

# Protecting Marine Nature by 2030

**Delivering an ambitious EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy with strong implementation to halt species extinction and restore natural ecosystems**

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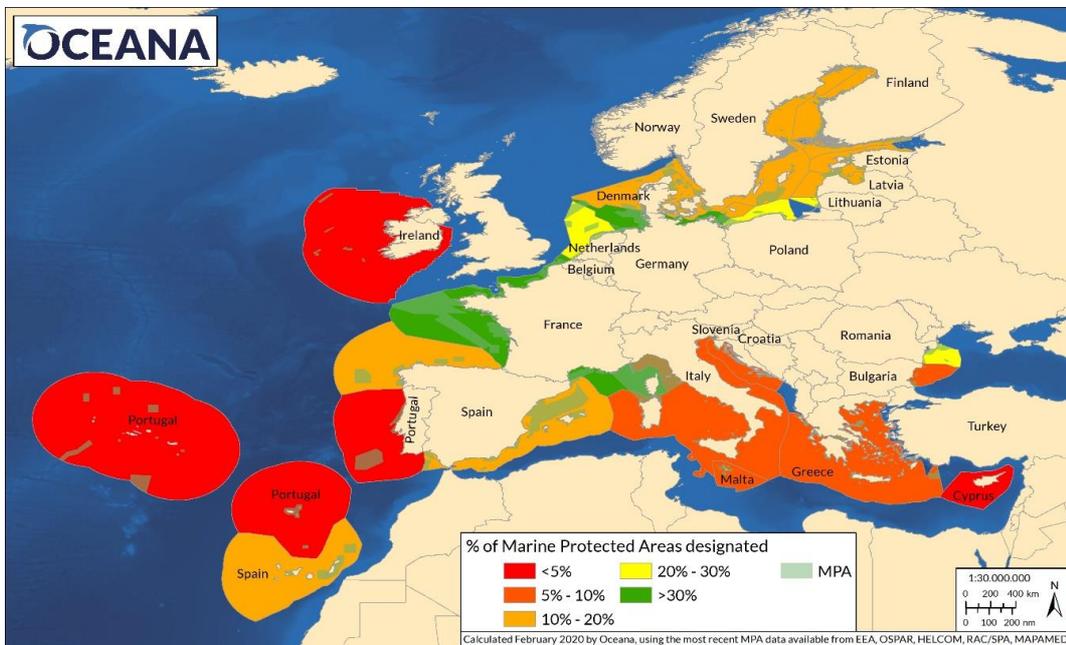
We are currently experiencing the 6<sup>th</sup> largest species extinction. The IPBES assessment<sup>1</sup> found that two-thirds of marine environments have been “severely altered” by human activity, with overfishing named as the biggest cause of marine biodiversity loss in the last 40 years. It is absolutely clear that the EU must increase its ambition on ocean protection, which will in turn bring significant benefits to local communities, as well as in terms of climate adaptation. This is an important driver to contribute to achieving the targets of [Sustainable Development Goal 14](#) on the ocean in an EU context.

Significant efforts were deployed in recent years by key EU Member States to escalate ocean conservation on the political agenda. We have enough knowledge to protect the most fragile and biodiverse parts of our ocean: countries now need to implement what has been committed. Since 2003, scientists have been calling for 20-30% of each marine habitat to be strictly protected.<sup>2</sup> In Europe alone, the journey to reach 10% of the sea designated as marine protected areas (MPAs) was a long path full of pitfalls, never mind efforts to achieve less than 1% of strictly protected areas. The prevalence of marine ‘paper parks’ in Europe illustrates the lack of political will to deliver: 85% of the current network of MPAs does not have any management in place and thus delivers no benefits to the marine life that sites are intended to protect.<sup>3</sup>

*MPA experts recommended in 2003 that 20-30% of the world's oceans be strictly protected by 2012.*

*5<sup>th</sup> World Parks Congress, Durban, South Africa (2003)*

## % OF MPAS DESIGNATED BY EU MEMBER STATES



**Figure 1.** Percentage of marine protected areas designated by EU Member States, as of February 2020. Percentages of waters designated under MPAs are clustered by traffic-colour coding, ranging from red (<5%) to green (>30%).

## CURRENT MARINE PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK IN EUROPE

During the past decade, the international community (including the EU) has made efforts to strengthen marine protection by 2020 under Aichi Target 11 of the CBD, which called for 10% of coastal and marine areas (especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services) to be “conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures”. Despite official political statements, including from EU leaders, on the achievement of the international target of 10% of MPAs, the reality is different: nearly 90% of all European MPAs are not managed effectively.<sup>3</sup> Not only does this contradict the call for “effectively managed MPAs”, but this misleading communication undermines the concept of MPAs by pretending that mere ‘marine paper parks’ deliver ocean conservation benefits. Worse, some of the most destructive human activities such as bottom-trawling, dredging, and seismic testing for oil and gas currently take place freely inside MPAs.<sup>4,5,6</sup> The highly disturbing and/or destructive nature of these activities for marine life is intrinsically incompatible with the conservation objectives and high ecological value of effectively protected MPAs.

In its latest assessment, the European Environment Agency concluded that the EU network of MPAs was not yet ecologically coherent.<sup>11</sup> Obvious ecological gaps exist in the MPA network, such as a clear imbalance of MPA coverage across regions (with Mediterranean and Macaronesian waters lagging behind) and a bias towards protection of coastal waters, while deeper marine habitats remain underrepresented. Similarly, several species groups are generally poorly covered by MPAs, such as marine mammals and other migratory species (e.g., tuna, whales, and sharks).<sup>8</sup>

Individual EU countries have performed differently in relation to designating MPAs, as illustrated by Figure 1, which shows the current level of MPA coverage by EU Member States. The most serious deficiencies can be found in Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal and Greece, all of which have designated less than 6% of their waters as MPAs, and thus have failed to meet the 10% target for 2020. Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy and Malta have also missed the 10% target and will be required to step up with significant efforts to achieve 30% by 2030.

Fourteen EU countries have achieved the 10% target, some of which have exceeded 20% designation: The Netherlands, Poland, Lithuania, Romania. Finally, four ‘champion’ countries have already designated more than 30% of their waters: Slovenia, France, Germany and Belgium. It should be noted that these figures only refer to area designated and not the area that is effectively protected, with appropriate management measures.

Table 1. Percentage of national waters designated as Marine Protected Area by EU Member States, as of February 2020.

Slovenia	99.7%
France	47.9%
Germany	45.3%
Belgium	35.5%
Netherlands	24.4%
Poland	24.3%
Lithuania	22.7%
Romania	20.9%
Estonia	18.5%
Denmark	18.3%
Latvia	15.8%
Sweden	15.5%
Spain	12.7%
Finland	11.1%
Croatia	9.0%
Italy	9.0%
Bulgaria	8.2%
Malta	7.8%
Greece	5.6%
Portugal	4.2%
Ireland	2.4%
Cyprus	0.1%
<b>EU (27)</b>	<b>10.9%</b>

Source: Oceana (GIS calculation)



Noble pen shell (*Pinna nobilis*) in a seagrass (*Posidonia oceanica*). Cala Galiota, Cabrera Marine National Park, Spain.

## 2020: A ‘SUPER YEAR’ FOR NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY... INCLUDING THE OCEAN

Global biodiversity loss is the second largest ecological crisis our society faces after climate change, and an unprecedented level of ambition is required to drive changes in the many sectoral policies that negatively affect biodiversity – including in the ocean. The EU has recently recognised the status of the climate emergency and has committed to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.<sup>9</sup>

In parallel, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity has adopted a strategic vision for a world “living in harmony with nature” in which by 2050, “*biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.*”

These broad commitments are necessary to avoid an environmental catastrophe. If they are to be achieved by 2050, they require equally ambitious intermediate measures by 2030 and by 2040. In this context, the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy is critical for setting this ambition and guiding action across the Union, as well as paving the way for the international biodiversity negotiations at COP15 of the CBD in October 2020.

### 2030 PRIORITIES FOR OCEAN RECOVERY

Oceana calls for strong EU leadership on marine biodiversity conservation, so that the EU Biodiversity Strategy delivers a healthy, productive and resilient ocean by 2030, notably through the adoption of specific policy targets:

- **A target of 30% of EU waters within MPAs (30x30):**

Protecting at least 30% of our ocean is needed to safeguard the global ocean on which we all depend. This 30x30 target must be included in the CBD Post-2020 Strategy and must commit to at least 30% of Highly Protected Marine Areas (with no extractive activities) as recommended by the IUCN, if our ocean and seas are to recover.<sup>10</sup>

A wide spectrum of levels of protection exist across different types of MPAs. Yet highly protected MPAs have shown to yield much greater conservation benefits compared with areas under lesser levels of protection.<sup>11</sup> We encourage the EU to follow the IUCN MPA Guide<sup>12</sup> approach, that defines “strongly protected” MPAs as MPAs that are “fully protected” and “highly protected”.



*“Between 26% and 41% of the world ocean needs to be protected to effectively protect the species living in them” according to researchers from the University of Queensland<sup>8</sup>*

### Fish Stock Recovery Areas: rebuilding fish stocks & biodiversity

In 2017, a closure for bottom-trawling was established in the Jabuka/Pomo Pit area, the most important nursery area for Norway lobster and hake in the central Adriatic. This Fish Stock Recovery Area (FSRA)<sup>13</sup>, covers an area of 3143 km<sup>2</sup> and encompasses one permanent no-take zone and two zones with temporary restrictions to licensed vessels.

Since the establishment of this FSRA, the biomass of the two key species has increased by three times for hake, and five times for Norway lobster. In addition to observed larger catches, the sizes of individuals have also increased. This demonstrates showcases a successful example of a fisheries closure that enhances sustainability of fish stocks, fishermen’s livelihoods, and nature

Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) protected under EU legislation. Bajo Somos Lluno, off Cape Peñas, Asturias, Spain.

● **A target for Fish Stock Recovery Areas:**

Fisheries closures (temporal or permanent) can effectively protect Essential Fish Habitats (e.g., feeding, breeding, nursery grounds and migratory corridors), and thereby help to rebuild fish stocks. Such fisheries management tools have been too infrequently used and must be promoted as win-win solutions for nature and fishers. Where such areas do permanently protect broader ecosystems and other species, they may also be considered under the MPA target as other effective area-based conservation measures.

● **No net loss of blue carbon habitats and a restoration target:**

Given the climate and ecological emergencies, a priority aim should be protecting and restoring all so-called ‘blue carbon’ habitats (e.g., kelp forests and seagrass meadows) that play a critical role in sequestering carbon and hence in fighting against climate change. They also protect our coasts against increased waves and storms and provide habitats to other marine species including serving as nursery grounds for many commercial fish species.

● **A harmonised EU enforcement mechanism:**

Enforcement should be strengthened across Member States, through common standards and consistent sanctions for activities that contravene the objectives of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. A more integrated EU approach to deliver effective enforcement and sanctions could enhance the implementation of marine and nature policy nationally by creating a level playing field.

**11%**

*of EU waters are designated as MPAs*



**1.8%**

*of EU MPAs have management in place*



**>0.5%**

*of all MPAs are no-take zones*



Greater amberjacks on kelp (*Laminaria ochroleuca*). Gorringe Bank Marine Protected Area, Portugal.

<sup>1</sup> [Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) (Bonn, Germany, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> 2003 World Parks Congress, Durban (South Africa), 2003, Rec.V.22 on Building a Global System of Marine and Coastal Protected Area Networks

<sup>3</sup> WWF report, [Protecting Our Ocean: Europe's challenges to meet the 2020 deadlines](#) (September 2019)

<sup>4</sup> <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/362/6421/1403?rss=1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/seanad/2018-05-23/14/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://eu.oceana.org/en/press-center/press-releases/oceana-blasts-seismic-testing-plans-spains-costa-brava>

<sup>7</sup> [ETC/ICM. 2017. Spatial Analysis of Marine Protected Area Networks in Europe's Seas II, Volume A.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Jones, K.R., et al. 2020. Area requirements to safeguard Earth's marine species. *One Earth* 2.2: 188-196.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2019/12/12-13/>

<sup>10</sup> IUCN Resolution [Increasing marine protected area coverage for effective marine biodiversity conservation](#), 2016 World Conservation Congress

<sup>11</sup> e Costa, B.H., Claudet, J., Franco, G., Erzini, K., Caro, A., Gonçalves, E.J. 2016. A regulation-based classification system for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). *Marine Policy* 72: 192–198.

<sup>12</sup> Oregon State University, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, Marine Conservation Institute, National Geographic Society, and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. 2019. [An Introduction to The MPA Guide.](#)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.msp-platform.eu/story-1-italycroatiaslovenia-fisheries-and-conservation>

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