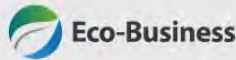


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http://www.eco-business.com/news/the-fight-for-ocean-health/

The fight for ocean health

Our responsibility for the ocean's health is as deep, fundamental, and permanent as our dependence on it. It's time for policymakers, businesses, and citizens to protect it.

By José María Figueres, Pascal Lamy, and John D. Podesta

Thursday 16 February 2017



A marine biologist checking the coral reefs of Sipadan Island in Sabah, Malaysia. Enhancing the ocean's productivity and restoring marine habitats are two options suggested by scientists to reduce carbon emissions. Image: Abd. Halim Hadi / Shutterstock.com

The ocean is changing – and not for the better. Well-established scientific evidence shows that it is becoming emptier, warmer, and more acidic, putting marine life under serious pressure. But there is good news: evidence also indicates that the ocean can regenerate, and the world has already agreed to enable that outcome.

The Sustainable Development Goal for the Ocean (SDG 14) was adopted by world leaders in September 2015 as part of the United Nations [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). It includes vital targets, such as mitigating ocean acidification, securing habitat and species protections, reducing pollution substantially, and ending illegal fishing and subsidies that lead to overfishing.

Ultimately, SDG 14 promises to preserve the ocean and ensure its sustainable use in the future. But it can be realized only with bold and urgent action, buttressed by solidarity among governments, citizens, and business.

This week, governments and experts are gathering in New York to begin crafting a global “call for action” to implement SDG 14. The call, which will be launched in June, at the UN's first-ever [Ocean Conference](#), should include a firm commitment to protect at least 30 per cent of the ocean by 2030, and ensure that the remaining 70 per cent is sustainably managed.

UN member states must also pledge to secure the extension of legal protections to high-seas biodiversity by closing the gaping governance loophole that exposes the ocean to plunder.



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There is one more priority area that the call for action must address: climate change. In fact, a healthy ocean will be impossible to secure without also addressing this pressing global challenge. Achieving SDG 14 therefore demands that the international community reaffirm its commitment to the Paris climate agreement, and to announce concrete steps toward achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

To avoid more empty promises, all commitments must be backed up by a clear financing plan and subjected to regular accountability checks. Governments, the UN, and other actors should set a schedule for monitoring and check-ins, to keep delivery of the targets transparent, funded, and on schedule.

To support these efforts, we urge UN Secretary-General António Guterres to appoint a Special Representative for the Ocean, tasked with improving ocean governance and ensuring that the full potential of SDG 14 is realized. Such a representative must be given sufficient resources to do the job.

The ocean has suffered decades of abuse and neglect. It has been treated as a free-for-all garbage bin and race-to-the-bottom buffet. We have financed its destruction, with no regard for the consequences. But those consequences have become impossible to ignore.



While we, as previous global ocean commissioners, had to campaign hard in 2014 for the ocean to have its own dedicated global goal, it is now hard to believe that the ocean's position in the SDGs was ever in question. That is the sense that we should have in 2030, when the targets of SDG 14 are fully met.

The only way to get there is through concerted effort – and not just by the likes of ocean commissioners. People everywhere must stand up and demand real action to ensure the ocean's regeneration. In short, the ocean must become everyone's business.

To kick-start that process, we have joined the Ocean Unite network, which is galvanizing conservationists, business leaders, young people, and activists to take advantage of growing interest in these issues and create coalitions that can drive ocean health to the top of political and economic agendas worldwide.

The ocean has suffered decades of abuse and neglect. It has been treated as a free-for-all garbage bin and race-to-the-bottom buffet.

Such efforts are already having an impact, with citizens mobilizing to defend the ocean and policymakers beginning to respond to their calls. Now, it is the business community's turn to step up.

Business has a clear interest in reversing the decline in ocean health. The GDP derived from the ocean amounts to \$2.5 trillion, or 5 per cent of the world's total GDP. That's equivalent to the GDP of the world's seventh-largest economy.

The ocean is also the world's biggest employer, directly supporting the livelihoods of more than three billion people, and is a source of food for over 2.6 billion. Restoring the ocean thus amounts to an unparalleled business opportunity.



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But the ocean's value goes far beyond economics. It provides half of the air we breathe, governs our weather, and helps to support peace and prosperity. The ocean's future is the world's future.

At a time when politics threatens to undermine cooperative action on the environment, fighting for our shared global environment is more important than ever. Our responsibility for the ocean's health is as deep, fundamental, and permanent as our dependence on it.

No political consideration can compete with that. Now is the time for all of us – citizens, business, and government – to unite and fight for our ocean.

José María Figueres, former President of Costa Rica, is Co-Chair of the Global Ocean Commission. Pascal Lamy, a former director-general of the World Trade Organization, is a Global Ocean Commissioner. John D. Podesta, Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton from 1998 to 2001, is the founder of the Center for American Progress.

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