



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique



SPREP
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional
Environment Programme



2. Conserving, sustainably managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems including deep-sea ecosystems.

This theme covers the protection, management and restoration of marine environments from coastal areas to the deep ocean. It encompasses establishing and managing marine protected areas, implementing ecosystem-based management approaches, and developing frameworks for emerging activities that may impact marine ecosystems.

Additional considerations, as raised through the UN's stakeholder consultation on panel themes, include improving scientific research accessibility and data sharing, strengthening environmental safeguards for deep-sea activities, developing comprehensive monitoring systems, and integrating traditional knowledge into ecosystem management approaches.

Pacific Context

The Pacific Islands region contains one of Earth's richest and most complex arrays of marine ecosystems, supporting globally significant biodiversity including hundreds of endemic species¹. These ecosystems provide critical services, including sustaining fisheries that support livelihoods, protecting coastlines from storm surges, and serving as a carbon sink which mitigates climate change impacts².

However, these vital ecosystems face mounting pressures. Climate change impacts, including sea-level rise and ocean acidification, pose existential threats to all Pacific Island Countries and Territories³. Coral reefs are particularly vulnerable, with bleaching events and weakened resilience threatening both biodiversity and ecosystem services¹. Deep-sea ecosystems face particular challenges as emerging activities like deep-sea mining create new pressures on these poorly understood environments⁴. There is an urgent need to assess, create frameworks and enforce legislation on deep-sea habitats and species before potentially irreversible activities take place⁴.

Local challenges such as overfishing, coastal development, invasive species and pollution from urban areas, agriculture and forestry activities further compound these threats¹. While initiatives to conserve marine ecosystems have seen progress in some areas, they are often constrained by limited financial resources, gaps in capacity, and varying levels of enforcement, making it more complex to address these interconnected challenges³.

Traditional knowledge plays a fundamental role in marine conservation across the Pacific Islands region. Indigenous communities have maintained centuries of accumulated understanding of marine ecosystems and sustainable resource use, which continues to inform effective management practices⁵. Customary marine resource management includes closed areas such as the *tabu* in Fiji, Vanuatu, and Kiribati, the *ra'ui* in the Cook Islands, the *tambu* in Papua New Guinea, the *bul* in Palau, the *mo* in the Marshall Islands, and the *tapu* in Tonga⁵. These approaches involve measures like temporary or seasonal bans, no-take

zones, and species-specific restrictions to allow resource recovery and ecosystem resilience⁵. For example, Palau's *bul* is implemented to protect fish spawning areas, while Fiji's temporary bans coincide with significant cultural events such as the passing of high chiefs⁵. These practices not only support marine conservation but also reflect the cultural and spiritual connection of Pacific communities to their natural environment.

A variety of approaches are used to conserve, sustainably manage, and restore marine and coastal ecosystems, including deep-sea ecosystems. These include integrated approaches such as Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) or spatially focused strategies like area-based measures approaches including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). EBM provides a holistic framework that considers ecological, social, and economic factors at the ecosystem level, integrating local community involvement and cultural perspectives to ensure sustainable resource use while protecting biodiversity⁶. MPAs are designated marine conservation zones that aim to protect ocean ecosystems in order to recover from human impacts. Area-based measures including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), are regulatory tools that involve clearly defined geographical spaces to manage human activities and conserve natural or cultural resources⁶. MPAs can range from small, community-managed areas to large-scale national sanctuaries like Palau's National Marine Sanctuary.

Regional and International Instruments.

- [Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan 2021-2030](#)
- [The Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme](#)
- [The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent](#)
- [The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021-2025](#)
- [Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy](#)
- [Framework for Pacific Oceanscape](#)

International Instruments

- [The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction](#)

The Ocean Action panels at UNOC3 are collaborative, multi-stakeholder sessions designed to:

- Generate concrete commitments and actions to support SDG14 implementation
- Produce specific outcomes that will be captured in the "Nice Ocean Action Plan"
- Contribute to the Conference's overarching theme of "Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean"
- Foster partnerships between governments, civil society, private sector, and other stakeholders

1. H. Pippard, G.M. Ralph, M.S. Harvey, K.E. Carpenter, J.R. Buchanan, D.W. Greenfield, H.D. Harwell, H.K. Larson, A. Lawrence, C. Linardich, K. Matsuura, H. Motomura, T.A. Munroe, R.F. Myers, B.C. Russell, W.F. Smith-Vaniz, J.-C. Vié, R.R. Thaman, J.T. Williams (2017). The Conservation Status of Marine Biodiversity of the Pacific Islands of Oceania. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. viii + 59 pp.
2. Barbier, E.B. (2017). Marine ecosystem services. *Current Biology*, [online] 27(11), pp.R507–R510. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2017.03.020>.
3. Mcleod, E., Bruton-Adams, M., Förster, J., Franco, C., Gaines, G., Gorong, B., James, R., Posing-Kulwaum, G., Tara, M. and Terk, E. (2019). Lessons From the Pacific Islands – Adapting to Climate Change by Supporting Social and Ecological Resilience. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 6(289). doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2019.00289>.
4. Santos R. S., Pham C. K., Ingels J. (2019). Anthropogenic disturbances in the deep Sea. *Front. Res. Topics*. doi: 10.3389/978-2-88963-288-6
5. Vierros, M, Tawake, A., Hickey, F., Tiraa, A. and Noa, R. (2010). Traditional Marine Management Areas of the Pacific in the Context of National and International Law and Policy. Darwin, Australia: United Nations University – Traditional Knowledge Initiative.
6. Winther, J.-G., M. Dai, et al. 2020. Integrated Ocean Management. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute.