



## PRESS RELEASE

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### HIGH SEAS ALLIANCE APPLAUDS COUNTRIES JOINING THE HIGH SEAS TREATY 'RACE FOR RATIFICATION'

### HOLLYWOOD STARS, HEADS OF STATE AND OCEAN LEADERS CALL FOR URGENT OCEAN PROTECTIONS AS TREATY OPENS FOR SIGNATURE AT UNITED NATIONS

**New York, 20 September 2023:** As the historic High Seas Treaty opened to United Nations (UN) Member States for signature<sup>1</sup> at the UN General Assembly today, actors Sigourney Weaver and Jane Fonda supported the High Seas Alliance and its 52 members in challenging countries to compete in a Race for Ratification<sup>2</sup>, with the ambitious goal of fast-tracking the Treaty's entry into force as soon as 2025.

The call was issued during 'High Ambition for the High Seas', a high-level event held on the margins of the UN meeting, organized by the governments of Belgium, Costa Rica, France and the European Union with support from Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the High Seas Alliance, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Mission Blue and the Pew Charitable Trusts. The event celebrated Heads of State and Ministers signing the High Seas Treaty - and committing to a high-level declaration<sup>3</sup> to ensure it secures the 60 ratifications needed to enter into force as soon as possible. By signing, countries are not yet bound by the Treaty, but indicate they intend to ratify it.

The High Seas - the entire ocean beyond countries' maritime borders - covers half the planet, is home to the world's greatest wealth of biodiversity and plays an essential role in regulating our climate. This vast ocean area supports some of the most important, yet critically endangered ecosystems on Earth, yet a lack of governance has left it increasingly vulnerable to over-exploitation. Currently, [only 1% of the High Seas is protected](#).

The 60th country to ratify the High Seas Treaty will trigger a 120-day countdown, after which it will become the world's first international Treaty to mandate the conservation and management of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), by enabling the establishment of [High Seas marine protected areas](#), including fully and highly protected areas, and regulating activities that may harm the High Seas through comprehensive environmental impact assessments.

Bringing the High Seas Treaty into force is a critical step for securing international goals, including the 30x30 goal to protect 30% of the world's land and sea by 2030, agreed during last year's UN Biodiversity Summit. The High Seas Alliance and its members are working with governments to have the Treaty up and running by the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France.

*"I'm pleased that today, thanks to the efforts of the Blue Leaders, the BBNJ High Ambition Coalition and all states involved in the process, this historic treaty is open for signature," said **Vincent van Quickenborne, Deputy Prime Minister, Belgium.** "The ocean makes our planet habitable, and now is the time for countries to sign up and give it the level of protection it needs and deserves. As a founding member of the Blue Leaders, Belgium calls upon all states to sign and ratify as quickly as possible, because signing means having a voice in this process. A speedy ratification is crucial to put in place the necessary structures and institutions to turn the great ambitions of this agreement into reality."*

**Hervé Berville, Minister of State for Marine Affairs, France,** said: *"Today is an historic day for the ocean and our planet. France, the high ambition coalition for BBNJ, NGOs of the High Seas Alliance and civil society created momentum to conclude what we consider the most important United Nations treaty of the next decades. This agreement will allow us to give a liveable planet for future generations. Now it's the time to sprint, achieve swift ratifications and increase our collective ambitions for the United Nations Ocean Conference that France will host with Costa Rica in 2025."*

**Virginijus Sinkevičius, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries** said: *"High seas are 64% of the ocean's surface. Until yesterday, only about 1% was protected-but today, this changes for good. With the signature of the High Seas Treaty, we can safeguard the ocean from human pressures, and get closer to our objective of protecting at least 30% of the Planet by 2030".*

*"We are convinced it is our ethical duty to future generations and to our planet to ensure the ratification of this instrument in the shortest possible time, to start building a network of MPAs on areas beyond national jurisdictions urgently needed to improve the ocean's health and safeguard global biodiversity," said **Arnoldo André Tinoco, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Costa Rica.** "Costa Rica will join the historical signature of the BBNJ Agreement today and invite all countries to sign and ratify the treaty as a matter of priority. The High-Level Event on Ocean Action that Costa Rica will host next year, on the route towards UNOC 2025, will be a great opportunity to continue our call for ratification. The ocean is counting on all of us."*

*"As we stand at the brink of ecological catastrophe, the High Seas Treaty offers a ray of hope," said **actor and activist, Jane Fonda.** "It gives us a chance to breathe life back into the ocean, so that the ocean can continue to breathe life into us. All of us must do everything we can to save the magnificent Ocean, our ally in the fight against the climate crisis. I urge all countries to ratify the High Seas Treaty without delay - for every life on Earth."*

*"As we start the Race for Ratification of the High Seas Treaty, we must not underestimate the opportunity before us," said **Rebecca Hubbard, Director of the High Seas Alliance.** "Ocean temperatures have hit record highs, marine life – and all our lives – are under unprecedented pressure. To survive, it is critical that the new High Seas Treaty enters into force as soon as possible so that we can accelerate international action to restore planetary health and defend the lives and livelihoods of billions of people worldwide."*

*"We welcome the positive commitments made today," said **Lisa Speer, Director of the International Oceans Program at Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).** "Life on our blue planet depends on a healthy ocean. Each and every country has the same obligation to future generations – to urgently reverse ocean decline. I hope all countries will proceed without delay to sign and ratify the High Seas Treaty."*

**Nainoa Thompson, President of the Polynesian Voyaging Society**, said: *“The deep connection that indigenous peoples have with the ocean is rooted in knowledge and traditions passed down through the generations, which emerged from a profound respect and appreciation for marine life. The new High Seas Treaty, aimed at protecting marine life in the high seas, is not just a commitment to marine conservation, it is also a promise to recognize and protect the heritage of indigenous peoples whose lives and culture depend on the sea.”*

*“The High Seas Treaty is a historic victory for the health of people, our ocean, and our planet,”* said **Antha Williams, who leads the global climate and environment program at Bloomberg Philanthropies**. *“With adequate funding, Treaty implementation will safeguard marine biodiversity, expand protected areas, and protect livelihoods in communities that depend on our ocean. Bloomberg Philanthropies looks forward to supporting governments in their ambition to swiftly ratify the Treaty, which is critical to reaching the global 30x30 target. The ocean is one of our greatest allies in fighting the climate crisis - it's past time that we return the favor.”*

*“For too long, we couldn't fathom that our actions could cause significant harm upon the vast ocean, especially the areas far beyond the coast,”* said **oceanographer, explorer, and founder of Mission Blue, Dr. Sylvia Earle**. *“But now, we're aware that in just a few decades we have eliminated entire marine ecosystems. This treaty represents a critical step towards safeguarding the ocean by facilitating the creation of a network of highly and fully protected marine areas. But we cannot and we must not wait any longer. I encourage countries around the world to rapidly ratify this treaty and act to protect the blue heart of our planet as if our lives depend on it... because they do.”*

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. There are 193 Member States to the United Nations. See a full list on the [High Seas Alliance Ratification Tracker](#).

- **Signing the Treaty** does not establish consent for States to be bound to the Treaty, but it does express the willingness of the signatory State to continue the treaty-making process and for it to proceed to ratification. Signing also creates an obligation to refrain, in good faith, from acts that would defeat the object and the purpose of the Treaty. Following signature, countries can ratify the Agreement at any time. The Treaty text specifies that this Agreement shall be open for signature by all States from 20 September 2023 and will remain open for signature at the UN Headquarters in New York until 20 September 2025. Once this period has past, States can join by acceding to the Agreement. Accession refers to the act whereby a State expresses its consent to be bound by an Agreement. This can take place after a Treaty has entered into force.
- **Ratification** is when nations formally consent to the new international law, and this often entails ensuring that their national laws are consistent with it. The speed and process to ratify varies by country. In some countries, the act of ratification is simply a Leader's decree, while in others Parliamentary approval is needed.

2. Find out more about the High Seas Alliance and its new Race For Ratification campaign at [www.highseasalliance.org/treaty-ratification](http://www.highseasalliance.org/treaty-ratification).

### 3. The Declaration:

*“Heads of State and Ministers from around the world commit to working together to ensure the new United Nations Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (the High Seas Treaty) secures the 60 ratifications needed to enter into force as soon as possible, and will strive to reach this goal by the 2025 UN Ocean Conference.”*

4. Read more about the High Seas Treaty in this [factsheet](#) and [FAQS](#).

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**Images of the event are available upon request.**



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