

Why sustainability is no longer enough for the blue economy

- **While the sustainable blue economy is often cited as a key aspect of sustainable development, the ocean is still degrading rapidly.**
- **A regenerative blue economy focuses on restoring marine and coastal ecosystems while supporting global economic growth.**
- **How can we chart a viable economic trajectory for marine sectors, while supporting innovation that leads to healthier marine ecosystems, mitigates climate change impacts and ensures equity?**

For the past decade, the idea of a sustainable blue economy helped put the ocean on the global agenda – integrating ocean health into development plans, investment strategies and business practice.

Yet the continued degradation of ocean health shows us that sustaining the status quo of a degraded ocean isn't a win.

We must focus on regeneration: restoring ecosystems, strengthening resilience and ensuring that prosperity is shared by the communities who depend on the sea.

The blue economy and the business case for regeneration

The blue economy already contributes [\\$2.5–\\$6 trillion annually to global GDP](#), making it the [eighth-largest economy in the world](#).

Ocean-based jobs are projected to grow by 130% between 2010 and 2030, while sectors from shipping to coastal tourism and aquaculture continue to expand. The ocean also represents the [world's largest untapped source of renewable energy](#).

But this prosperity is fragile. Over one-third (35%) of [global fish stocks are overexploited](#). Coastal ecosystems like mangroves and seagrasses – vital carbon sinks – are being lost up to **five times faster than tropical forests**.

Pollution and warming seas are pushing ecosystems toward tipping points. For businesses, the degradation of ocean health means weakened supply chains, food and energy insecurity, and higher costs.

As we navigate a time of overlapping ecological and climate crises, we must fundamentally shift how we value, use and protect the ocean – and this is where regeneration offers a clear business case.

By restoring ecosystems and embedding equity, regeneration reduces risk, creates durable prosperity and future-proofs the blue economy. It also maximizes long-term value for stakeholders by ensuring the ocean economy remains resilient, productive and just.

A regenerative approach mirrors how nature works: circular, self-healing and inclusive. It means designing marine industries – renewable energy, aquaculture, transport and tourism – not in silos, but as interconnected systems that contribute positively to both ecological and human well-being.

Momentum for ocean action is building across both business and policy. The 2025 UN Ocean Conference saw record business participation alongside [65 heads of state and 10,000 participants](#).

Investor interest is spreading across 70+ categories of ocean innovation, while policy frameworks such as the [Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction \(BBNJ\) Agreement](#), and the [WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement](#) are dismantling barriers that held back progress for decades and creating unprecedented alignment.

This momentum across business, finance and policy signals a key shift: the ocean is moving from the margins to the centre of the climate and nature agenda and delivery on global commitments. The challenge now is to ensure this momentum delivers regenerative outcomes and avoids extractive lock-ins.

Turning momentum into a regenerative blueprint

The [Global Future Council on the Regenerative Blue Economy](#) brings together experts from finance, business, government, academia and civil society to help shape the conditions where regeneration becomes the norm rather than the exception.

The council offers strategic guidance to help governments, investors, and businesses in undertaking the bold thinking, cross-sector collaboration and real innovation that translates intent to practice and ambition to action.

This means shaping the conditions that unlock a regenerative blue economy by improving policy integration, making nature-inclusive design the norm, innovating financial instruments that de-risk and accelerate investment into regenerative solutions, as well as co-designing such solutions with local and indigenous communities.

Taken together and aligned with an interconnected approach to climate and nature, we can ensure equity, resilience and lasting prosperity for the blue economy.

Rather than treating regeneration as a set of isolated pilots, the council shows that the glimpse of the future is already visible across diverse contexts.

In Chile, [community-led Territorial Use Rights for Fisheries \(TURFs\)](#) are rebuilding ecosystems while sustaining local economies. Across the North

Sea, [offshore wind areas are being co-designed with aquaculture and reef restoration](#), blending renewable energy production with ecological restoration, ocean environment and biodiversity monitoring, and local employment.

And in Zanzibar, Tanzania, [women-led seaweed cooperatives](#) are restoring lagoon health while creating income and diversifying household economies. Together, these examples illustrate how ecological recovery and community prosperity can advance in tandem – and how regeneration can become a guiding principle for the ocean economy.

These stories demonstrate the variety of pathways regeneration can take, and that these pathways together can point toward a regenerative blueprint where economic activity is designed to restore ecosystems and strengthen prosperity at the same time. The council's role is to spotlight and connect such approaches, helping them scale with integrity and speed.

What's the World Economic Forum doing about the ocean?

The Global Future Council on the Regenerative Blue Economy will gather at the [Annual Meeting of the Global Future Councils](#) in Dubai on 15-17 October to continue deliberating how ocean sectors – from legacy industries to

emerging fields – can evolve towards regeneration, and highlight the enabling levers of policy, finance and innovation that are needed.

We invite governments, businesses, investors, and communities to engage with this work and bring forward initiatives that demonstrate how regeneration can become the organizing principle of the blue economy.

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- While the sustainable blue economy is often cited as a key aspect of sustainable development, the ocean is still degrading rapidly.
- A regenerative blue economy goes beyond sustaining current use, focusing on restoring marine and coastal ecosystems while supporting global economic growth.
- How can we chart a viable economic trajectory for marine sectors, while supporting innovation that leads to healthier marine ecosystems, mitigates climate change impacts and ensures equity?

For the past decade, the idea of a **sustainable blue economy** helped put the ocean on the global agenda—integrating ocean health into development plans, investment strategies, and business practice. Yet the continued degradation of ocean health shows us that sustaining the status quo of a degraded ocean isn't a win. We must focus on **regeneration**: restoring ecosystems, strengthening resilience, and ensuring that prosperity is shared by the communities who depend on the sea.

A crossroads for the ocean economy and the case for regeneration

The blue economy already contributes **\$2.5–\$6 trillion annually** to global GDP, making it the eighth-largest economy in the world. Ocean-based jobs are projected to grow by 130% between 2010 and 2030, while sectors from shipping to coastal tourism and aquaculture continue to expand. The ocean also represents the world's largest untapped source of renewable energy. But this prosperity is fragile. **One-third of global fish stocks are overexploited.** Coastal ecosystems like mangroves and seagrasses—vital carbon sinks—are being lost up to five times faster than tropical forests. Pollution and warming seas are pushing ecosystems toward tipping points. For businesses, the degradation of ocean health means weakened supply chains, food and energy insecurity, and higher costs.

As we navigate a time of overlapping ecological and climate crises, we must fundamentally shift how we value, use, and protect the ocean. This is where **regeneration offers a clear business case**. By restoring ecosystems and embedding equity, regeneration reduces risk, creates

durable prosperity, and future-proofs the blue economy. It maximizes long-term value for stakeholders by ensuring the ocean economy remains resilient, productive, and just. A regenerative approach mirrors how nature works: circular, self-healing, and inclusive. It means designing marine industries—renewable energy, aquaculture, transport, and tourism—not in silos, but as interconnected systems that contribute positively to both ecological and human well-being.

Momentum across business and policy

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The Global Future Council: turning momentum into a regenerative blueprint

[The Global Future Council on the Regenerative Blue Economy](#) brings together experts from finance, business, government, academia, and civil society to help shape the conditions where regeneration becomes the norm rather than the exception. The Council offers strategic guidance to help governments, investors, and businesses in undertaking the **bold thinking**, cross-sector collaboration, and real innovation that translates intent to practice and ambition to action.

This means shaping the conditions that unlock a regenerative blue economy by improving policy integration, making nature-inclusive design the norm, innovating financial instruments that de-risk and accelerate investment into regenerative solutions, as well as co-designing such solutions with local and indigenous communities. Taken together and aligned with an interconnected approach to climate and nature, we can ensure equity, resilience and lasting prosperity for the blue economy.

Rather than treating regeneration as a set of isolated pilots, the Council shows that the glimpse of the future is already visible across diverse contexts. In Chile, community-led Territorial Use Rights for Fisheries (TURFs) are rebuilding ecosystems while sustaining local economies. Across the North Sea, offshore wind areas are being co-designed with aquaculture and reef restoration, blending renewable energy production with ecological restoration, ocean environment and biodiversity monitoring, and local employment. And in Zanzibar, women-led seaweed cooperatives are restoring lagoon health while creating income and diversifying household economies. Together, these examples illustrate how ecological recovery and community prosperity can advance in tandem — and how regeneration can become a guiding principle for the ocean economy.

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