



High seas Q & A

What is RISE UP and why is it concerned about the High Seas?

RISE UP is a global network of over 500 groups representing civil society, fishers and Indigenous peoples to drive collective action to protect, restore and equitably govern the ocean.

Restore Ocean life

Invest immediately in a net-zero carbon emissions future

Speed the transition to a circular and sustainable economy

Empower and support coastal people

Unite for stronger global ocean governance

Protect at least 30% of the ocean by 2030

Under its goal to “Unite for stronger global ocean governance” RISE UP has identified the following priority action: “a new legally-binding UN agreement on High Seas biodiversity that ensures robust protection including the rapid establishment of a network of fully protected marine protected areas, and enhances cooperation among global, regional and sectoral bodies” towards achieving a 100% sustainable ocean.

What are the High Seas?

The High Seas are the international waters that cover over two thirds of our Ocean—that’s nearly 50% of the planet’s surface area. This ocean area lies outside of any country’s jurisdiction. It is part of the global commons and is governed collectively by all nations.

Why are the High seas important?

This global commons is critical to the health of the entire ocean. Once thought to be barren and devoid of life, it is now known that the High Seas are one of the largest reservoirs of biodiversity on Earth and are a crucial component in all of the Earth’s systems (such as the hydrosphere and biosphere) and cycles (such as carbon and water cycles), providing a multitude of ecosystem services including climate

regulation. As an example, the [estimates of the economic value of carbon storage by the High seas](#) range from US\$74 billion to US\$222 billion per year.

What are the threats facing the High seas?

Increasing impacts from human activity continue to negatively affect biodiversity on the High Seas. For example, fish stocks are in trouble because dwindling stocks nearer to shore mean that boats are going further and deeper looking for fish. Destructive fishing practices, such as bottom trawling, and illegal fishing are threatening High Seas marine life. The impacts on marine life of additional threats such as noise, plastic and chemical pollution, shipping, new and emerging activities (e.g. seabed mining) and acidifying and warming waters as a result of the climate crisis are adding further concern.

Why do we need a new treaty to protect High seas marine biodiversity?

Despite its size and importance, only 1.2% of the High Seas have been protected. Whilst there are laws and regulations to protect areas within national waters, for most of the High seas there are no clear rules to establish protected areas, leaving its marine life vulnerable to exploitation.

The United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), an international treaty that many call 'the Constitution of the Ocean' entered into force in 1982 to determine which marine areas States have jurisdiction over, and which are areas of international responsibility. Since then, several agreements have been made to regulate specific activities, like seabed mining and fishing for highly migratory and straddling fish stocks. Under these treaties, particularly for fishing, a plethora of organizations have been set up to manage different types of fishing or specific species on the High Seas.

It is an ungainly and ineffective system that still leaves major gaps in coverage, and has mainly focused on extracting life from the Ocean or regulating other industrial activities, rather than the protection of High Seas marine life.

Where are we in the process and what is the timeline?

For almost two decades, governments have been discussing what best to do to protect marine life in the High Seas and finally on the 24th December 2017, the UN General Assembly made the [historic decision](#) to formally start negotiations for a new UN [landmark treaty to protect the High seas](#).

These on-going negotiations had been due to conclude in 2020 but were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So far there have been five negotiating conferences. The last round of negotiations took place in August 2022 at the 5th Intergovernmental Negotiating Conference (IGC5), however governments were

unable to finalise the treaty text. A next round of negotiations will take place at resumed IGC5 from 20 February-3 March.

What will make a “strong” and “ambitious” High seas treaty?

To ensure this new treaty is transformative enough to restore ocean health, rather than reinforces business as usual, governments must make sure it includes:

- a strong legal process to establish, effectively manage and enforce a representative network of marine protected areas in the High seas;
- comprehensive, globally accountable, effective and rigorous environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for any ocean-based activities, with international review where necessary;
- a global decision-making body, that also enables key decisions to be voted on rather than relying solely on consensus;
- a robust institutional framework to ensure effective implementation and compliance, including an independent scientific committee;
- adequate financing to ensure implementation, capacity building and technology transfer
- the equitable access and sharing of benefits from the use of marine genetic resources.

How can your organisation help to protect the High seas?

RISE UP urges your organization to join forces with fellow RISE UP supporters to highlight the need to your government on the need for ambitious action. Here are some ways you can get involved:

- Send a letter to your government urging them to ensure a strong treaty is finalized at this intergovernmental conference in February.
- Liaise with Parliamentarians to help put pressure on governments, through Parliamentary questions etc.
- Organise a public rally to show support for the need for a strong new treaty.
- Get in touch with your media contacts and flag why this new treaty is so important so they can report on it.
- Publish an op-ed or article in your national media to raise awareness of this new treaty and why your government must act.
- Make noise via social media on the importance of agreeing an ambitious strong treaty using the High Seas social media assets.
- Share with our supporters, networks, members this call to action and urge them to sign the global petition.

For more information please also visit:
<https://only.one/pages/high-seas>