

July 2022 through June 2023

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# Ocean Conservation Heroes



BLUE NATURE  
ALLIANCE



# Table of Contents

Page 4: Where We Work

## Ocean Conservation Areas

Page 6: Panama

Page 7: Tristan da Cunha

Page 8: Great Bear Sea

## Capacity Development and Learning

Page 10: Peer-to-Peer Learning

Page 11: Western Indian Ocean

Page 12: Indigenous Authority

## Sustainable Financing

Page 14: Niue

Page 15: Colombia

## Policy

Page 16: High Seas

Page 17: Ireland

## Science

Page 18: Pacific Ocean

Page 20: By the Numbers

Page 23: Our Partners



Rays in the Caribbean region.  
© SeaLegacy



Bluefin tuna.  
© National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



Sunset on the coast of Tanzania.  
© Leslie Russell



Nisga'a citizens conduct research on saak oolichan, a traditional food.  
© Nisga'a Fish and Wildlife + LGL Environmental





Dear Friends,

All around the world, heroes are hard at work saving our ocean—and our planet. They live in coastal communities touching all five basins of the ocean, in national capitals, in rural areas, and in urban centers. They work for Indigenous organizations, governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, financial institutions, and foundations. They're creating new ocean conservation areas, expanding the boundaries of existing ones, and improving their effectiveness, durability, and equitability. This report shines a spotlight on some of their stories.

These large-scale ocean conservation efforts are helping accelerate a global movement known as "30x30." Nations in December 2022 adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, a historic agreement that aims to conserve 30% of all of Earth's lands and waters by 2030. If done equitably, this kind of momentum could be critical for tackling threats such as climate change, pollution, irresponsible fishing practices, and other human activities as they continue to intensify pressures on ocean health.

The Blue Nature Alliance is proud to support the work of more than 60 partners in 29 sites across the globe who are collectively working toward conserving more than 18 million square kilometers of ocean. From Colombia, to Ireland, to Tristan da Cunha in the Atlantic,

to Africa's Western Indian Ocean region, these marine champions are working to sustainably, equitably, and effectively manage the ocean for the benefit of people and nature. This report showcases the expansion of an ocean conservation area in Panama that could catalyze similar action across the Caribbean; an announcement of an Indigenous-led network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in First Nations' waters along Canada's Pacific coast; a multilateral agreement that paves the way for MPAs on the high seas; an innovative method for durably financing ocean conservation around the island of Niue; a peer-to-peer learning exchange that equipped marine managers worldwide with knowledge to help them increase impact; and an assessment of ways to effectively incorporate Indigenous authority into ocean governance.

These inspiring stories from the Blue Nature Alliance's partner network show what's possible when conservation work is collaborative, equitable, innovative, and community driven. As the world works to achieve 30x30, the Alliance is thrilled to support partners and projects like these to catalyze and accelerate large-scale marine conservation that benefits the wildlife, ecosystems, and people who depend on a healthy ocean.

—The Blue Nature Alliance

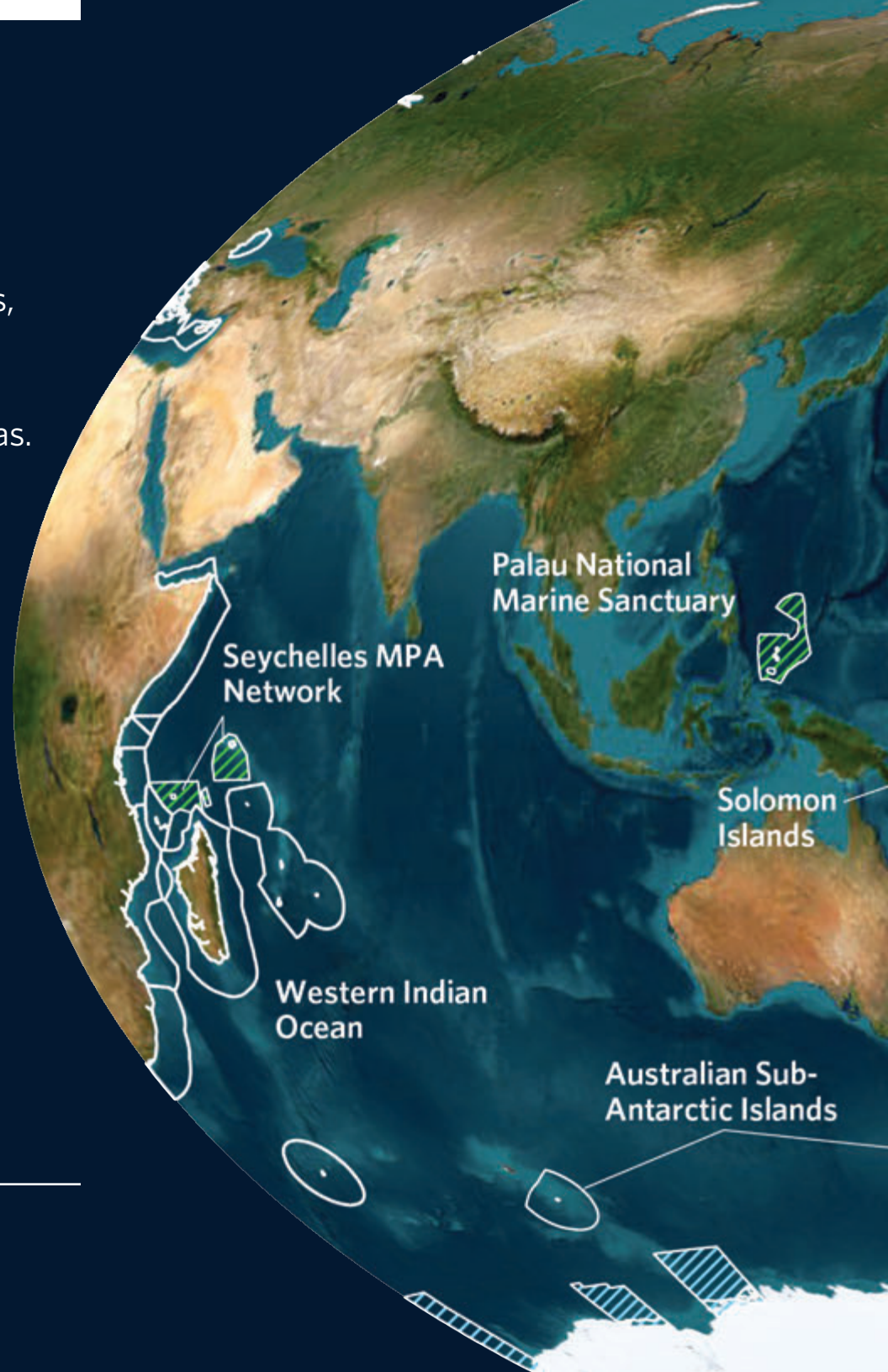
**Cover photo:** Dolphins in the Caribbean region. © SeaLegacy

**Back cover photos:** Green sea turtle. © Stephen Leonardi; Blue Nature Alliance team. © Randi Rotjan; Seychelles island of Mahé. © Olivier Langrand; Blue Nature Alliance team. © Shubash Lohani; Lau Seascape in Fiji. © Conservation International/photo by Mark Erdmann

# Where We Work

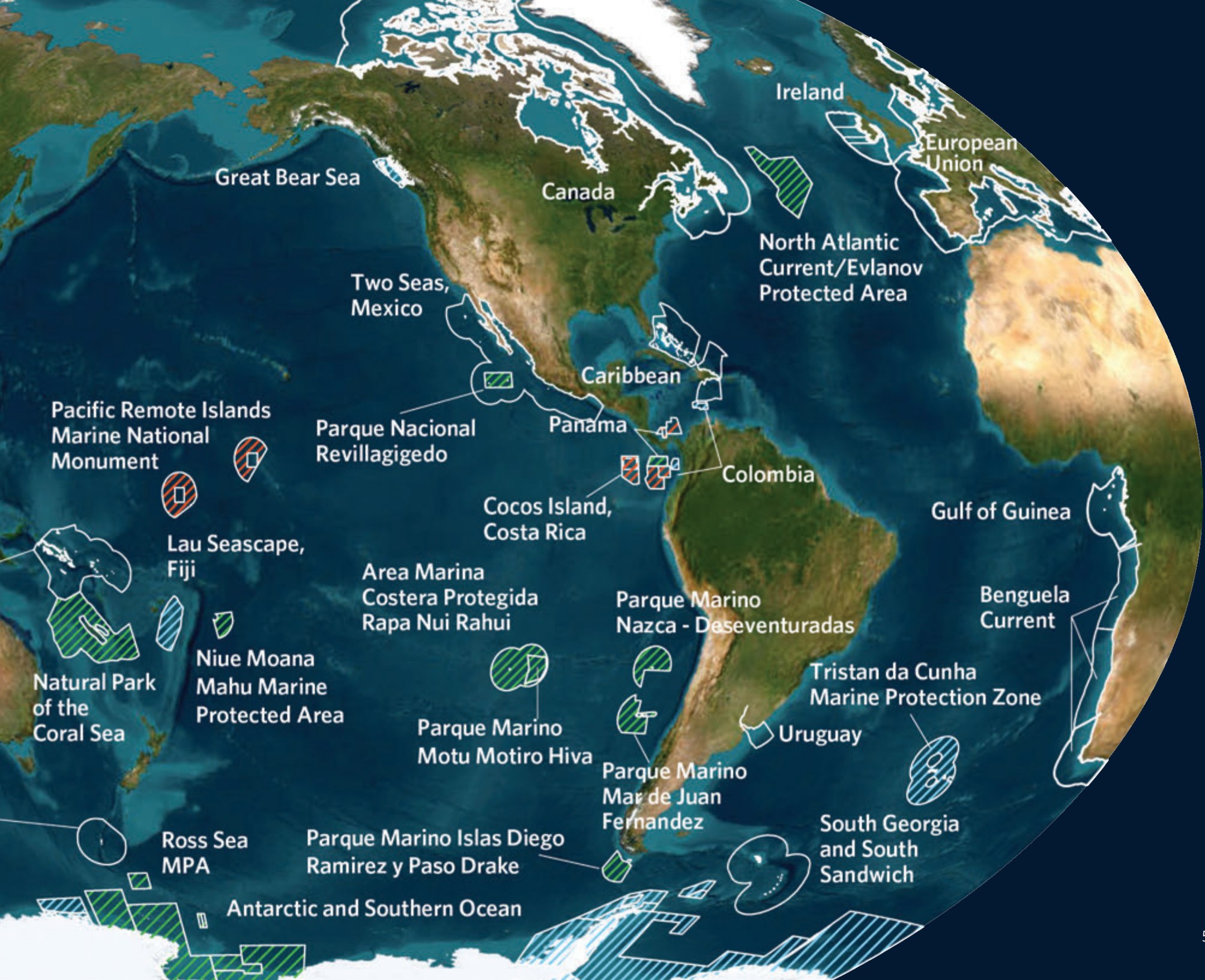
The Blue Nature Alliance collaborates with governments, NGOs, Indigenous peoples, local communities, and scientists around the world to catalyze the creation, expansion, and improvement of ocean conservation areas. Here's a look at the sites within our partner network where work is currently underway.

-  National/Multinational Engagement
-  New Ocean Conservation Area
-  Improved Ocean Conservation Area
-  Expanded Ocean Conservation Area



Map as of April 2023







Panama

## Expansion of Ocean Conservation Area

With the expansion of the Banco Volcán Area of Managed Resources, Panama has now conserved more than half of its territorial waters. The government broadened the size of the Caribbean conservation area from 14,200 square kilometers to more than 90,000 square kilometers. Half of that total area is designated as fully protected, where no extractive or other environmentally damaging activities are allowed. The expansion enabled Panama to surpass the commitment it made to protect 30% of its ocean by 2030, a strong call to action for

other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America to follow Panama's lead. The Blue Nature Alliance, MigraMar, Mission Blue, SeaLegacy, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, and Wyss Foundation supported the government's leadership in expanding Banco Volcán. The Blue Nature Alliance and others have committed to supporting the government's efforts to ensure the area is effectively managed, which will require technical expertise, increased capacity, and sustainable financing.

“The expanded Banco Volcán Area of Managed Resources will provide benefits for the coastal communities of the region and will support biological connectivity with other marine protected areas and the rest of the Caribbean Sea.”

—Hector Guzmán, Senior Staff Scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and a member of the MigraMar network



Aerial shot of Panama's Guna Yala territory.  
© SeaLegacy



Oceanic whitetip shark in the Caribbean region.  
© SeaLegacy



A fisher in Panama's Guna Yala territory.  
© Cristina Mittermeier



A boatmaker at work in Panama's Guna Yala territory.  
© Cristina Mittermeier

# Conservation Hero

**Janine Lavarello, Marine Protection Zone Officer,  
Government of Tristan da Cunha**

Tristan da Cunha, an island territory of the United Kingdom, in 2021 designated the largest fully protected zone in the Atlantic. In February 2023, Janine Lavarello traveled 17 days from the small South Atlantic island to speak at the fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress in Canada about why her remote community protected 91% of its waters.



Janine at the conference.  
© Tristan da Cunha Government

© Janine Lavarello

*"Creating our marine protection zone was not about a problem that needed fixing. It was about protecting and preserving our ecosystems for the future. The ocean is our livelihood—we rely on it for our food, our income, and, most importantly, our connection to the outside world."*



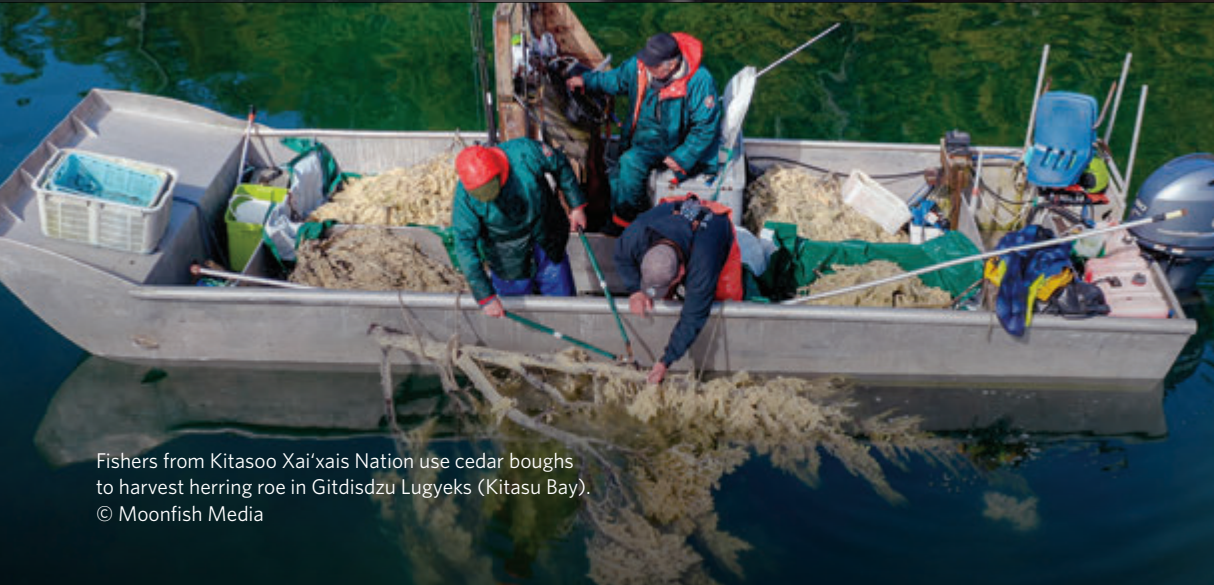


A member of the Haisla Nation collects water samples for research.  
© Haisla Fisheries Commission

“Our shared commitment to collaborative governance and management, based on sound science and traditional knowledge, is an example of true reconciliation in action and provides a blueprint for improving marine management and ocean stewardship worldwide.”

—Marilyn Slett, Chief of the Heiltsuk Nation  
and President of Coastal First Nations

Orcas in the Great Bear Sea.  
© Andrew S. Wright



Fishers from Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation use cedar boughs to harvest herring roe in Gitdisdzu Lugyeks (Kitasu Bay).  
© Moonfish Media



Members of the Mamalilikulla Guardians survey kelp in the Broughton Archipelago.  
© Markus Thompson—Thalassia Environmental



Great Bear Sea

## Indigenous-Led Conservation



Fifteen First Nations, the federal government of Canada, and the provincial government of British Columbia have agreed on a plan to create a series of MPAs in the Great Bear Sea along the Pacific coast. First Nations have protected and cared for this valuable marine environment for millennia, and these MPAs will build upon collaborative agreements from 2006 and 2007 to conserve and manage millions of hectares of the neighboring Great Bear Rainforest. The world's largest Indigenous-led, collaboratively developed network of MPAs will combine Indigenous

governance and stewardship traditions with modern science to protect these marine ecosystems for the benefit of communities and nature. The MPAs would help preserve areas that carry economic, cultural, and spiritual significance for communities and families, as well as kelp forests, ancient glass sponge reefs, and habitat for humpback whales, seabirds, rockfish, herring, and other wildlife. The Blue Nature Alliance supports Coast Funds, an organization that is engaging with First Nations to conserve portions of the MPA network.



“Our Nations have a solid track record proving that Indigenous-led conservation works for nature and for people. Our marine protected area network, together with our collaborative governance agreement and our shared commitment to durable finance, will deliver healthier seas while creating jobs, supporting economic development, and bringing people home to healthier communities.”

—Dallas Smith, Board President of the Nanwakolas Council Society



Global

## Peer-to-Peer Learning and Knowledge Exchange

Successful, durable MPA management requires connection, context, and culture. In November, the Blue Nature Alliance and partner Big Ocean hosted the 2022 Ocean Manager's XCHANGE on the North Shore of O'ahu, Hawai'i. The convening brought together 38 marine management professionals from 16 countries collectively working to protect more than 8 million square kilometers of ocean. Participants

spent the week sharing lived experiences and building the new connections essential to peer learning among those who lead on-the-ground ocean management efforts. The event also provided an opportunity to capture and record insights from new and veteran conservation area managers that could significantly benefit the field of marine management for years to come.

“The ocean connects us all, and regardless of where we work, the challenges we face are very similar. It is essential that ocean managers work together and learn from each other to maximize our impact and be more successful.”

—Gabriela Ochoa, Program Assistant at MPACconnect



An activity during the 2022 Ocean Manager's XCHANGE.  
© Joanie Coker

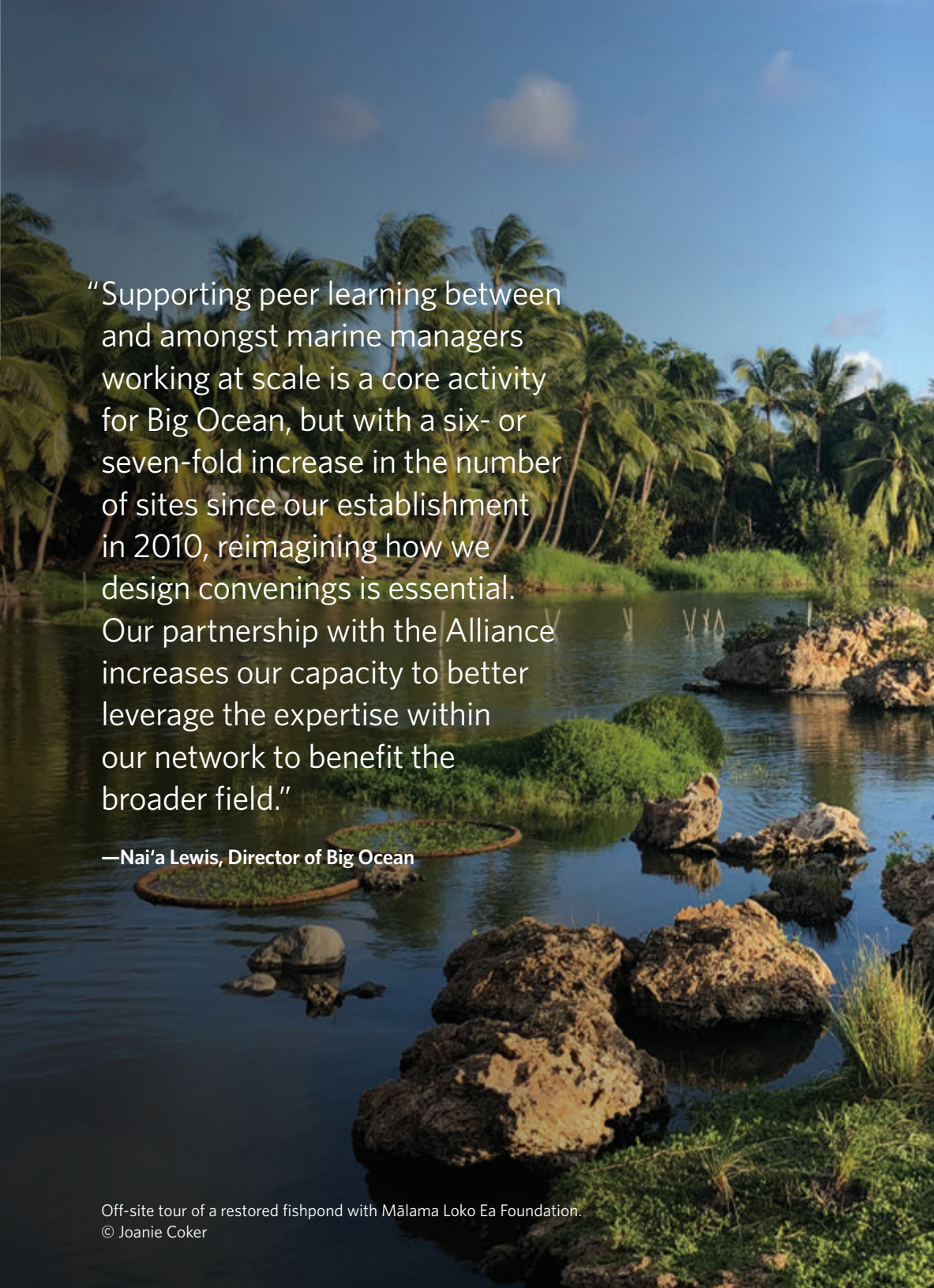


2022 Ocean Manager's XCHANGE attendees.  
© Matt Ramsey



Opening ceremony of the 2022 Ocean Manager's XCHANGE.  
© Joanie Coker





“Supporting peer learning between and amongst marine managers working at scale is a core activity for Big Ocean, but with a six- or seven-fold increase in the number of sites since our establishment in 2010, reimagining how we design convenings is essential. Our partnership with the Alliance increases our capacity to better leverage the expertise within our network to benefit the broader field.”

—Nai’a Lewis, Director of Big Ocean

Off-site tour of a restored fishpond with Mālama Loko Ea Foundation.  
© Joanie Coker

# Conservation Hero

**Dr. Arthur Tuda, Executive Secretary, Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association**

With support from the Blue Nature Alliance, Dr. Arthur Tuda and his team at the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association completed a fact-finding study to improve regional awareness of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and advance MPA management effectiveness in the region.



Malagasy fishers.  
© Cristina Mittermeier



© Photo courtesy of Arthur Tuda

*“IUU fishing remains one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystems in Africa. This research was a significant first step in understanding what kind of efforts should be prioritized to curb IUU fishing in the Western Indian Ocean for the benefit of the hundreds of thousands of people that rely on healthy fish stocks for their livelihoods and food security.”*





A New Caledonian fisher.  
© Mael Imirizaldu



Coral in the New Caledonia barrier reef.  
© Shawn Heinrichs



A New Caledonian man on Mount Panié.  
© Shawn Heinrichs



Global

## Indigenous Authority and Equity

After centuries of discrimination and neglect, there is increasing recognition of the role of Indigenous peoples as custodians of the environment, the traditional wisdom that is key to preserving nature, and Indigenous peoples' legitimate rights to ancestral lands and the resources they contain. The Blue Nature Alliance has worked with Conservation International Hawai'i to conduct an extensive assessment of the processes through which Indigenous authority can be formally and effectively incorporated into the governance and management of large-scale ocean

conservation areas. By exploring the factors that enable or hinder the formal inclusion of Indigenous authority, the report can inform the efforts of other Indigenous groups around the world who seek not only to preserve their marine resources but uphold their cultural values, practices, and laws. For example, Alliance partners in New Caledonia are applying the report's findings as they revise their marine governance approach.

“Indigenous people have acted in kinship with their lands and waters for countless generations. Marine conservation can only reach its full potential if it is intentional about respecting and truly learning from that native knowledge and expertise.”

—Aarin Gross, Director of Conservation Policy and Incentives,  
Conservation International Hawai'i

“For the Kanak people of New Caledonia, ocean conservation is life. We have a duty to incorporate their voices in decisions that affect the future of their resources.”

—Aïle Tikoure, Customary Authority Referent for Drubea-Kapumë Area, Natural Park of the Coral Sea, New Caledonia



Niue

## Resilience through Innovative Finance

Driven by strong support from the Niuean government and local communities and stakeholders, the Pacific island of Niue has emerged as a global leader in ocean conservation, culminating in 2021 and 2022 when the country ensured legal protections for all 317,500 square kilometers of its waters, an area roughly the size of Germany. To generate the financing needed for effective and durable large-scale ocean management, the government of Niue and local nonprofit Tofia Niue worked with the

Blue Nature Alliance and McKinsey and Company to develop a revenue-generation mechanism called ocean conservation commitments (OCCs). The sponsorship of each OCC funds the protection of 1 square kilometer of Niue's waters for 20 years, enabling individuals, governments, donors, philanthropists, and corporations to directly contribute to ocean conservation in a way that is shared, sustainable, and transparent. The OCC mechanism, as well as the Niue Ocean Wide Trust it will fund, received an

enthusiastic reception when highlighted at regional and international forums in 2022 and 2023, and a formal launch is slated for mid- to late 2023 with a capitalization target of raising \$18 million over time. This innovative framework will not only support Niue's ocean conservation efforts, climate resilience, and blue economy, but it also could establish a precedent for other small island developing states.

“Niue is a very small nation, but we have a large ocean real estate that comes with great responsibility. This has been a responsibility our people have carried for thousands of years. It is that very experience and deep-rooted cultural respect for the ocean and service it has provided our people that has led us to this point. We have had to take bold new measures to help restore and sustain our important taoga and ocean, which we must nurture for the generations to come.”

—Hon. Dalton Tagelagi, Premier of Niue



Coral off the coast of Niue.  
© Richard Sidey/Galaxiid





Niue.  
© Jamie Wright



Humpback whale.  
© Rodolphe Holler

“Our ocean under strict protection contributes multiple dimensions of value that accrue at the global, regional, and country level to all stakeholders. This wholistic accounting of ocean value underpins the principle and concept of an OCC—democratizing shared responsibility and commitment to ensuring the longevity of ocean protection, and alleviating what is currently a disproportionate cost burden for many small island developing states and communities.”

—Coral Pasisi, President of Tofia Niue

## Conservation Hero

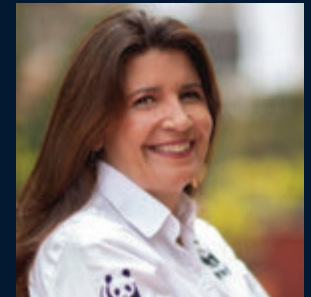
**Sandra Valenzuela, Executive Director,  
WWF-Colombia**

Colombia, working together with Sandra Valenzuela’s team at WWF and other partners, has launched a Project Finance for Permanence initiative called Herencia Colombia, or Heritage Colombia, an innovative financing mechanism made possible through collaboration among governments, the private sector, and civil society.

Herencia Colombia, supported by the Blue Nature Alliance and many other partners, will secure \$245 million of public and private finance to permanently protect 32 million hectares of iconic landscapes and seascapes.



Colombia.  
© Micha Weber, WWF/Shutterstock



© Photo courtesy of  
Sandra Valenzuela

*“We are proud to be part of this initiative that facilitates significant progress toward Colombia’s goal of protecting 30% of its seas by 2030. This commitment supports the preservation of this megadiverse country for its future generations and, in turn, contributes to the well-being of local communities.”*



High Seas

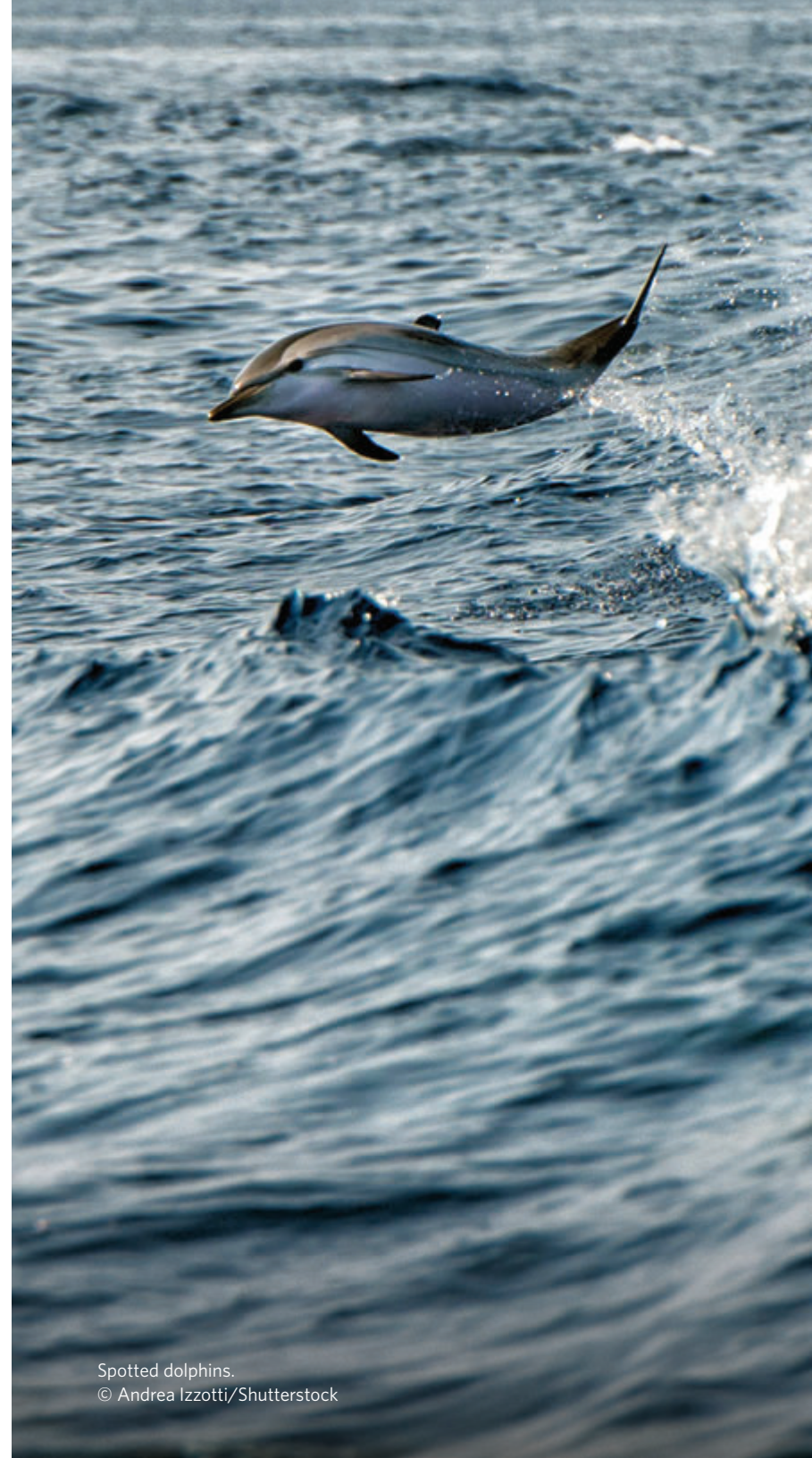
## Multilateral Ocean Action

Nations from across the globe have completed negotiations for a treaty that would help protect the high seas—parts of the ocean not governed by a particular country. The agreement, which now will need to be ratified by at least 60 nations, would pave the way for the establishment of MPAs on the high seas, which are critical for the migration of species such as whales and sharks, as well as the health of fisheries and other habitat for marine life. The treaty also would improve

the way human impacts on the high seas are assessed. The Blue Nature Alliance applauds the work of the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of organizations—including Alliance partners Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, BirdLife International, and Deep Sea Conservation Coalition—that are collaborating to protect the high seas. The Alliance is exploring ways to help advance implementation of the treaty once it is ratified and enters into force.

“Only 1.2% of the high seas is protected from damaging human activities, a figure that is entirely inadequate to ensure a healthy ocean in the face of climate-related threats. ... [This treaty] is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for [United Nation] member states to unite as a global community to arrest and reverse the rapid loss of biodiversity in the two-thirds of our ocean that lies beyond the exclusive economic zones of individual states.”

—Member organizations of the High Seas Alliance  
in a letter to the United Nations secretary-general



Spotted dolphins.  
© Andrea Izzotti/Shutterstock





Whale shark.  
© Shutterstock



Blue whale.  
© Shutterstock

# Conservation Hero

**Aoife O'Mahony, Campaign Manager,  
Fair Seas in Ireland**

Aoife O'Mahony is leading a campaign to advance MPAs in Ireland, including spearheading the development of a scientific report—supported by the Blue Nature Alliance and other partners—identifying 16 areas in Ireland's waters where decision-makers could consider creating MPAs. She also is the official champion for Ireland's first Hope Spot—on the country's Greater Skellig Coast—designated by ocean advocate Sylvia Earle's nonprofit Mission Blue as an area essential to ocean health.



Aoife O'Mahony shows her daughter, Alissa Fleury, and nephew, Anar Devee, an ocean map.  
© Michael O'Sullivan/OSM PHOTO

© Photo courtesy of Aoife O'Mahony

*"It's critical for countries around the world, including Ireland, to take prompt, decisive, and urgent action to create marine protected areas and ensure they are effectively managed to preserve biodiversity for future generations."*



## Pacific Ocean

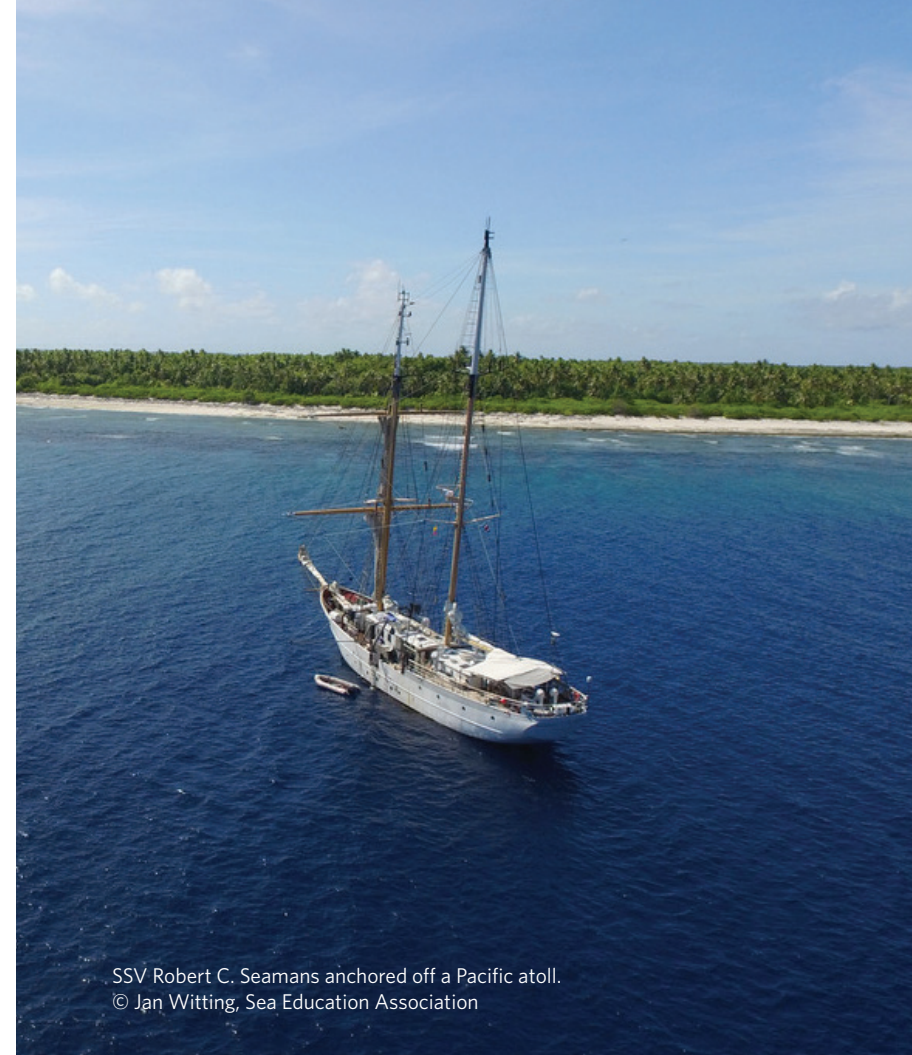
# Research to Improve MPA Effectiveness

Much of the total surface area of MPAs comes from remote, large, open-ocean areas, and with the recent completion of the high seas treaty, more MPAs in the open ocean are soon to come. However, there is little existing background data on the abundance and diversity of the zooplankton—tiny organisms that drift with the currents—that form the basis of the pelagic, or open-ocean, food web. This lack of knowledge could make it challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of existing and future open-ocean MPAs. The

Blue Nature Alliance has partnered with the Sea Education Association and Boston University to collect surface plankton samples from across the Pacific through student-led scientific expeditions that include regional scientists. These efforts started in 2014 and, with Alliance support, have expanded geographically. These long-term baseline data sets could inform management efforts for current and future conservation areas and could help formulate additional research strategies.

“Operating in the open ocean is a joy and a challenge, which makes these types of samples even more precious. Establishing biodiversity baselines is a way to create an open-ocean time capsule—a way to preserve this moment in time so that we can always go back and learn how things have changed.”

—Dr. Jan Witting, Faculty at Sea Education Association



SSV Robert C. Seamans anchored off a Pacific atoll.  
© Jan Witting, Sea Education Association



Mixed zooplankton under a microscope.  
© Rotjan Lab, Boston University





“Understanding how marine protected areas impact large-scale migratory fish species is a hot topic, but learning about the life history stages of zooplankton communities is such an important piece of the puzzle.”

—Jacob Jaskiel, PhD Student in the Rotjan Lab  
at Boston University



# By the Numbers

The Blue Nature Alliance is working with partners in countries around the world toward shared conservation goals. In some places, we are advancing the designation of new or expanded ocean conservation areas. In others, we are improving the effectiveness, durability, and equitability of existing ones. While it may take years to achieve each individual goal, the work is well underway. Here's a snapshot of our work in progress.

We support conservation in **29 sites** around the world...

Covering **18,603,128 square kilometers** of ocean...

An area larger than the U.S. and Canada combined.

Projected new and expanded protections: **8,223,054 square kilometers**

Projected improved and upgraded protections: **10,380,074 square kilometers**



## Growing the Field of Large-Scale Ocean Conservation

The Alliance is working with partners to advance science and knowledge, support professional development, and create new financing mechanisms. Here's a look at our work so far.

# 68

research papers,  
knowledge products,  
and communications  
materials published

# 1,300

people reached through  
learning opportunities

# 1,700

people involved in  
implementing projects  
around the world





Damselfish in Palau.  
© Ethan Daniels/Shutterstock





Nesting red-footed booby in Fiji's Lau Seascape.  
© Conservation International/photo by Lisa and Michael Anderson



# Our Partners

The Blue Nature Alliance is a global partnership founded and led by five core partners. We collaborate with governments, NGOs, Indigenous peoples, scientists, financial strategists, ocean conservation experts, and communities of practice to advance effective large-scale ocean conservation.

## Core partners



## Some of our technical, leverage, and implementing partners







The Blue Nature Alliance is a global partnership catalyzing and accelerating large-scale ocean conservation.

Learn more:

-  [www.blunaturealliance.org](http://www.blunaturealliance.org)
-  [contact@blunaturealliance.org](mailto:contact@blunaturealliance.org)
-  [@BluNatAlliance](https://twitter.com/BluNatAlliance)
-  [Blue Nature Alliance](https://www.linkedin.com/company/blue-nature-alliance)

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