REVIVING THE OCEAN ECONOMY
The case for action - 2015
A fisherman shows some of his catch in Mafamede, Mozambique, part of the Primeiras and Segundas Environmental Protection Area. © WWF-US / James Morgan

The **Global Change Institute** ([www.gci.uq.edu.au](http://www.gci.uq.edu.au)) is an Australian-based research institute that is focused on evidence-based solutions to global challenges such as food security, clean energy, sustainable water, and healthy oceans. Professor Hoegh-Guldberg also undertakes research on coral reef ecosystems and their response to rapid environmental change, which is supported primarily by the Australian Research Council (Canberra), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Washington, D.C.), Catlin Group (London), and Great Barrier Reef Foundation (Brisbane). He did not receive salary for writing this report.

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**WWF** is one of the world’s largest and most experienced independent conservation organizations, 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.

**Lead author:** Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg  
**Global Change Institute, University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4072, Australia**

The Boston Consulting Group: Douglas Beal, Taz Chaudhry.  
Additional contributors: Hassan Elhaj, Amer Abdullat, Petra Etessy, Marty Smits

**Editor-in-chief:** John Tanzer  
**Managing editor:** Paul Gamblin  
**Contributing editor:** Valérie Burgener

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SUMMARY

Earth is distinguished from all other known planets by the presence of a warm, salty ocean that covers more than two-thirds of its surface. Its value to our planet is incalculable, but has been brought into sharp focus by the fact that the future of humanity is dependent on the health of the ocean, and the goods and services it provides.

Yet this invaluable resource that feeds us, stabilizes the climate and provides countless other benefits is showing serious signs of failing health. Ocean health is declining due to local stresses such as habitat destruction, overfishing and pollution, as well as global phenomena such as rapid and unprecedented changes in ocean temperature and acidity.

WWF’s Reviving the Ocean Economy report clearly spells out what we all stand to lose if the mismanagement of ocean assets continues. Recognizing that science alone is an insufficient motivator, we have combined the evidence of serious environmental degradation with the economic case for urgent action.

Working with the eminent scientist Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg and in collaboration with leading business consultancy The Boston Consulting Group, WWF looked at the bottom-line implications leaders should consider based on current policies and practices. The results illustrate the economic case for ocean conservation in stark terms. The range of goods and services that flow from coastal and marine environments can be valued conservatively at US$2.5 trillion each year, and the overall value of the ocean as an asset is 10 times that. We emphasize that this is an underestimate, as outputs that are not generated by the ocean – offshore oil and gas, and wind energy, for example – were excluded, as were valuable intangibles such as the ocean’s role in climate regulation.
The report brings together the latest assessments of some of the most valuable ocean assets, from fish stocks to corals, and shows how rapidly they are declining. To revive the ocean’s productive capacity before it is too late, the world must take urgent action. The eight actions proposed are achievable and all are important; however, we recommend that the first three be prioritized for action in 2015.

**ACTION 1** Ensure ocean recovery features strongly in the UN Post-2015 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Post-2015 Agenda will establish global ambition, outline practical policy steps and guide investment in sustainable development for the next 15 years or more. Goal 14 of the SDGs focuses specifically on the ocean, namely to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.” Indicators under this goal must address issues such as habitat destruction, overfishing, illegal fishing and marine pollution, and solutions must be crafted in an equitable and participatory way. If all this is achieved, the scene will be set for unprecedented and concerted international action, which is crucial for steering our ocean toward a more sustainable future.

**ACTION 2** Address the problems of ocean warming and acidification. We must listen to science and make the deep cuts in emissions that will prevent further increases in dangerous climate change. It is vital that the world signs on to an ambitious international agreement in Paris in December 2015 (COP21) that will allow the rapid decarbonization of our economies and societies. Failure to solve the climate change problem will frustrate, and in many cases defeat, attempts to bring sustainable practices to the world’s ocean.

**ACTION 3** Countries should deliver against the agreed target for at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas to be protected and effectively managed by 2020, with an increase to 30 per cent by 2030. This is not just about the extent of area protected; it is about establishing representative networks of marine protected areas that are most important for delivering outcomes for biodiversity, food security and livelihoods.

**ACTION 4** With 61.3 per cent of the world’s fisheries now fully exploited, and 28.8 per cent over-exploited, depleted or recovering from depletion, there is an urgent need to revise policies to ensure that the over-exploitation and destruction of fisheries does not continue, and to deal with the problem of illegal fishing. Habitat protection and fisheries management must go hand in hand, with the goal being ecologically sustainable fisheries.

**ACTION 5** Given the transboundary nature of the ocean, we need appropriate international mechanisms for negotiation and collaboration to ensure its sustainable management. Formation of a “Blue Alliance” of concerned maritime countries will provide leadership and build the case for a rapid and comprehensive set of actions on behalf of the ocean.

Such a coalition could build international will and foster the shared global responsibility and informed decision-making that are important when it comes to ocean resources. It will also be important to establish a global fund to support countries that have fewer resources and are more vulnerable to the impacts of ocean degradation.
ACTION 6  Appropriately structured public-private partnerships that take into account the well-being of communities, ecosystems and business have the potential to revolutionize how sectors work together sustainably. Enabling a network of such cross-sector partnerships to share ideas, solutions and blueprints for sustainable practices will ensure that even the poorest countries have access to necessary resources.

ACTION 7  Communities and countries must develop complete, transparent and public accounting of the benefits, goods and services that the ocean provides. Valuing the ocean’s assets is vitally important to effective decision-making.

ACTION 8  Develop an international platform to support and share ocean knowledge and solutions through which problems can be understood, and solutions and methodologies evaluated and applied. Such a platform must be interdisciplinary and informed by biological, social and economic data. This platform will build capacity and improve access to critical information and expertise.

WWF has brought together the research and conclusions of an expert community and marries this scientific evidence with a common-sense economic case for action to safeguard the value of our ocean. The message is clear: We are running down our ocean assets and will push the ocean economy into the red if we do not respond to this crisis as an international community. A prudent treasurer or CEO would not wait until the next financial report to correct course. They would act now.

The eight actions outlined here can provide a sustainable future for the hundreds of millions of people who depend directly on the ocean for their food and jobs, and for all humanity, which depends on the ocean as an essential contributor to the health of our planet.
OCEAN ASSET VALUES

FIGURE 1 - GLOBAL OCEAN ASSET VALUE

The ocean provides wide-ranging value, from food and tourism to coastal protection and much more.

**OCEAN-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND ASSETS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct output of the ocean from:</th>
<th>TOTAL VALUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marine fisheries</td>
<td>US$6.9tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangroves</td>
<td>US$5.2tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral reefs</td>
<td>US$7.8tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seagrass</td>
<td>US$4.3tn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trade and transport:**

- Shipping lanes: US$5.2tn

**Adjacent assets:**

- Productive coastline: US$7.8tn
- Carbon absorption: US$4.3tn

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FIGURE 2 - ANNUAL GROSS MARINE PRODUCT

The annual gross marine product, the equivalent of a country’s GDP, would make the ocean the world’s 7th largest economy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>US$17.4tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CHINA</td>
<td>US$10.4tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>JAPAN</td>
<td>US$4.8tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>GERMANY</td>
<td>US$4.8tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>FRANCE</td>
<td>US$2.9tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>US$2.9tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ITALY</td>
<td>US$2.3tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>US$2.3tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ITALY</td>
<td>US$2.3tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>RUSSIA</td>
<td>US$2.1tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>US$2.0tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>CANADA</td>
<td>US$1.6tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>US$1.4tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>S. KOREA</td>
<td>US$1.4tn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Reviving the Ocean Economy: the case for action – 2015* | SUMMARY
The ocean’s asset value would dwarf the world’s largest sovereign wealth funds:

- **US$893bn**
  - NORWAY
  - Government Pension Fund

- **US$773bn**
  - ABU DHABI
  - ADIA

- **US$757bn**
  - SAUDI ARABIA
  - SAMA

- **US$653bn**
  - CHINA
  - China Investment Corp.

The ocean is valued at more than US$24 trillion; however, its actual value is likely to be much higher because many key ecosystem services are difficult to quantify.

**FIGURE 3 - OCEAN ECONOMY DEPENDENT ON HEALTHY ASSETS**

Gross marine product is the ocean’s annual economic value. More than two-thirds of the gross marine product is dependent on healthy ocean assets.
As natural assets are degraded, the ocean is losing its capacity to feed and provide livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people.

The downward trends are steep and reflect major changes in species abundance and diversity, as well as habitat extent, most over a single human lifespan.

References:
At current rates of temperature rise, coral reefs will disappear by 2050.

- The Marine Living Planet Index shows a decline of 39% between 1970 and 2010.
- Almost one-third of all seagrasses have been lost.
- 50% of the world’s corals have disappeared.
- Deforestation rate of mangroves exceeds even the loss of forests by 3-5 times.

*The marine Living Planet Index is an indicator of the state of global biological diversity, based on trends in more than 900 marine species of mammals, birds, reptiles and fish.
TIME TO HIT THE RESET BUTTON

The message is clear: We are running down our ocean assets and will push the ocean economy into the red if we do not respond to this crisis as an international community.

It’s time to act and provide a sustainable future for the hundreds of millions of people who depend directly on the ocean for their food and jobs, and for all humanity, which depends on the ocean as an essential contributor to the health of our planet.
The ocean in numbers

US$24TN
The overall value of key ocean assets is more than US$24 trillion

Two-thirds of the base economic value of the ocean is produced by assets that rely on healthy ocean conditions

At current rates of temperature rise, coral reefs will disappear by 2050

Based on the gross marine product, the ocean is the 7th largest economy in the world

Why we are here
To stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.
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Tel. +41 22 364 9111 Fax +41 22 364 0332. For contact details and further information, please visit our international website at www.panda.org

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