



OceanCare: We need an „environmental TÜV certification“ for the high seas!

Press release for the start of the UN High Seas Treaty (BBNJ) negotiations

Press release OceanCare
Zurich/Vienna/Berlin, 11. August 2022

- High seas make up 2/3 of the ocean and are crucial in tackling the climate crisis
- Only about 1% of the high seas are protected
- Biodiversity is the basis for a healthy and well-functioning ocean
- “Environmental TÜV certification“: OceanCare calls for globally legally binding standards for environmental impact assessments for high seas activities
- The High Seas Treaty: A step towards multilateralism and away from purely national agendas

From August 15th to the 26th, the future of the high seas - and thus also that of our planet - will be decided at the United Nations (UN) headquarter in New York. After years of negotiations, the [Fifth and for the time being last Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction \(IGC5 - BBNJ\)](#) is set to place biodiversity on the high seas under international legally binding protection. If the international community manages to finalise and adopt a High Seas Treaty, it will be a once-in-a-lifetime milestone. OceanCare's goal is to pursue strict and clear provisions for environmental impact assessments and the management of human activities that affect the high seas. At the centre of the UN negotiations: Preserving biodiversity. And standing up for multilateralism against selfish national interests.

Protection of the high seas is a long overdue service to all of humankind

The high seas cover about half of our planet and account for two-thirds of the ocean. Yet only about 1 percent of it is protected. The 1980s Convention on the Law of the Sea regulates the use of the oceans and their resources, but not the conservation of marine biodiversity in the high seas. The new UN agreement, colloquially also known as the ‘BBNJ Treaty’, lays the groundwork for this to happen for the very first time.

"The high seas are currently a predominantly lawless area. Neither pollution, industrial fishing activities, nor the exploitation of resources are adequately regulated. The climate crisis is exacerbating these existential pressures on the ocean. All of this is threatening biodiversity. The task now is to get the High Seas Treaty over the finishing line and regulate the use of international waters in a climate-conscious way. That is our goal," says Fabienne McLellan, managing director of the marine conservation organisation OceanCare. Johannes Müller, OceanCare Policy Expert adds, "In many areas, the high seas are like the wild west. Due to the unclear or lack of regulatory frameworks, it has been massively exploited for decades. OceanCare advocates for internationally binding rules that can directly, immediately and effectively preserve biodiversity in the high seas."

Preserving biodiversity: The ocean is our ally in tackling climate change

The conservation of biodiversity in the high seas is not adequately regulated. This is particularly worrying as it is its biodiversity that allows the ocean to perform its climate regulation role. "The ocean is our best ally in

fighting climate change. However, it can only perform its function as climate regulator if it is healthy and resilient. Every marine species plays an important role in the well-functioning of this ecosystem. Biodiversity conservation therefore belongs at the heart of the High Seas Treaty. That is the number one priority countries need to keep in mind," McLellan said.

"Environmental TÜV certification": global management against the trend to exploit the ocean

OceanCare has been a strong advocate for effective management of transboundary forms of pollution since the beginning of the BBNJ negotiations. Our goal is to have globally binding and uniform standards for the protection of the high seas. Before activities that could harm the environment may proceed, their environmental impact must be assessed, mitigated and only then should the activity be approved. It is not enough to assess and control activities only where they occur. After all, marine pollutants that threaten biodiversity - such as noise, plastics or chemicals - pollute the ocean not only at their source but far from their point of origin. "For many states, driven by nationalistic agendas and self-interests, a possible high seas agreement is seen as an opportunity to maximize the exploitation of marine resources. What is needed, however, is a clear departure from this mode of thinking. A species-rich, resilient high seas is in the interest of all humanity," says McLellan.

Underwater noise – a destructive threat to biodiversity and the entire marine ecosystem

Underwater noise is - along with plastic waste or chemical pollution - one of the most worrying yet helpful examples in demonstrating the devastating impact of transboundary pollution on the marine environment. Shipping and oil and gas exploration, to name two specific examples, result in widespread noise emissions that can cause irreversible damage to marine life. These damages range from deafness and habitat displacement to reduced reproductive opportunities and in some cases even death. During oil and gas exploration, so-called airguns produce explosive noise of up to 260 decibels underwater every 10 to 15 seconds for weeks or months. The sound of these seismic surveys can travel far and wide and can be heard 4,000 kilometers from their point of origin. This noise impacts almost all marine life, from the smallest plankton to the largest marine mammals.

"The climate and biodiversity crisis is in full swing so we have no time to waste. If we are to have any chance of fending off the worst of the climate crisis, we must protect the ocean. We need an instrument that can be used immediately and has a direct impact. The "environmental TÜV certification" that requires high and consistent standards is a good start" says Fabienne McLellan. "With the adoption of the High Seas Treaty, governments are rightfully committing to facing up to their responsibility. We owe this to those who are already struggling with the consequences of climate change and to the generations that will come after us."

"The adoption of the High Seas Treaty sends a clear signal in support of multilateralism and against unilateral and inward-looking national interests. We hope governments will raise their collective level of ambition and spirit of cooperation and seize this historic opportunity and show the world that it can unite in matters of common interest: the protection of the high seas" concludes Johannes Müller.

Media Contacts (in New York from 14th August – 27th August 2022. Time difference: -6hrs to CEST):

Fabienne McLellan, Managing Director OceanCare, fmclellan@oceancare.org, mobile: +41 79 456 77 07

Dr. Johannes Müller, Ocean Policy Expert, jmueller@oceancare.org, mobile: +49 157 897 95147

About OceanCare:

OceanCare has been working on ocean conservation since 1989. Based in Switzerland, OceanCare holds Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC and with its international work contributes to the achievement of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. OceanCare addresses marine pollution and the growing biodiversity and climate crisis, species extinction and hunting and marine life conservation and sustainable fisheries. We bring innovative, far-reaching reforms and pragmatic change, from the functioning of marine protected areas to a strong UN High Seas Treaty to a global treaty on plastic pollution and to calling for a ban on oil and gas exploration in the ocean. We are making a difference. OceanCare. For healthy living oceans. More at www.oceancare.org