoods of 10–12% of the world’s population,² demonstrating that seafood production offers ample opportunities to alleviate poverty, hunger and malnutrition while generating a Sustainable Blue Economy. Implementing best practices within the seafood industry and other marine sectors can ensure better use of natural resources to safeguard livelihoods and nutritional needs, while mitigating and adapting to our changing climate.

Five years on from the adoption of the UN 2030 Agenda, and as the climate and biodiversity crises have become paramount threats to our ways of life, this report presents European decision makers and other signatories of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a comprehensive and evidence-based critique on the achievements to date of the SDG14 (Life Below Water) targets. Having failed to deliver on three of the four SDG14 targets due by 2020 and with only partial progress on the fourth, **WWF calls for urgent action from all stakeholders for the achievement of all SDG14 targets by 2030.**

A transformation of the European Union (EU) and of international ocean governance is urgently required to deliver the 2030 Agenda and, specifically, SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 13 (Climate Action) and 14. To fully achieve SDG14 and thus the 2030 Agenda, substantial increases in funding for SDG14 are especially required given that it is the second most underfunded SDG³ while its achievement has been demonstrated to support multiple targets within other SDGs.³ WWF urges the EU and all SDG-signatory States to take immediate action for the sustainable management of natural resources and for fair socio-economic development in the restoration and use of our ocean. **In the face of the impacts of climate change on ocean health and food security, all stakeholders must intensify their efforts towards marine protection, sustainable seafood production and ecosystem-based management of our ocean.**

SECURING OUR OCEAN’S FUTURE STARTS NOW

THE 10 TARGETS OF SDG14



THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICY COHERENCE TO ACHIEVE ALL SDGs:



The SDGs are indivisible: there are significant interlinkages between all targets and their individual achievement often depends on the success of others.⁴ The SDG targets were designed to inspire directed and carefully designed actions that combine the development of innovative technologies while ensuring buy-in from society and appropriate governance mechanisms. Policy coherence between those actions at all stages of domestic and international decision making is crucial to integrate all economic, social, environmental and governance dimensions of sustainable development.

Specifically, several assessments on the connectivity between the SDGs indicate that **SDG14 ‘Life Below Water’⁵ interacts with all other SDGs and plays a central role in achieving the 2030 Agenda.**⁴ An assessment of co-benefits and trade-offs⁶ shows that 38% of all SDG targets require ocean sustainability in order to be achieved, particularly SDG1 (No Poverty) and SDG2 (Zero Hunger). In addition, important linkages have been identified between the achievement of SDG14 and SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation

and Infrastructure), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on Land) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).⁷ However, despite the recognition of the marine environment’s importance to advancing sustainable development and its relevance across the spectrum of the 2030 Agenda, awareness of the ocean and concrete SDG14 policy action remain poor.⁸ There is, therefore, an urgent need to increase awareness and build capacity among EU decision makers and stakeholders beyond the marine sectors.⁹

It is high time that the links between ‘Life Below Water’ and issues which have, until now, seemed unrelated, are better considered and defined to deliver tangible, cross-cutting policy action. For instance, a requirement of SDG13 (Climate Action) is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The seafood industry is directly implicated by efforts to realise this Goal, including by the reduction of fuel consumed by vessels and the production, packaging and transportation of frozen, chilled and cooked seafood. A more holistic view is necessary to ensure success across all SDGs.

DEEP DIVE INTO THE SDG14 TARGETS

As highlighted in WWF’s 2018 Living Planet Report,¹⁰ humans face both a climate and biodiversity crisis, and our situation needs climate action and radical change in order to reverse the trend of global biodiversity decline. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the document, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which defines the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 accompanying targets.¹¹

“The 2030 Agenda integrates in a balanced manner the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and reflects for the first time an international consensus that peace, security, justice for all, and social inclusion are not only to be pursued on their own but that they reinforce each other.”

—NEXT STEPS FOR A SUSTAINABLE EUROPEAN FUTURE - EUROPEAN ACTION FOR SUSTAINABILITY, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2016

The 2030 Agenda is a universal call to action which recognises the need for sustainable management of natural resources for social and economic development, laying out specific objectives and a clear timeframe. It specifically includes a Goal on the conservation and the sustainable use of our ocean, seas and marine resources (SDG14 – ‘Life Below Water’) with ten targets, four of which are to be achieved by 2020.

Despite SDG14 being identified as one of the Goals most strongly linked to the success of other SDGs,⁵ including SDG13 on Climate Action, there is an underlying lack of data for almost all SDG14 targets. This is critical, as the targets associated with fisheries and seafood production rely on publicly available data from all UN members and through the Food and Agriculture Organization. The progress of non-fisheries targets remains even more challenging to evaluate due to limited data availability. While the UN and the EU monitor their progress for SDG targets with a comprehensive indicator framework, more effort is needed to develop consistent indicators at the national, regional, and global levels. Coherently and consistently collecting the relevant data from all UN members is key to explicitly detail the extent to which any ocean-related action contributes to the SDGs. This is especially relevant for Member States to stand by their responsibility to the EU Policy Coherence for Development, which requires the EU and its Member States to make links between their actions and multiple SDG targets. This ensures that development objectives are taken into account in all policy actions likely to affect developing countries, as well as eliminating contradictions and capitalising on overlaps between EU policies to increase the effectiveness of development cooperation.



SDG TARGETS RELY ON PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA FROM ALL UN MEMBERS



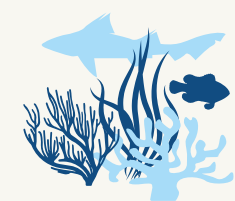
A diverse array of fish swim above healthy reef-building corals, Solomon Islands. © Shutterstock / Ethan Daniels / WWF

THE ELEVENTH HOUR: ACHIEVING THE 2020 TARGETS



TARGET 14.2: PROTECT AND RESTORE ECOSYSTEMS

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 in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.



30%

AT LEAST 30% OF
THE OCEAN MUST BE
FULLY PROTECTED
BY 2030 TO
RESTORE MARINE
BIODIVERSITY

1.8%

WWF RESEARCH
SHOWS THAT LESS
THAN 2% OF EU
MARINE AREAS
HAVE MPAs WITH A
MANAGEMENT PLAN

For each SDG target, the monitoring process relies on indicators chosen at international and national level. The agreed international indicator for target 14.2 is “Proportion of national exclusive economic zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches”.¹² By March 2021, EU Members States should have met the requirements of the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive and produced marine spatial plans which identify areas most suitable for various industrial needs (e.g. offshore wind farms) with minimum environmental impacts and minimum conflict with other marine sectors. Marine spatial plans are to be rooted in the ecosystem-based approach and recognise the full array of interactions within an ecosystem, including human use of marine resources, rather than consider single use, species, or ecosystem services in isolation. Achieving target 14.2 thus relies on the use and preservation of marine ecosystem services in a sustainable way, to which EU Member States committed when they adopted the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in 2008 and the MSP Directive in 2014.

In addition, recommendations from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and scientific advice call for at least 30% full protection of our ocean by 2030 to restore marine biodiversity and improve ocean resilience. For European waters, WWF research¹³ shows that only 12.4% of EU marine areas are designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and only

1.8% of EU marine areas have MPA management plans. Furthermore, many of the present management plans have insufficient measures to protect the designated sites, failing to embrace ecosystem-based approaches.

Over the past five years, few marine spatial plans avoiding significant adverse impacts have been published. European seas continue to suffer from a lack of appropriate measures to effectively manage MPAs and enable them to act as a coherent network to strengthen our ocean’s resilience and, ultimately, increase the assets of a Sustainable Blue Economy.

WWF CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION AND RECOMMENDS THAT:

- EU Member States ensure that the main priority of Marine Protected Areas is conservation of biodiversity and marine ecosystem services, not short-term economic opportunity. Marine Protected Areas must lead to effective protection to conserve and restore ecosystems, and include zones that are fully protected from destructive activities.
- EU Member States actively, urgently and cooperatively establish, enforce and implement effective management and monitoring in already designated Marine Protected Areas, including appropriate management plans and means to monitor and enforce them.

AROUND 25%
OF EU COASTAL WATERS ARE
SUBJECT TO SEABED HABITAT
LOSS DUE TO HUMAN ACTIVITIES

SOURCE: EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (2019), THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT — STATE AND OUTLOOK 2020



Adult common seals on a sand strip in the Wadden Sea. © Rob Webster / WWF

IMPROVING MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING IN GERMANY

Since 2009, Marine Spatial Planning¹⁴ (MSP) has been in place in the German North Sea and in the Baltic Sea. However, the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) within these seas have not been taken into consideration, resulting in no areas where priority was given to nature conservation or necessary restoration by Germany’s MSP, preventing the achievement of healthy and productive seas. A first step to improve German MSP is to ensure that offshore wind farms are not allowed within Natura 2000 sites, a process which is currently regulated through the spatial plans but not through MPA management plans.

Concrete action is required to fulfil the obligation of embracing the ecosystem-based approach in

MSP. To achieve ecosystem-based management, EU Member States must take the MSP Directive fully into account when drafting their plans and embed the ecosystem-based approach in all environmental impact assessments, protected area management plans and fisheries measures.

For instance, future locations for renewable energy generation must be located outside of MPAs and be guided out of other areas which are ecologically valuable, important for sensitive species and habitats, and/or provide climate refugia. Additionally, marine activities must tread carefully in their use of marine spaces and apply the precautionary principle at all times to support ocean resilience.



TARGET 14.4: SUSTAINABLE FISHING

By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting, end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices, and implement science-based management plans in order 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.



15%

ILLEGAL,
UNREPORTED AND
UNREGULATED (IUU)
FISHING REPRESENTS
AT LEAST 15% OF
GLOBAL SEAFOOD
CATCHES



66%

TWO-THIRDS OF
GLOBALLY ASSESSED
FISH STOCKS ARE
FULLY FISHERD OR
OVERFISHED

Since the 1970s, fleets have been fishing further, deeper and finding fish more easily due to technological advances, leading to overfishing worldwide² and threatening the livelihoods of coastal communities. A third of marine fish stocks were fished beyond biologically sustainable levels in 2018.¹⁵ Global estimates indicate that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing represents at least 15% of global seafood catches, weighing between 11 million and 26 million tonnes each year and with a price tag of US\$10–23 billion.¹⁶

The indicator 14.4.1 “Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels” is evaluated every year by scientists, decision makers and stakeholders.¹⁷ One of the primary objectives of the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is the restoration of all EU fish stock biomass above Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), the maximum level at which a natural resource can be routinely exploited without long-term depletion. The CFP set the objective for all EU Member States to achieve fishing mortality rates at or below MSY ($\leq F_{MSY}$) by 2015, where possible, and across the EU by 2020 at the latest. In 2018, WWF analysed publicly available data for 397 fish stocks in waters where the EU fleet is active and found that many stocks still remained overfished, especially in the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Seas.¹⁸

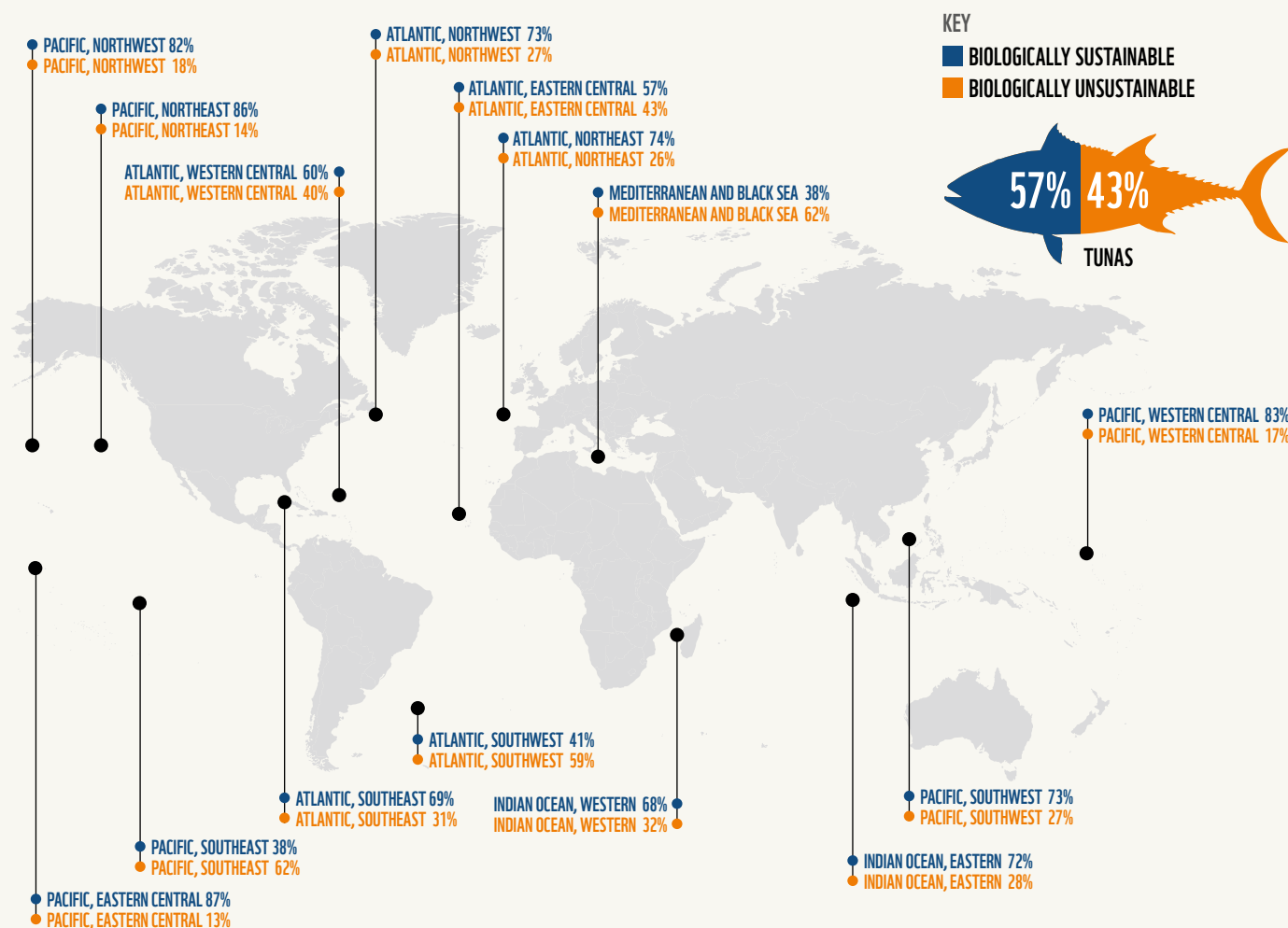
With 70% of its consumed seafood being imported, the EU’s seafood supply will change in the face of a warming world. To ensure the ecological, social and economic sustainability of EU seafood production, the implementation of effective policies to mitigate and adapt

to climate change is crucial, including the urgent elimination of overfishing worldwide.

WWF CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION AND RECOMMENDS THAT:

- EU Member States follow advice based on the best available scientific evidence to set fishing opportunities aligned with sustainable levels, i.e. at or below F_{MSY} , and apply the precautionary approach when data on the status of fish populations is lacking.
- Marine stakeholders, including fishers and researchers, collaborate to improve the selectivity of fishing gear to reduce the impact of the EU fleet on marine biodiversity and the seabed.
- EU Member States, vessels and operators face appropriate penalties, e.g. fines, when fishing activities are found to exceed agreed catch quotas (i.e. overfishing), including in partner country waters if the extraction of fish goes beyond the surplus stock.
- The EU increases transparency on the activities of its vessels and nationals by tackling the practices of flying flags of convenience and secrecy behind beneficial owners, which currently allow illegal fishing operators to hide their activities and avoid sanctions. Mandating internationally recognised unique vessel identification numbers for all vessels to allow authorities to obtain a vessel’s history, regardless of name changes or reflagging, can be part of the solution.

Figure 1: State of the world’s fish stocks by FAO statistical area



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2018), The state of world fisheries and aquaculture

CONTROL OF FISHERIES AND REMOTE ELECTRONIC MONITORING

Control of activities at sea is key to the success of fisheries transparency, to deliver a level playing field without market distortion, in addition to data collection to support scientific advice for fisheries management, accurate estimation of sensitive species bycatch and use of other marine resources. In general, more real-time (or close to real-time) data collection is necessary to help increase accountability and transparency, alongside the development of global platforms to visualise and interpret the data. This data needs to be publicly available so that vessel operators and their flag States can be held accountable for fishing and bycatch activities that contravene environmental legislation. This data collection may be implemented through the use of automated technologies such as Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), which incorporates closed-circuit television (CCTV) and vessel monitoring systems (VMS). Such innovations need to be wholly adopted across fisheries sectors in order for these tools to be successfully brought on board and make real change happen.

Using REM in marine resources management has been shown to be the most cost-efficient way to monitor and

control activities at sea, due to advances in technology and greater efficiencies of analyst staff time.¹⁹ In 2015, it was estimated that reviewing 10% of the monitoring footage across the United Kingdom fleet would cost roughly one quarter of the money currently spent on more traditional systems (e.g. on-board observers) which deliver less than 1% at-sea coverage.¹⁹

Some of the clear benefits of REM include the potential for significantly improved catch and bycatch data, more reactive data management and larger data sets to feed into fisheries management, and the ability to use the technology to provide supporting evidence for industry anecdotal experience. The use of REM also minimises the use of human observers and safety risks posed at sea.

The use of REM would address the traceability concerns raised by supply chain representatives – those in the retail and processing sectors – over compliance with key environmental legislation and the potential for illegality in the supply chain if compliance is low. REM brings transparency to the seafood market, nature protection and ensures a level playing field between fisheries operators.



TARGET 14.5: CONSERVE COASTAL AND MARINE AREAS

By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.



12%

OF EU WATERS
ARE DESIGNATED
AS MPAs

85%

OF THEM ARE
FAILING TO ACHIEVE
EFFECTIVE MARINE
PROTECTION

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are tools for delivering conservation and protecting marine biodiversity. MPAs are “a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.”²⁰

Designation alone of MPAs does not deliver any protection measures to the marine environment. A comprehensive, fully implemented management plan, backed up by legislation, stakeholder support and sustainable financing, along with actions for conservation, active nature restoration, monitoring and adaptive management are needed for an MPA to provide biodiversity protection from seabed to surface.

In 2019, over 12% of EU waters were covered by MPAs, but WWF research showed that 85% of them were failing to achieve effective marine protection.¹³ In practice, this means that the majority of the EU’s designated MPAs cannot be included in the indicator 14.5.1 “Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas” for European waters. On an international level, designating coastal and marine areas for protection is on track to reach the 10% target.²¹ However, the reality of the protection remains to be evaluated.

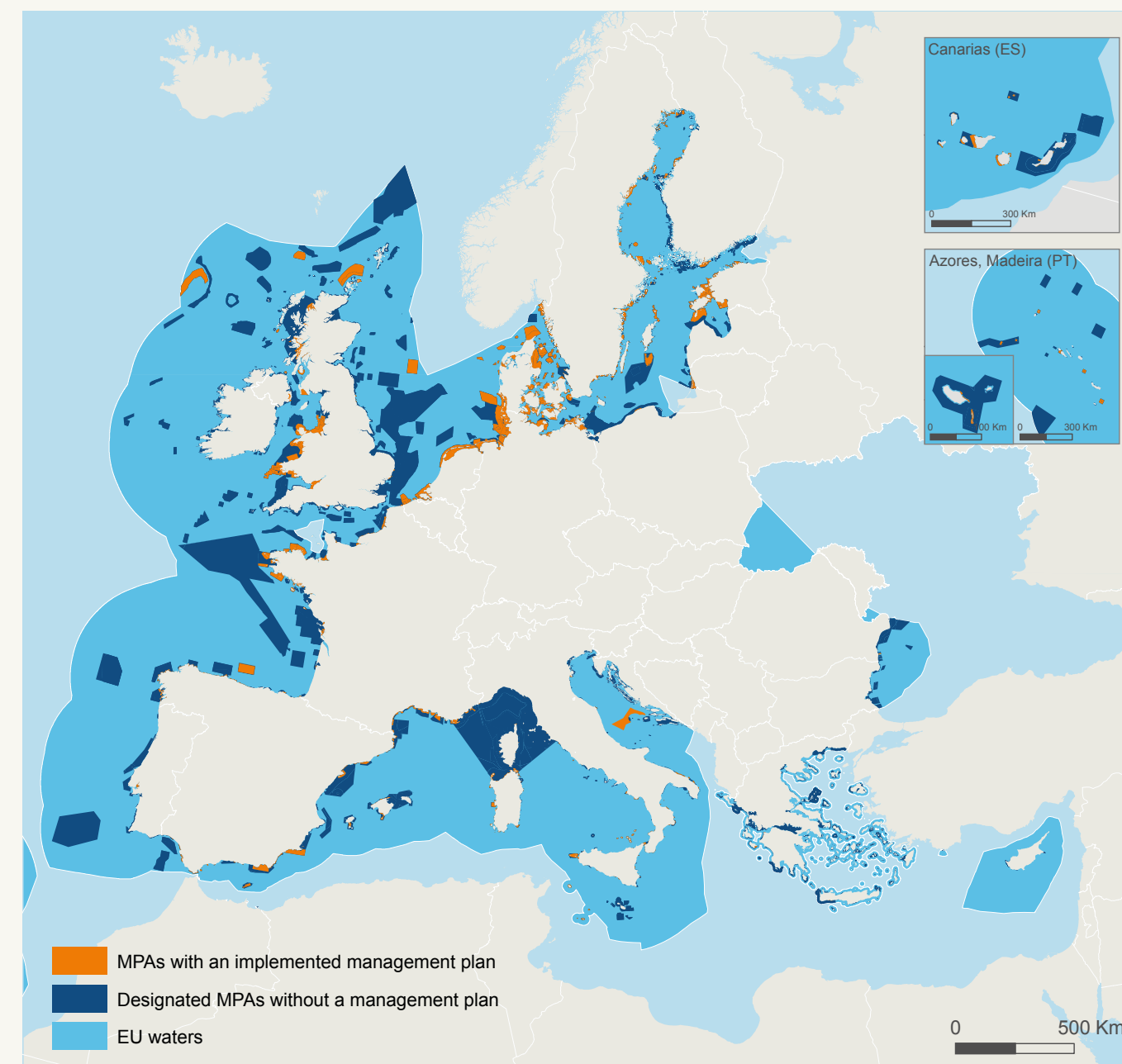
In addition to developing enough well-managed and fully implemented MPAs to protect the marine environment, attention should be given to developing

these MPAs into a functioning network. MPAs must cover all habitats, not only the sensitive or rare ones; proximity between MPAs is paramount for the successful dispersal of species; and the protected habitats and species should be included in more than one MPA in the network to ensure coherent protection of biodiversity. This trifecta of requirements, referred to as ecological coherence, can only be achieved when MPAs are designated where ecologically meaningful, not where politically convenient.

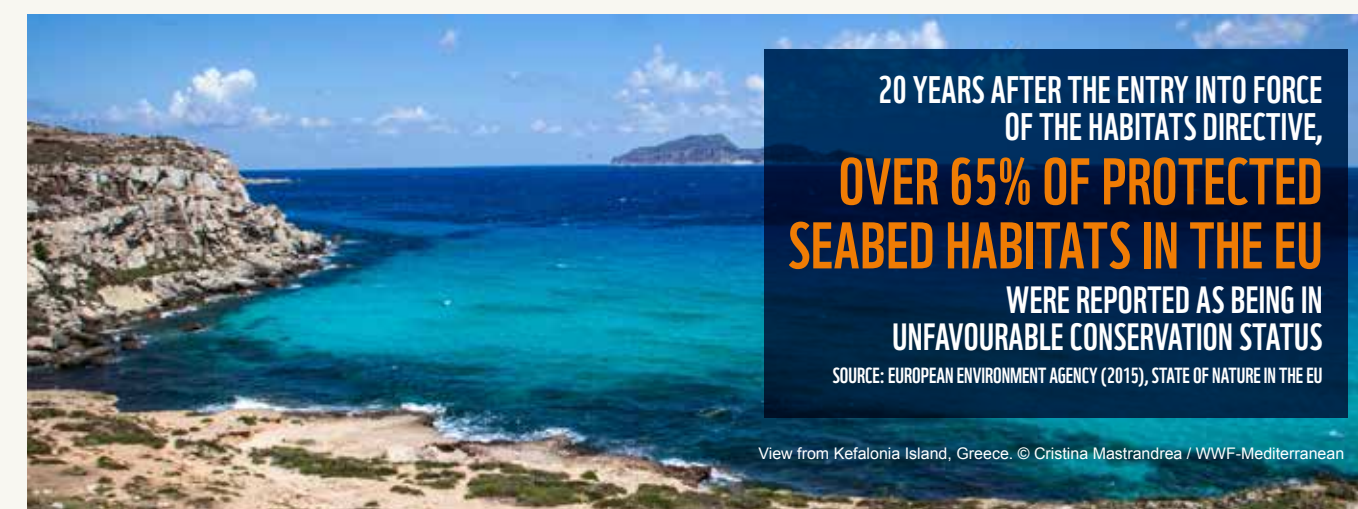
WWF CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION AND RECOMMENDS THAT:

- UN members commit to effectively manage MPAs covering at least 30% of their marine and coastal areas by 2030. Together, these MPAs and OECMs will act as a coherent network to restore biodiversity, improve ocean resilience and increase the asset base that is the foundation for a Sustainable Blue Economy.
- EU Member States increase transparency on how their marine areas are protected by ensuring timely and accurate reporting to all relevant MPA authorities and databases.
- National and EU decision makers encourage inclusive, multi-stakeholder participation for long-term management plans of marine resources that also include fish stock recovery areas, to protect fish nurseries and spawning sites.

Figure 2: Only 1.8% of EU seas have MPA management plans despite 12.4% being designated for protection



Source: WWF (2019), Protecting Our Ocean: Europe's challenges to meet the 2020 deadlines





TARGET 14.6: END SUBSIDIES CONTRIBUTING TO OVERFISHING

By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognising that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed States should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation.



1 BILLION

MORE THAN A BILLION
PEOPLE WORLDWIDE
MAKE THEIR LIVING
FROM THE OCEAN



LESS
THAN 1/5

SMALL-SCALE FISHERS
IN THE EU RECEIVED
ONLY 19.6% OF THE
EUROPEAN MARITIME
AND FISHERIES FUND,
ALTHOUGH THEY
ACCOUNT FOR OVER
85% OF THE FLEET

More than a billion people worldwide make their living from the ocean, yet many governments still provide subsidies to their fishing fleets. Subsidies for fleet renewal, i.e. acquisition of new vessels, and modernisation, e.g. engine replacement, systematically result in an increase of fishing capacity which our already depleted seas cannot afford. Harmful subsidies have been prohibited in the EU since 2004 and any form of reintroduction would not only distort competition but go directly against target SDG14.6. The indicator “Progress by countries in the degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing” shows that the fiscal angle of the fight against overfishing proves to be taken broadly into account by all States.²²

Globally, shifting all harmful fisheries investments towards a Sustainable Blue Economy is an urgent challenge for which political action remains inconsistent.²³ EU subsidies have, historically, led to a build-up of excessive fishing capacity; the EU fleet is, in some fisheries, up to three times larger than sustainable fishing allows. In 2019, the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament approved reintroducing harmful subsidies, despite the European Parliament

Plenary adopting a report on the way forward for EU actions at the World Trade Organization (WTO)²⁴ the year prior, where the EU is encouraged to “get more actively involved in how trade can help achieve the SDGs, beyond the negotiations on fisheries subsidies” and to “define the more concrete action that needs to be taken to protect marine life.” The European Parliament’s actions in 2019 have put the EU in direct contradiction with its position on the WTO negotiation floor regarding harmful fisheries subsidies and jeopardise the EU’s credibility for global ocean leadership.

In addition, the sectoral support funded by the EU to partner countries as part of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements has been misspent²⁵ on fuelling the running costs of fishery operations instead of supporting the development of sustainable fisheries. The lack of financial infrastructure in some partner countries remains a problem as they are unable to absorb the totality of funding or, in some cases, funds can be misspent.²⁵

WWF urges all decision makers to lead the transformation on fisheries subsidies and ensure that public money contributes to ending overfishing and reducing damage to the marine environment.

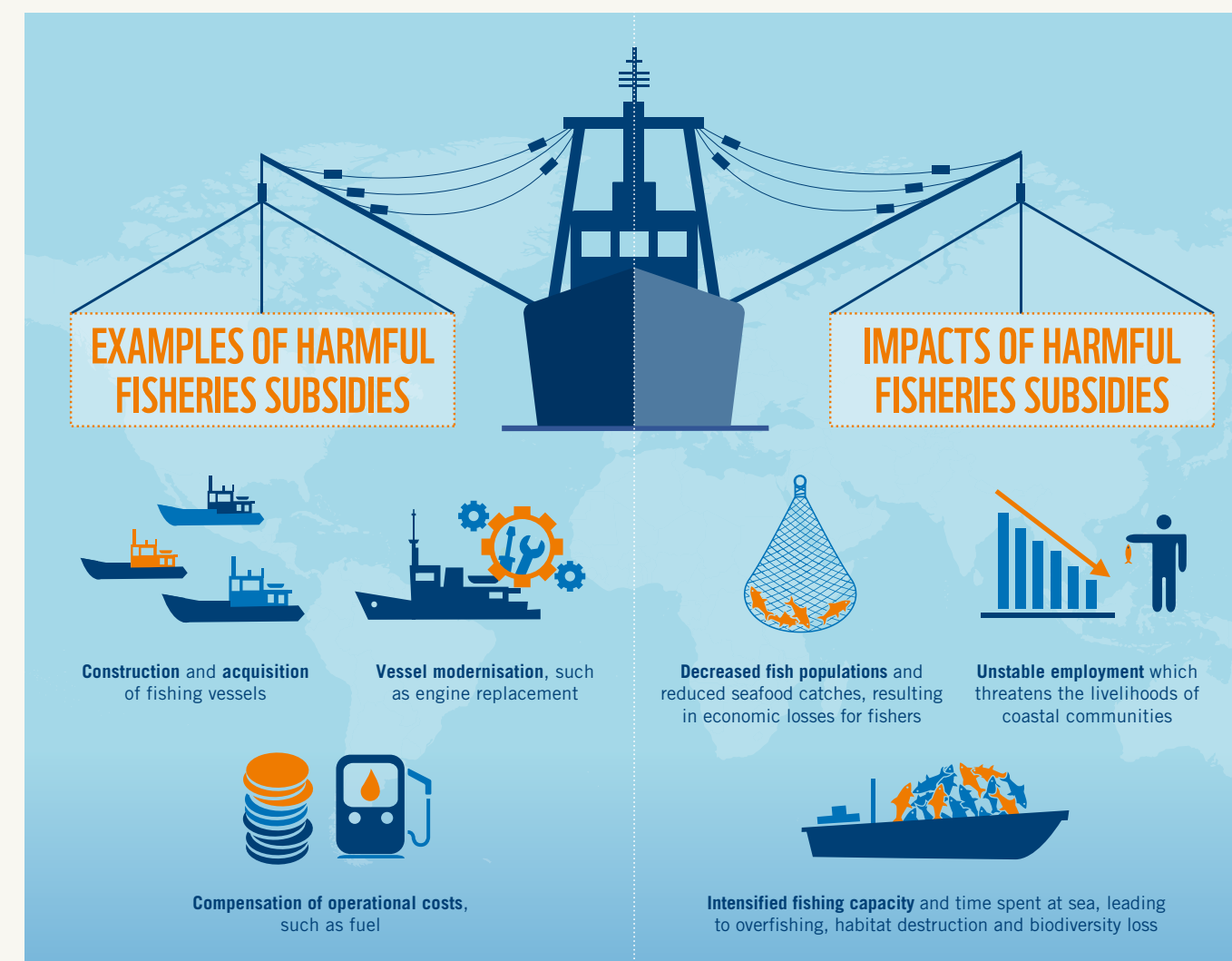
WWF CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION AND RECOMMENDS THAT:

- The EU maintains its ban on harmful subsidies that increase fishing capacity, particularly the renewal of the fleet.
- The EU eliminates subsidies to operational effort-enhancing costs that may increase fishing capacity, including engine replacement. Replacing old engines does not translate into a reduction of the vessel’s ability to catch fish, as the actual power of the engine is difficult to control and vessels still have an incentive to increase their fishing effort, e.g. by spending more hours at sea.
- National and EU decision makers remove any funding for temporary and permanent cessation of fishing activities as it contributes to maintaining the status quo

instead of promoting structural changes needed to end overfishing. For periods where fisheries are closed to allow fish populations to replenish, other government socio-economic schemes that support the loss of income need to be better promoted.

- WTO members adopt an ambitious agreement on comprehensive and effective disciplines on harmful fisheries subsidies at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in June 2020. Countries must address subsidies reform at the national level, but the WTO is the only body that can take meaningful action to curtail harmful fisheries subsidies at a global scale to strengthen ocean governance and fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 14.6. By curtailing subsidies that drive overcapacity and overfishing and support illegal fishing vessels, WTO disciplines can undercut ongoing economic support for activities that destroy our oceans and the livelihoods of millions.

Figure 3: The need for fisheries subsidies reform





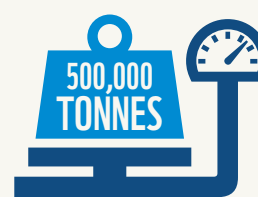
THE COURSE AHEAD: ACHIEVING ALL SDG14 TARGETS BY 2030

Humpback whale fluke with fishing boats, northern Norway. © Espen Bergersen / naturepl.com / WWF



TARGET 14.1: REDUCE MARINE POLLUTION

By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.



**½ MILLION
TONNES OF
PLASTIC**

**ENTER THE
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
EVERY YEAR**



30 YEARS

**IT IS ESTIMATED THAT
BY 2050, THERE WILL
BE MORE PLASTIC
IN THE OCEAN
THAN FISH**

Marine pollution comes in many forms, including underwater noise which disrupts sensitive species that rely on underwater acoustics to forage and communicate, physical pollutants such as oil spills, agricultural runoff and human waste, as well as invasive organisms which disrupt marine habitats and food webs.

As public awareness of marine litter has grown, data collection for the indicators “Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density”, “quality of water for bathing”²⁶ and “amount of plastic” has significantly increased. Plastic is the most ubiquitous material and waste generation is expected to quadruple by 2050.²⁷ WWF research has shown that over half a million tonnes of plastic enters the Mediterranean Sea every year.²⁷

Pollution is the result of failures across the entire life cycle of material use, including design, production, consumption, waste management and secondary markets for recycled material. Action must be taken at all levels to ensure zero leakage of waste, including plastic, into nature.

WWF RECOMMENDS THAT:

■ EU decision makers support a new legally binding global treaty to combat marine plastic pollution and stop plastic leakage into nature by 2030. Pollution does not respect national borders and is thus the collective responsibility of all States. While every nation and

region may face unique challenges, shared targets would create greater mutual accountability, empowering States to collaborate and support each other to achieve ‘zero leakage’.

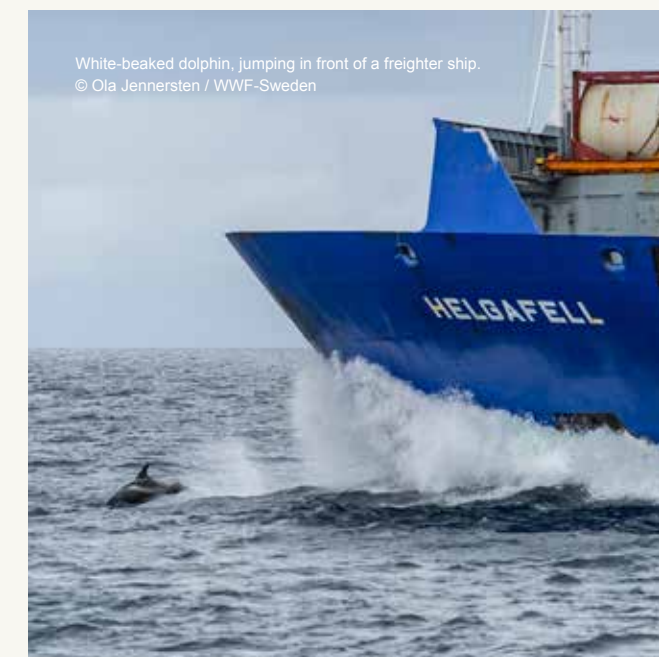
■ The principle of extended producer responsibility (EPR) be applied across the entire life cycle of materials, with schemes to hold industry accountable for the downstream impacts of their products. Standardising existing EPR schemes will increase the compliance of transnational companies and ensure that the plastic industry bears financial responsibility for all parts of production and waste processing, including plastic waste management and recycling.

■ EU Member States encourage transnational collaboration to solve the issues of global pollution by openly and proactively sharing best practices and innovation. Deposit-refund programmes in Germany, microplastic bans in Italy and France, and pay-as-you-throw schemes in Greece are just a few leading actions that other States can learn from and build upon.

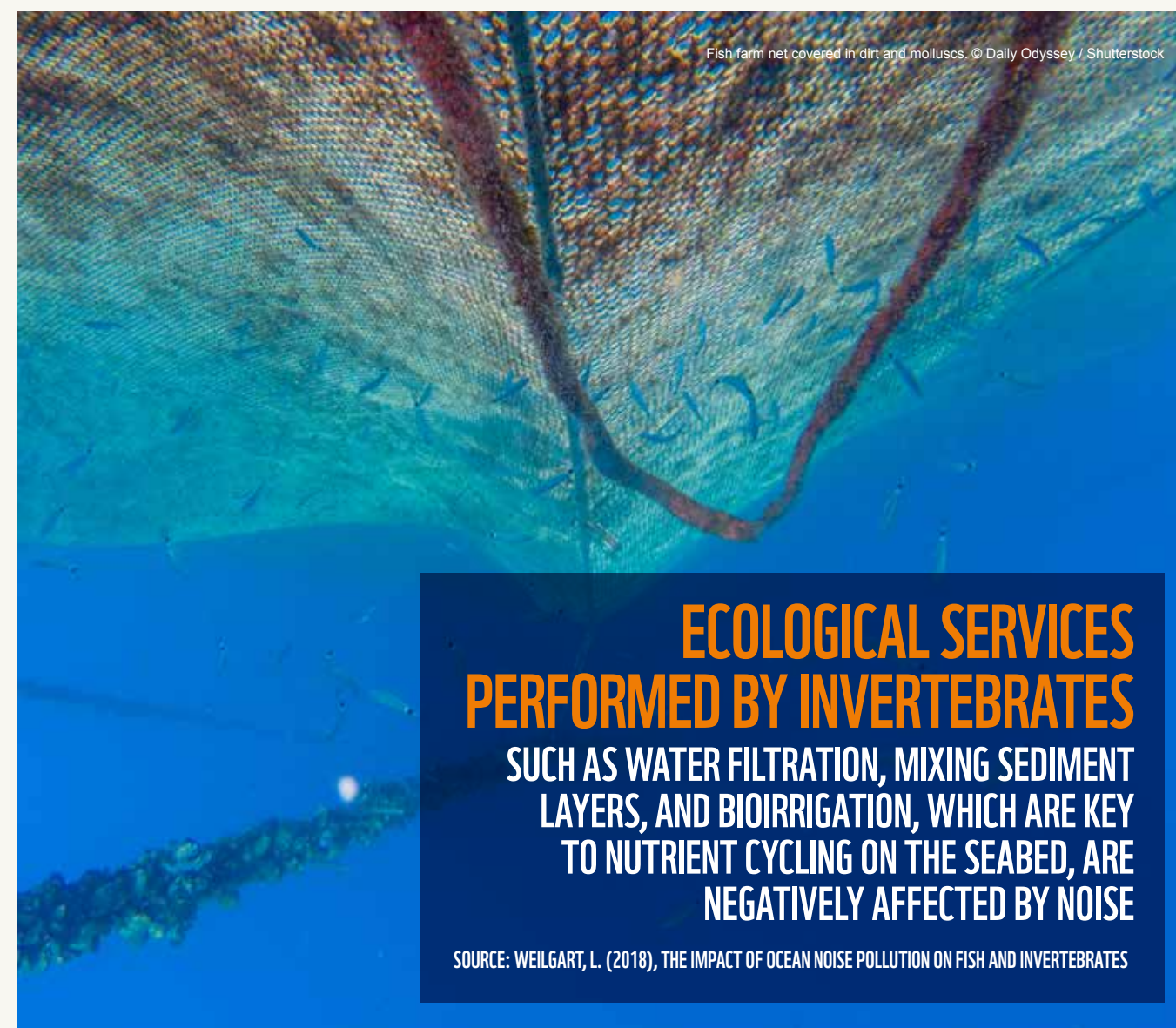
■ Finally, on the rising issue of microplastic, WWF asks EU decision makers to advance the EU’s ambition of banning microplastics which are intentionally added to consumer goods (including cosmetics, paints and detergents, as well as some farm and medical products) through the REACH Regulation.²⁸ The EU must also address the unintentional release of plastic into nature, particularly with regards to tyres and textiles.



Dead bird and plastic bag floating in the ocean.
© Shutterstock / Krzysztof Bargiel / WWF



White-beaked dolphin, jumping in front of a freighter ship.
© Ola Jennersten / WWF-Sweden



Fish farm net covered in dirt and molluscs. © Daily Odyssey / Shutterstock

**ECOLOGICAL SERVICES
PERFORMED BY INVERTEBRATES**
SUCH AS WATER FILTRATION, MIXING SEDIMENT
LAYERS, AND BIOIRRIGATION, WHICH ARE KEY
TO NUTRIENT CYCLING ON THE SEABED, ARE
NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY NOISE

SOURCE: WEILGART, L. (2018), THE IMPACT OF OCEAN NOISE POLLUTION ON FISH AND INVERTEBRATES



TARGET 14.7: INCREASE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE RESOURCES

By 2030, increase the economic benefits of Small Island Developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.



THE OCEAN'S KEY
ASSETS ARE WORTH
AT LEAST

US\$24
TRILLION

THE WORLD BANK
HAS ESTIMATED
THAT SUSTAINABLE
FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT
COULD RECOVER AN
ADDITIONAL

US\$83
BILLION IN
REVENUE
WORLDWIDE

While collectively enjoying an exclusive economic zone of 1.25 million km² available for the development of a thriving Sustainable Blue Economy,²⁹ Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have limited land areas while facing the biggest impacts from climate change and adverse weather events.²⁹ SIDS development is also challenged by both the limited opportunities to diversify their economies and the high transport costs which hamper trade opportunities, as many SIDS are among the world's most remote islands and least developed countries.

Sustainable Blue Economies fit within the boundaries of marine ecosystems: truly integrated maritime policies, adequate economic and legislative incentives, supportive public and private financial and investment flows, as well as successful implementation of ecosystem-based marine spatial plans are all important means to achieve thriving Sustainable Blue Economies. For instance, aquaculture can be a productive, climate-friendly method of food production when it has a low carbon footprint, minimises marine pollution and limits degradation of coastal habitats. Until now, however, overfishing and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing have all severely limited SIDS and other developing States' abilities to reap the full gains from their available marine resources. Strengthening regional and international initiatives is crucial to ensure effective cross-border and multi-jurisdictional governance,

and to develop an accurate oversight of Sustainable Blue Economy opportunities. Furthermore, the indicator 14.7.1 "Sustainable fisheries as a percentage of GDP in Small Island Developing States, least developed countries and all countries" suffers from a lack of holistic data, which makes it difficult to assess the global progress towards sustainable seafood production.¹²

With the EU aiming to lead on global ocean governance, it is crucial that any new action or legislation developed by the EU institutions and Member States aligns with the EU Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) that requires all internal and external EU policies to not undermine each other, nor the objectives of EU development cooperation.³⁰ Given the EU's international commitments, the alignment of EU policy areas with the EU's PCD approach at strategic level is key for the external dimension of policy areas, such as fisheries, trade and climate change. Sustainable Fisheries Partnerships Agreements (SFPA) between the EU and third countries have an inherent development dimension with provisions on human rights, working standards and stakeholder involvement. However, negotiations of SFPAs between the EU and developing coastal States do not always include mutual benefits for the national coastal communities due to a lack of transparency and inclusion of stakeholders in the SFPA negotiations.



Developing clear guidelines and codes of conduct for all major marine sectors including aquaculture, tourism, fisheries, trade and health, eliminating economic incentives that encourage marine habitat degradation, and implementing robust legislative and regulatory actions are critical to the successful and sustainable development of all countries in the face of climate change.

WWF RECOMMENDS THAT:

- The EU fully implements the IUU Regulation and applies sanctions for non-compliant vessels. More specifically, stronger and more systematic sanctions are needed to deter IUU fishing and to help compensate for the damage done to marine ecosystems and to communities impacted

by diminished marine economies. Trade rules could be used to oblige non-EU nations trading with the EU to provide access to key data and information that will help evaluate best practices of both the EU and the partner countries of SFPAs.

- The EU and partner countries of SFPAs increase transparency of their fishing activities through robust catch data collection and reporting, while ensuring full compliance with monitoring, control and surveillance measures;
- The EU strengthens its regional and international initiatives to ensure effective cross-border and multi-jurisdictional governance, and develops an accurate oversight of Sustainable Blue Economy opportunities.



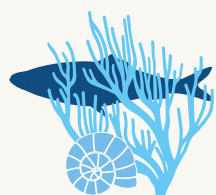
TARGET 14.3: REDUCE OCEAN ACIDIFICATION

Minimise and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels.



40%

THE OCEAN HAS
ABSORBED NEARLY
HALF OF THE CO₂
EMITTED INTO THE
ATMOSPHERE BY
HUMAN ACTIVITIES



1/4

CORAL REEFS
SUPPORT 25% OF
ALL MARINE SPECIES
ON THE PLANET

Our ocean absorbs a substantial proportion of the CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere by human activities. This intake has negative effects on shell and reef-forming organisms, including coral reefs which support 25% of all marine species on the planet despite occupying just 0.1% of the ocean. Hundreds of millions of people rely on coral reefs for essential nutrition, their livelihoods, protection from life-threatening storms and essential economic opportunities. Recent research has shown that around half of the world's shallow water coral reefs are already gone; without urgent action to address climate change, pollution, overfishing and destructive coastal development, the remaining reefs may also disappear.³¹

The indicator 14.3.1 “Average marine acidity (pH) measured at agreed suite of representative sampling stations” helps illustrate the decline in pH which corresponds to an increase in ocean acidity. Since 2018, the European Earth Observation Programme, Copernicus, has been monitoring marine acidity both at the global scale and for European seas, and provides the basis for the Eurostat ocean acidification indicator. This is achieved in combination with proxy data from the ALOHA station in Hawaii, which monitors a suite of physical and biogeochemical properties such as salinity and dissolved oxygen. Observations dating from 1988 reveal that,

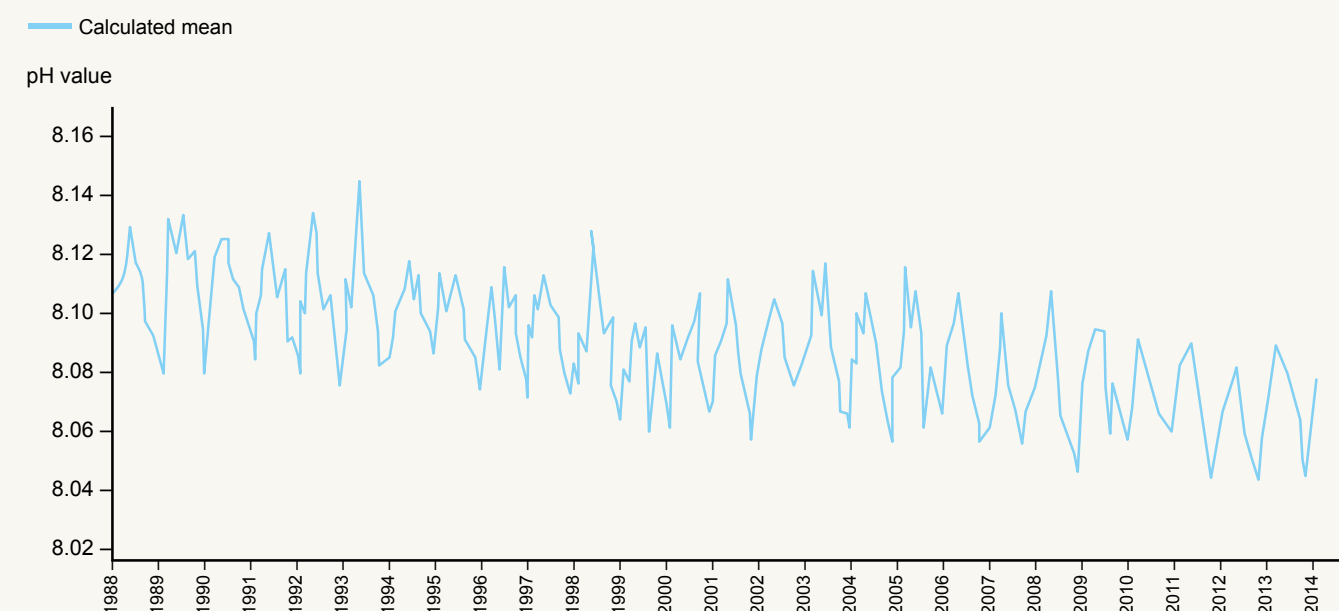
globally, the ocean has become more acidic, threatening the ability of shellfish and other organisms such as coral reefs to build their calcium-based shells and putting entire ecosystems and food webs at risk.

WWF RECOMMENDS THAT:

- The EU urgently agrees on a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 and implements immediate actions to reduce carbon emissions, starting with doubling the removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere by 2030 – this can be achieved by supporting the activity and expansion of European carbon sinks, in particular through ecosystem restoration.
- The EU identifies opportunities to reduce water pollution and nutrient runoff from agricultural systems into waterways, as these contribute to acidification and deoxygenation of marine systems (also relevant for target 14.1).
- The EU supports coordination at international and national levels to capitalise on existing data and efforts to monitor ocean acidification.
- The EU supports literacy schemes to increase understanding of ocean acidification and its consequences among stakeholders, targeted audiences and local communities for better compliance with environmental legislation.

Figure 4: Mean ocean acidity from 1988 to 2014

The lower the pH value, the more acidic the ocean. ⁴¹



Source: European Environment Agency (2019), Europe's state of the environment 2020

ABORLAN MUNICIPALITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

One of the main threats to coral reefs is ocean acidification. The Coral Reef Rescue Initiative, a major partnership between coral reef conservation and development organisations, is identifying the most resilient coral reefs ('regeneration' reefs) and dependent communities. By working with local communities and major partners to protect the reefs that are most resilient to climate change from the impacts of overfishing, pollution and unsustainable development, we increase the chances that the marine species they host will thrive, enhancing biodiversity recovery. Coral Reef Rescue focuses on building the resilience of coral reefs and the communities dependent on them by securing reefs in seven main States (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Philippines, Madagascar, Tanzania and Cuba) which account for 70% of global coral reef regeneration capacity. These reefs will stand a better chance of helping other reefs to regenerate.³² In this way, Coral Reef Rescue will complement and boost reef conservation work around the world.

For nearly 10 years, WWF has been facilitating community workshops and consultations in the Philippines in order to identify key conservation areas for coral near the Aborlan municipality. Studies

to assess the health of marine life in this region are carried out on a scientific basis for the protection of reefs and the ocean. Getting the local community involved and leading on informed designation of protected areas has also been key, such as gathering GPS data with local fishers to establish areas for various marine activities, including fishing, protection and tourism. Finally, regular seminars and trainings have been held on fisheries and the value of coral reefs with diverse stakeholders, including school children, women and the general public, so that when rounds of consultations and environmental education sessions were conducted with government officials, all parties involved with the issues at hand were interested in participating.

As a result of Coral Reef Rescue, people have started seeing the bigger picture and the 'spillover effect' for fisheries: when the reef is healthy, it supplies fish to smaller coral reefs outside of protected zones, meaning local fishers do not need to go so far to find fish. The research has provided evidence for the communities of the Aborlan municipality to support conservation and no-fishing zones, while investing in the growth of a Sustainable Blue Economy.



TARGET 14.A: INCREASE SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing States, in particular Small Island Developing States and least developed States.



ENVIRONMENTAL



ECONOMIC



SOCIAL

CONTRACTING
PARTIES ENCOURAGE
MEASURING THEIR
SDG IMPACT, SUCH
AS ECONOMIC,
ENVIRONMENTAL
AND SOCIAL
OUTCOMES
FOR LOCAL
COMMUNITIES

Less than a year before the start of the UN Decade of Ocean Science that will support efforts to reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health and gather all ocean stakeholders worldwide, the indicator 14.A.1 on “Proportion of total research budget allocated to research in the field of marine technology” is only available for a few regions, such as for the EU and its European Maritime Fisheries Fund.³³ For some international organisations like Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMO), Contracting Parties can encourage the development of robust indicators to measure the impact of their contributions to the SDGs, such as economic, environmental and social outcomes for local communities, human rights and labour conditions. However, the investigation and use of social and traditional expertise of many stakeholders, including women, remain low.³⁴

A standardised system of data collection is paramount for research, innovation and knowledge sharing that enable us to better understand marine ecosystems and their resources, as well as the results of marine policy on their management in light of the SDG targets. At RFMO level, however, little work has been undertaken by the European Commission and the EU Member States to provide better data and support research that investigates the links between marine policy in RFMOs and the achievement of SDG targets. In addition, at EU Member State level, the need to increase transparency of data collection and monitoring in Marine Protected Areas has been identified as critical for successful marine

protection. At present, few EU Member States ensure timely, accurate and publicly-available reporting to all relevant marine authorities and databases.

WWF RECOMMENDS THAT:

- EU Member States improve and optimise data collection by establishing harmonised monitoring of how marine resources are used and comprehensive data exchange systems to facilitate scientific evaluations of both the ecological and economic effects of adopted management measures.
- EU Member States evaluate existing monitoring programmes to measure the efficacy of their implementation, and ensure transparency and accountability with robust reporting and control mechanisms.
- EU Member States align annual fishing opportunities with scientific recommendations and apply the precautionary approach for sustainable fishing mortality rates consistently across the EU. This will restore and maintain fish populations above Maximum Sustainable Yield, thereby increasing overall marine ecosystem capacity and supporting the ability of marine life to adapt to pressures from environmental changes and anthropogenic demand.
- EU Member States accelerate implementation of ecosystem-based management by designing more marine recovery programmes and designating more fish recovery or protected areas to further strengthen implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, the Habitats Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and other EU environmental legislation.
- EU Member States proactively integrate strong political, legal, financial and social measures within all partnerships to ensure appropriate and practical approaches for adaptation to climate change. Increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change into research, management and policy is key to ensure acceptance and support of climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Sandra Fynn, Land Based Fishing Analyst for the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development of Ghana, monitors fishing activities. © Kyle LaFerriere / WWF-US

NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE OCEAN GOVERNANCE

There is currently an alarming lack of data across all sectors of ocean governance. In the fisheries sector, vessel operators and partner countries continually fall short of their reporting obligations across a wide remit of data types including logbook catch data, vessel registration information (with many new vessel registrations left unreported), labour conditions such as crew and wages, and the official reporting on the way in which international and EU funds were used for sectoral support in partner States. When data has been successfully collected, it is often poorly transmitted or not made publicly available. This lack of transparency, both at the negotiation and implementation levels, perpetuates the exclusion of marine stakeholders from management evaluations and negotiations, and likely amplifies tensions between EU vessels and developing State partners, many of whom have argued that traditional access rights to their fisheries are being violated by foreign fishing fleet activities.³⁵ Further, collaboration between management organisations has been made more difficult due to a lack of public information which, in the long term, often leads to less efficient use of management resources, as common goals are not identified.

New technologies are now widely accessible to all actors to support sustainable seafood production and ambitious ocean governance. With information on fish stocks, marine areas, access to marine resources and markets, States can gain a better picture of activities in their waters. With the added promise of Earth observation technology and surveillance, governments will be empowered to activate port state measures and other controls. A full picture of marine activity can empower States with resources to calculate optimum levels of fishing, plan sustainable

aquaculture expansion and ensure fair and secure access to living aquatic resources.

Regarding technological tracking devices to monitor and control activities at sea, incentivising data collection and compliance has been encouraged in several EU Member States. In Croatia, all purse-seine, trawl fishing vessels and even small boats less than 12 metres in length are required to use Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) to submit tracking data which is available in real time on a national website. VMS are excellent tools to control fishing effort in terms of time spent at sea and activities across areas. In Spain, over 1,500 boats less than 12 metres in length are equipped with the low cost “green box” tracking systems that use a GPS connection linked to an electronic navigational chart/plotter.³⁶ These green boxes are mandatory in Marine Protected Areas and for some specific fisheries. Tracked data can be cross-checked with spatio-temporal measures in place against landings of caught fish and compared to market figures. While such a scheme is already in place in Andalusia, it could be adapted in line with the EU Landing Obligation to enforce bans against discarding bycatch of marine species across all EU sea basins.

There is an urgent need for the EU to facilitate Member States exchanging their results from successful practices via a common international database. It is critical that EU Member States share and learn from their best practices and that decision makers, fishers, and other key stakeholders work together to find and agree the best ways to ensure maximum compliance with laws that will secure sustainable use of marine resources and promote the transfer of innovative solutions for ambitious and successful ocean governance.



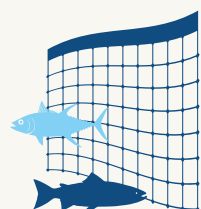
TARGET 14.B: SUPPORT SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.



**€1.3
BILLION**

THE EU FLEET
MAINTAINS HIGH
NET FISHERIES
PROFITS ANNUALLY



80%

THE MAJORITY OF
THE EU'S SMALL-
SCALE FLEET USES
PASSIVE RATHER
THAN MOBILE FISHING
GEAR, REDUCING
ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACTS ON MARINE
ECOSYSTEMS

Six years after the international endorsement of the Food and Agriculture Organization's Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines,³⁷ the indicator 14.B.1 on "Progress by countries in the degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries" needs, first and foremost, to be combined with transparent and objective criteria on EU Member States' use in allocating fishing opportunities. Those criteria should not only take economic sustainability into account, but also environmental and social considerations. In order to broaden access to marine resources, all States should incentivise national fishing fleets to deploy selective fishing gear and adopt fishing techniques with reduced environmental impacts.

The current allocation of fishing opportunities is mostly based on historical catches and favours industrial scale fishing rather than local, low-impact practices. In the EU, some States are currently considering changes to their allocation systems, such as Denmark and Portugal; however, no clear mention of environmental considerations could be found in the documents available to public scrutiny.

At present, the EU fleet maintains high fisheries net profits of over €1.3 billion annually; this high profitability rings especially true for the fleet segments with sustainable fishing methods, demonstrating the value of investing in these best practices.³⁸

In order to develop and promote transparent and objective criteria for access to marine activities, greater efforts are required to mobilise collaboration between major intergovernmental organisations such as the World Trade Organization for trade data collection and trade sanctions, the World Health Organization to collect data on the livelihoods of seafood workers and the relation to health and nutrition, the United Nations to help systematically measure progress towards each of the SDGs, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to collaborate on projects aiming to secure livelihoods and decent work of both seafood workers and low-impact fishing communities, as well as national food security.

WWF RECOMMENDS THAT:

- EU Member States set fishing limits aligned with scientific evidence to allow fish populations to recover above sustainable levels, ultimately increasing the benefits of fishing and marine activities to all stakeholders who intersect with the fisheries sector.
- EU Member States and fishing organisations must include clear environmental, compliance and socio-economic criteria in their allocation systems to favour the most sustainable fishing practices; progress toward achieving these criteria must be measured and reported via means that are available to public scrutiny.



- The EU and its Member States must incentivise greater compliance to environmental legislation by reserving a percentage of quotas and fishing effort for best practitioners within a fishery.
- The EU and its Member States promote best practices in decision-making procedures; these include co-management processes for decision making in fisheries management which are carried out with the joint participation of fishers, administrations, scientists and other stakeholders.

- EU decision makers and the European Commission take immediate steps to incentivise vessel owners, Member States and third party partner States to improve their fishery practices with regard to social, environmental and economic sustainability by applying strong sanctions to rule breakers, whether this be illegal fishing activity or misreporting of information.



TARGET 14.C: IMPLEMENT AND ENFORCE INTERNATIONAL SEA LAW

Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of *The Future We Want*.



90%
OF WORLD TRADE
IS CARRIED
OUT THROUGH
INTERNATIONAL
SHIPPING ON THE
HIGH SEAS



10%
OF ALL FISHED
MARINE LIFE
COMES FROM THE
HIGH SEAS

No nation has sole responsibility for the management of the high seas: they cover 64% of the surface of the ocean and represent nearly 95% of its volume.³⁹ The high seas contain 10% of all fished marine life and are home to many highly migratory species such as tuna and swordfish.⁴⁰ To sustainably manage fish stocks in specific marine regions, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMO) have been established by voluntary international agreements and RFMO contracting parties, including the EU, to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable exploitation of highly migratory fish stocks.⁴¹

However, the main existing safeguards to protect marine species in the high seas and their ecosystems, beyond their valuable fish stocks, lie in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which regulates the world's seas and governs all uses of their resources.⁴² The indicator 14.C.1 on the “Number of countries making progress in ratifying, accepting and implementing through legal, policy and institutional frameworks, ocean-related instruments that implement international law, as reflected in the UNCLOS, for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources” shows a positive trend of States ratifying the UNCLOS measures across the 1990s, followed by a period of deceleration in the 2000s as the number of States having signed on to multilateral agreements to address transboundary environmental issues neared the total number of States worldwide.⁴² However,

for this indicator to be fully accomplished, an indication of the number of States that are compliant to their commitments and which are strengthening their monitoring and enforcement processes at national and regional levels to ensure the full and efficient implementation of international laws is required. In addition, the States that have not yet signed up to those international agreements can be considered the “high-hanging fruits” which will require more time, capacity and effort to convince of the importance of the UNCLOS.

2020 marks the deadline for Good Environmental Status and Maximum Sustainable Yield in EU waters, and for 10% of the ocean to be effectively protected in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi target 11 and SDG14 targets 14.2 and 14.5. Yet, our ocean remains in a poor state and significantly lacks appropriate biodiversity protection. The EU has a role of paramount importance to play as negotiator of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty and as a bridge-builder between various nations and groups of nations. The BBNJ treaty is a new UN treaty under negotiation for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction. The new treaty will come under the umbrella of the UNCLOS and seeks to fill a number of gaps in the international legal framework governing ocean biodiversity, as well as help address emerging threats to and uses of marine biodiversity. The BBNJ treaty will be key to both the enhancement of conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, and to the achievement of the EU governance agenda for the future of our ocean.



Feather stars on fan coral, Indo-Pacific Ocean. © Jürgen Freund / WWF

**THE HIGH SEAS ARE
RESPONSIBLE FOR AN
ESTIMATED 49%
OF THE ROUGHLY 47 BILLION TONNES OF
CARBON FIXED BY PHYTOPLANKTON AND
ARE HOME TO MANY SPECIES ACROSS THE
MARINE FOOD WEB, INCLUDING HIGHLY
MIGRATORY TUNA AND SWORDFISH**

SOURCE: SUMAILA R. ET AL. (2016), THE HIGH SEAS AND US - UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF HIGH-SEAS ECOSYSTEMS

WWF RECOMMENDS THAT:

- The EU and its Member States implement a regime of enhanced cooperation between States, RFMOs and other competent bodies that sets out concrete provisions on cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional ocean conservation and sustainable use.⁴³
- The EU and its Member States promote an oversight framework between regional implementation of global standards to deliver holistic and integrated ecosystem-based management with concrete measures to protect sensitive species and habitats.⁴³
- The EU and its Member States unpack the broad category of area-based management tools⁴³ spelling out the designation of effective Marine Protected Areas; they must also ensure that strategic environmental assessment and Marine Spatial Planning will be adopted in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

A woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and black waders, stands in a shallow, muddy coastal area. She is holding a wooden crate filled with oysters. The background shows a body of water, some distant buildings, and a clear blue sky. The overall scene is a coastal farming or fishing environment.

THE WAY FORWARD: A RACE AGAINST THE CLOCK

WAY FORWARD

Before the adverse impacts of a warmer and overfished ocean further advance, WWF urges EU and international decision makers to follow the recommendations of this report and intensify their efforts to achieve all SDG14 targets. WWF recommendations for increased accountability, transparency, effective and science-based management, as well as the inclusion of a specified timeframe with achievements being monitored periodically to measure progress, must be integrated into all national legislative agendas. Ambitious action is needed to safeguard thriving marine ecosystems and prosperous coastal communities, and will contribute to securing Sustainable Blue Economies and subsequent global food security.



Soft corals, hard corals and anthias fish, Fiji. © Cat Holloway / WWF

Together with the other SDG14 targets, achieving sustainable fisheries and aquaculture contribute to multiple objectives of the 2030 Agenda including ending poverty (SDG 1), ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition (SDG 2), promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all (SDG 8), and mitigating and adapting to a changing climate (SDG 13). Despite how greatly SDG14 interconnects with the other SDGs, the lack of data for SDG14 and the limited scope of the available indicators heavily impede the assessment of progress made by UN members in these areas over the past 15 years. For instance, while the huge potential for the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and its external dimension to support the SDGs beyond SDG14 is clear, detailed information to assess this remains limited, leaving the EU's performance to meet its own objectives laid out in the CFP and its progress on the SDG commitments unclear. As a key actor in global ocean governance, the EU should strongly encourage all UN Members to support the SDGs with all their targets and sub targets. This should be conducted through the EU work on Policy Coherence for Development, as well as more technical files such as research on how the CFP external dimension can support specific Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Marine ecosystems may be resilient to some environmental changes and fish populations renewable to some degree, but without proper protection and effective management systems, our ocean and its ecosystem services risk severe damage. This includes but is not limited to fish stock depletion, habitat loss and pollution – which all potentially

contribute to local extinctions. **The current level of fishing activities is one of the greatest pressures hampering the achievement of the SDG14 targets and the EU goals of Good Environmental Status and sustainably managed fisheries by 2020.**

Our history of fishing beyond sustainable levels has made it more challenging to reach the objective of healthy fish and shellfish populations to support our fisheries. Thanks to science-based conservation and management measures, the situation is improving, albeit with strong regional differences and under the widespread and constant risk of illegal fishing. Further efforts and collective action are needed to secure long-term healthy fish populations, and suppress the prevalence of overfishing and the significant lack of reporting on fishing activities at sea.

Healthy, resilient and productive marine ecosystems are vital to both marine life and to people whose livelihoods depend on a Sustainable Blue Economy. In 2020, our ocean faces unprecedented challenges, including the destruction of marine habitats, pollution, continued illegal activities, and poor management of the fisheries sector and

marine resources. This destructive trend of our past must urgently be reversed, especially in coastal communities where seafood production contributes to livelihoods and food security. Europe's position as a leading maritime power, combined with its domestic and international commitments on sustainable development, make it a natural leader on global ocean governance. Specifically, greater efforts are needed from EU Member States to exert their influence in the RFMO policy sphere and in international fora to achieve wider aspects of the 2030 Agenda beyond SDG14.

The upcoming UN Ocean Conference in June 2020 should see the EU leading on highly ambitious objectives in the discussions on SDG14. It is imperative that the speed of SDG14 achievement increase significantly and be of much higher priority to EU Member States in the immediate future. Sustainable use of our ocean and a thriving Sustainable Blue Economy can and should contribute not only to socio-economic benefits for marine sectors and coastal communities, but also to global food security and increased ocean resilience to the impacts of climate change.

ACHIEVING ALL SDG TARGETS BEYOND 2020

In the face of the biodiversity and climate crises, the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs sets an ambitious programme for the world to achieve by 2030. A recent study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) evaluating the distance required to meet SDG targets for which data is currently available,⁴⁴ together with additional evidence from the Report of the Secretary General on the progress of the SDGs,⁴⁵ the Global Sustainable Development Report⁴⁶ and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (and its negotiated summary for policy makers)⁴⁷ show that **we are far off course to meet the majority of the 12 environmental SDG targets due to be reached in 2020, including SDG14.2, 14.4, 14.5 and 14.6.**

Given the planetary emergency of nature loss, the climate crisis and the importance of resilient natural ecosystems for achieving the 2030 Agenda,⁴⁸ it is vital that decision makers worldwide commit to continued action on the SDG targets with a 2020 end date. **No SDG target ends in 2020: this work must proactively be continued to maintain the integrity of the 2030 Agenda and all UN**

members must step up their efforts to develop a framework for global biodiversity restoration and protection for the period 2021 – 2030.

The adoption of the Political Declaration, *Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development* at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the UN General Assembly on 'Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', and the Declaration's endorsement by the General Assembly on Tuesday, 15 October 2019, are important first steps towards this goal. However, the commitments made by UN members⁴⁹ for "launching an ambitious and accelerated response to reach our common vision by 2030, and pledging to make the coming decade one of action and delivery" and "to maintain the integrity of the 2030 Agenda, including by ensuring ambitious and continuous action on the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals with a 2020 timeline" must be transformed into concrete actions to embrace the climatic, environmental and socio-economic ambitions set by the SDGs. Better identifying the connections between the biggest threats to our environment means that we can better protect it. Not much time is left.

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WWF - WORKING FOR THE WORLD'S OCEANS

WWF is working globally for resilient oceans with functioning ecosystems that support rich biodiversity, food security and sustainable livelihoods all over the world. By highlighting the importance of healthy oceans, we're working with communities, governments, businesses – including the finance industry – to end support for damaging activities and invest in creating a healthy marine environment.



For more information please visit the Fish Forward website: www.fishforward.eu

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Everyone can help in the fight to save our oceans. The most important thing consumers can do is to buy sustainable fish:

- Sustainably managed fish stocks will cope better with the changing environment.
- Healthy stocks and sustainable fisheries governance means fishing has a reduced footprint on the ecosystem: this leads to more resilient ocean populations and habitats.
- Healthy stocks mean less fuel and other resources are needed to harvest them.
- Fish from responsible aquaculture don't destroy coastal habitats – such as mangroves – that are key as critical ecosystems supporting communities adapting to climate change.

During the 2019 UN Sustainable Development Goal Summit, Fish Forward 2 was selected as an SDG Accelerated Action, initiatives voluntarily undertaken by countries and other stakeholders to contribute to a swifter implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

WWF is one of the world's largest independent conservation organisations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

The WWF European Policy Office contributes to the achievement of WWF's global mission by leading the WWF network to shape EU policies impacting the European and global environment.

For further information:
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HOW EU AND INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE CAN DELIVER THE 2030 AGENDA

100%
RECYCLED



38%

Over 1/3 of all SDG targets are only achievable with the accomplishment of SDG14

0

No SDG14 target has been fully achieved

2050

Essential marine ecosystems like coral reefs are projected to disappear in the next 30 years

1/10

Fisheries and aquaculture support the livelihoods of 10–12% of the world's population



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