



Ocean Conservation & Coasts

Executive Summary

South America plays a crucial role in global ocean and marine conservation due to its vast and diverse coastlines spanning both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, hosting key marine biomes like the Humboldt Current, the South Atlantic Gyre, and tropical coral reefs. Mangroves of South America span both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and represent some of the most ecologically rich and productive ecosystems on the continent. These ecosystems support rich biodiversity, major fisheries, and carbon sequestration. However, they face serious challenges, including overfishing, plastic pollution, habitat degradation, and the impacts of climate change such as ocean acidification and warming, which threaten marine life and coastal communities dependent on these resources.

To address the threats facing marine ecosystems, stronger, more effective, and equitable governance is required at multiple levels. Protecting marine biodiversity and safeguarding the ocean's biogeochemical processes are vital for the planet's survival. Robust legal and policy frameworks are urgently needed to support the protection, regulation, climate change mitigation, and restoration of the ocean's Key Biodiversity Areas, as well as other ecologically important areas both within and beyond national jurisdiction. Marine spatial planning must be prioritized to effectively support species and area-based conservation, protection, and management. Fisheries should be sustainable, fully legal, and capable of meeting the livelihood, nutritional, and health needs of the communities most dependent on them. At the same time, efforts to combat illegal fishing and to enhance the sustainability of maritime fleets and mariculture production are essential. Blue carbon habitats require greater financial investment, innovative blended-funding mechanisms, and stronger public support to protect their critical role in carbon sequestration while also sustaining local livelihoods. Additionally, species and ecosystems in the Arctic, Antarctic, and Southern Oceans require a representative network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), building on the recommendations of the IUCN Task Force on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

Program Targets

The effective protection, conservation and restoration of marine key biodiversity areas, other areas important for biodiversity, ecosystems and species has been achieved equitably and inclusively to reach global targets.

- Equitable and effective protection of Key Biodiversity Areas and other areas important for biodiversity in the ocean has been achieved, with protected and conserved areas summing to at least 30 per cent of ocean area, and other systematic approaches to address stressors to the integrity of marine biodiversity, including fisheries and extractive industries, have been identified and are being implemented.
- Regenerative blue economy models are applied that deliver nature-positive climate and socio-economic outcomes along with their enabling conditions and required investments, involving public, private sector and civil society actors.

Geographical Opportunities

- ♣ Tropical Eastern Pacific
- ♣ Southeast Pacific
- ♣ Caribbean Seascapes
- ♣ North Brazil Shelf LME
- ♣ Patagonian seas
- ♣ Southwest Atlantic Ocean
- ♣ Mangroves of the Tropical East Pacific (TEP)
- ♣ Mangroves of the North Brazil Shelf (NBS)
- ♣ Island Systems

Investment Opportunities

Donors can engage with the IUCN Regional Office for scaling pilots with proven impact, co-financing programs and regional initiatives, supporting innovation for marine conservation through project funding, earmarked support or multi-stakeholder coalitions. Regional opportunities include:

1. **BBNJ Accelerator: Advancing Equitable Governance and Conservation in South American High Seas.** These efforts will support the operationalization of the BBNJ in priority high seas areas adjacent to South America, such as the Southeast Pacific and Southwest Atlantic. Key activities include: Building regional capacity to engage in BBNJ governance mechanisms; support science-based area-based management tools (ABMTs); promote equitable benefit-sharing from marine genetic resources, ensure representation of South American states in global governance dialogues; create legal and monitoring frameworks to connect BBNJ actions to EEZ conservation goals (e.g., Galápagos–CMAR, Patagonia–High Seas corridor).
2. **Strengthening Integrated Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Across Key Biodiversity Areas.** This includes support for the design and implementation of MSP initiatives across critical Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) such as the Brazilian Shelf, Patagonian Shelf, Caribbean LME, and Humboldt Current LME. Activities include: Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms involving government, fisheries, industry, tourism, and Indigenous/coastal communities; integrating blue economy sectors into MSP (e.g., offshore renewables, sustainable aquaculture); mapping critical habitats (e.g., coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses) and ecosystem services; embedding climate risk assessments and ocean-use conflict resolution mechanisms.
3. **Enhancing Governance Systems in island seascapes like the Galapagos and beyond.** Island and archipelagic seascapes like Galápagos (Ecuador), Fernando de Noronha (Brazil), San Andrés and Providencia (Colombia), and Margarita (Venezuela) are biodiversity hotspots facing pressure from tourism, illegal fishing, and climate change. This investment opportunity supports: Institutional strengthening of marine protected area authorities; localized adaptive governance systems that integrate community voices, science, and enforcement; innovation in marine ecotourism governance and ecological zoning; integration with regional seascapes and marine corridors (e.g., CMAR, Caribbean Seascape).
4. **Coastal Stewards: Empowering Communities for Regenerative Blue Economy & Plastics-Free Oceans.** Promote ecosystem-based management approaches that empower coastal communities, small-scale fishers, and Indigenous peoples to sustainably manage marine resources. Key actions include: strengthening local fisheries governance; supporting the restoration of critical ecosystems such as mangroves, estuaries, and coastal reefs; advancing value chain innovations, including traceability and sustainable seafood certification; and building resilience through climate adaptation, blue economy development, and alternative livelihoods.

Aligned with emerging global commitments to end plastic pollution, these actions also call for **reducing ocean plastics** through policy development, institutional capacities, community-led waste management, circular economy initiatives, and advocacy for strong implementation of the new international plastics treaty.

Why Partner with IUCN?

- Over 75 years of global conservation leadership.
- Trusted network: states, NGOs, Indigenous organizations, academia.
- Evidence-based and rights-focused approach.
- Strong regional presence and impact measurement systems
- Science-based international policy work strengthening multilevel dialogues with practical solutions.

South America is rising. Join us in advancing bold action for people and the planet.

Contact

IUCN Regional Office for South America

samerica@iucn.org

https://linktr.ee/uicn_sur