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# World Conservation Congress Motion 49: Vote Yes for High Seas Protections

Advancing conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction

## Overview

Numerous issues threaten the health of the oceans, including climate change, shipping, and overfishing—plus emerging risks from activities such as mining and power generation. These issues are especially problematic on the high seas, the nearly two-thirds of the ocean that lies beyond national boundaries, where a lack of management for some activities, and little coordinated governance of existing high seas industries, intensifies the damage to our oceans.

In 2012, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress (WCC) adopted Resolution 074, "Implementing Conservation and Sustainable Management of Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction," which stresses the need to address governance gaps through the protection of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).[1] The U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution in June 2015 that launched negotiations on a new, legally binding agreement to address the need to conserve and sustainably manage ocean life. If the momentum continues, the General Assembly could fully adopt a treaty by 2020.

With the theme "Planet at the Crossroads," this year's IUCN WCC has an opportunity to encourage action on the high seas, which cover 43 percent of the Earth's surface. Motion 49 urges States to promote the development of a new international and legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in ABNJ. Specifically, such an agreement could include effective mechanisms for:

- Creating and managing an ecologically representative system of marine protected areas (MPAs) and reserves in ABNJ.
- Assessing the effects of human activities on ABNJ, including cumulative impacts, and regulating activities to prevent significant adverse impacts on the marine environment.

- Facilitating capacity building and the transfer of marine technology.
- Enhancing access to, and ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from, marine genetic resources from ABNJ.

Furthermore, the motion encourages Members to support a science-based process and urges States to call on the General Assembly to convene an intergovernmental conference in 2018 to consider recommendations and adopt text of an agreement for the protection of biodiversity in ABNJ.

The new treaty could reduce the threats of emerging high seas activities and ensure that their effects are thoroughly understood through the use of environmental impact assessments (EIAs). By creating a process to establish high seas MPAs, including fully protected marine reserves, ecologically important parts of the high seas would remain reservoirs of biodiversity[2] and build resilience to the effects of climate change.[3]

At the 2010 meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity, States committed to a conservation target of 10 percent of the marine environment, which was reaffirmed in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants at the 2014 IUCN World Parks Congress called for 30 percent of the ocean to ultimately have no extractive activities.[4] A 2016 study found that to successfully preserve healthy ecosystems and help degraded ones to recover, 30 percent of the world's oceans would need protection through MPAs and reserves.[5] The high seas fall far behind both of these targets, with less than 1 percent fully protected.

Members of the IUCN WCC have an opportunity, through the adoption of Motion 49, to encourage action on a strict timeline with effective mechanisms for the establishment of MPAs and reserves and a process for EIAs on the high seas.

## Endnotes

1    International Union for Conservation of Nature, "Implementing Conservation and Sustainable Management of Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction" (Resolution 074, World Conservation Congress, Jeju, South Korea, 2012), https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2012_RES_74_EN.pdf.

2    Sarah E. Lester et al., "Biological Effects Within No-Take Marine Reserves: A Global Synthesis," *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 384 (2009): 33–46, http://dx.doi.org/10.3354/meps08029; and Benjamin S. Halpern, "The Impact of Marine Reserves: Do Reserves Work and Does Reserve Size Matter?" *Ecological Applications* 13, no. 1 (2003): 117–37, http://dx.doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761(2003)013[0117:TIOMRD]2.0.CO;2.

3    Charlotte R. Hopkins, David M. Bailey, and Tavis Potts, "Perceptions of Practitioners: Managing Marine Protected Areas for Climate Change Resilience," *Ocean & Costal Managemen*t 128 (2016): 18–28, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2016.04.014; and Camille Mellin et al., "Marine Protected Areas Increase Resilience Among Coral Reef Communities," *Ecology Letters* 19, no. 6 (2016): 629–37, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ele.12598.

4    International Union for Conservation of Nature, "A Strategy of Innovative Approaches and Recommendations to Enhance Implementation of Marine Conservation in the Next Decade" (World Parks Congress, Sydney, 2014), http://worldparkscongress.org/downloads/approaches/ThemeM.pdf.

5    Bethan O'Leary et al., "Effective Coverage Targets for Ocean Protection," *Conservation Letters* (advance online copy, 2016), https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/conl.12247.