



Open letter to world leaders: Put marine ecosystems at the heart of climate policy

Our ocean gives us [every second breath](#). It absorbs around a third of the CO2 we pump out, and has taken in over a [nuclear bomb's worth](#) of [heat](#) every second for the past 150 years. It underpins our climate system and keeps our planet habitable: It is the blue beating heart of our planet.

Yet, when it comes to inclusion in climate policies, marine habitats are often neglected. A healthy ocean, teeming with life, is a vital tool in the bid to tackle global heating: more than [half of biological carbon capture](#) is stored by marine wildlife. This 'blue carbon' is in every part of the ecosystem, from the coasts, where mangrove forests store up to [four times](#) more carbon per hectare than tropical rainforests and seagrass meadows store nearly [20 gigatonnes of carbon](#) worldwide, to the open sea, where the great whales sequester [millions of tonnes of carbon](#) each year.

The COP26 climate talks and COP15 biodiversity talks this year will be the most important meetings for generations. They will set us on the road to either a sustainable future for humanity or conflict, suffering and mass extinctions.

We call on national governments to recognise the critical importance of our ocean and blue carbon in the fight against the climate emergency. Specifically, we urge our leaders to:

1. Include specific, legally binding targets to protect and restore blue carbon environments in their updated Nationally Determined Contribution implementation plans;
2. Commit to the 30x30 ocean protection plan and designate 30% of the ocean as ecologically representative marine protected areas by 2030;
3. Agree an international moratorium on deep sea mining to protect the deep sea from irreversible, large-scale harm.

Blue carbon is a golden opportunity: marine stores globally contain around [49 times](#) the amount of carbon as is in the atmosphere. However, it is a major risk if left unprotected. The current annual loss of seagrass is estimated to release around [299 million tonnes](#) of carbon every year, and for mangroves that figure rises to up to [450 million tonnes](#).

Restoring and protecting our marine habitats as a central tenet of climate policy could play a key role in our salvation. However, the protection of blue carbon must not be used as a substitute for ambitious decarbonisation, which must take place across all sectors in a 'whole of the economy' approach.

We must halt the destruction of ocean habitats, ensuring their protection through measures such as a moratorium of deep-sea mining, as well as actively restoring much of these habitats that have been lost. Unsustainable [fishing practices](#) also jeopardize the ecological integrity of ocean ecosystems. Nearly [90%](#) of the world's fisheries are either fully- or over exploited, and illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing represents up to [one third](#) of the world's reported catch. At this rate, we are facing the collapse of diverse marine ecosystems across the globe, with devastating consequences for people and for our climate.

To protect our ocean and halt climate breakdown, we need a global network of ecologically representative marine protected areas to cover at least 30% of the high seas no later than 2030. These areas must be truly protected, not designated as such on paper and left open to degradation as [many have been](#). Researchers have already created a [protection plan that would work](#). By analysing each of the 25,000 squares of 100x100 km that cover the high seas, they have found the 30% of each marine habitat that would be best for conservation and climate.

Protecting our blue carbon stocks is not only effective, low cost climate mitigation, it brings multiple other benefits. Nature-based solutions like restoration and protection of marine habitats will help us meet global decarbonisation goals and prevent the worst impacts of global heating while also protecting the lives and livelihoods of the [3 billion people](#) who depend on marine biodiversity around the world.

The climate emergency is the defining issue of our time, and we demand bold leadership which recognises the intertwined crises of climate, biodiversity, and human rights and implements meaningful policies to address them together.

[Add your voice to the letter here.](#)





