# Thirty-vessel fleet launches UN Ocean Conference with urgent call for High Seas Treaty ratification



A fleet of 30 research and exploration vessels set sail off the French coastal city of Nice on Sunday to inaugurate the third United Nations Ocean Conference, coinciding with World Oceans Day. The event, themed “Ocean Wonders,” aims to highlight both the beauty and critical importance of the ocean, urging world leaders to prioritise its protection as they address various global challenges.

This year's conference expects thousands of delegates, including heads of state, scientists, and environmental advocates, to gather in Nice to tackle urgent threats facing the oceans. These threats include rising sea temperatures, devastating plastic pollution, and the overexploitation of marine resources. Alarmingly, only 2.7% of the global ocean is currently shielded from harmful activities such as industrial fishing and deep-sea mining, putting in stark contrast the global ambition of achieving 30% protection by 2030.

Among the participating vessels is the Energy Observer, a solar-powered catamaran that circumvents the globe using renewable energy alone, showcasing innovative zero-emissions maritime travel. Other notable ships include France’s Alfred Merlin, which focuses on underwater archaeology, and the WWF’s Blue Panda, dedicated to mapping and preserving the Mediterranean's seagrass meadows. The oceanic showcase is designed not only to awe but to invigorate advocacy for marine protection.

At the heart of this gathering is a strong push to ratify the High Seas Treaty, adopted in 2023. If enacted, this landmark treaty would empower nations to establish marine protected areas in international waters, which account for nearly two-thirds of the ocean and are currently largely unregulated. Rebecca Hubbard, director of the High Seas Alliance, has pointed out the urgency for such agreements, stating, “The High Seas Treaty is critical to ensuring we can protect biodiversity in the ocean… We absolutely have to protect the ocean to address those crises.”

Despite the enthusiasm surrounding these initiatives, many countries, including France, have faced criticism from environmental groups over insufficient enforcement within existing marine protected areas. Sílvia Tavares, project manager at the Oceano Azul Foundation, voiced concerns, observing that the ambition and speed of action currently fall short of what is necessary: “The ambition is not there, the speed is not there, and the scale has not been there.”

During the conference, several nations are expected to announce new marine protected areas alongside bans on destructive practices like bottom trawling. Following the parade of vessels, the “Ocean Wonders” fleet will remain in Nice, open to the public until the conference wraps up on June 13, further fostering awareness and engagement.

This conference stands as a pivotal moment, echoing the impact of the 2015 Paris Agreement, with the potential to set in motion what could be termed the 'Nice Ocean Agreements' for sustainable ocean governance. Among the key goals is the ratification of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement and significant increases in funding for a sustainable blue economy. In an assertion of collective responsibility, French Ambassador Hélène Duchêne reflected on the urgent need for international collaboration to protect the ocean, which sustains livelihoods and is fundamental to planetary health.

As discussions unfold in Nice, the urgency of transforming commitments into actionable measures to protect marine biodiversity against the backdrop of climate change remains clear. A concerted effort to enforce, restore, and expand protected areas is critical if the aspirations set forth at this conference are to materialise into lasting change for the world's oceans.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/nice-france-wwf-mediterranean-sea-b2765980.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/b525125ffa719c7cd406cd29ce9a5eae)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/nice-france-wwf-mediterranean-sea-b2765980.html), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/636f79b6-ef19-461f-9604-2918af3b5387)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://time.com/6261890/high-seas-treaty-protect-oceans/), [[5]](https://www.axios.com/2023/06/20/un-adopts-first-high-seas-treaty-marine-life-oceans)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/nice-france-wwf-mediterranean-sea-b2765980.html), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/e65dbc624babda34ae1bcef2b9a6372b)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/nice-france-wwf-mediterranean-sea-b2765980.html), [[4]](https://time.com/6261890/high-seas-treaty-protect-oceans/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/b525125ffa719c7cd406cd29ce9a5eae), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/636f79b6-ef19-461f-9604-2918af3b5387)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/nice-france-wwf-mediterranean-sea-b2765980.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/b525125ffa719c7cd406cd29ce9a5eae> - The third United Nations Ocean Conference commenced in Nice, France, on World Oceans Day, with a fleet of international research and exploration vessels sailing through the Bay of Angels to highlight the importance and beauty of the ocean. Themed 'Ocean Wonders,' the event brings together thousands of delegates, including scientists, environmental advocates, and world leaders, to address critical threats to the oceans such as rising temperatures, plastic pollution, and overfishing. Currently, only 2.7% of the global ocean is protected from harmful activities, far from the 30% target by 2030. A central focus of the conference is the push to ratify the 2023 High Seas Treaty, which would enable the creation of protected marine areas in international waters. Notable vessels participating include the Energy Observer, which runs solely on renewable energy, and several ships engaged in scientific and conservation efforts. While some nations are expected to announce new marine protections, concerns persist about inadequate enforcement in existing protected areas. The conference underscores the urgency of turning promises into concrete measures to safeguard marine biodiversity amidst the climate crisis. The fleet will remain in Nice and open to the public until the conference ends on June 13. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/b525125ffa719c7cd406cd29ce9a5eae?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/636f79b6-ef19-461f-9604-2918af3b5387> - In anticipation of the third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3), co-hosted by France and Costa Rica in Nice from June 9 to 13, French Ambassador Hélène Duchêne calls for ambitious international action to protect the oceans. With over 8 million tonnes of plastic entering the ocean annually and more than a third of fish stocks being overfished, urgent measures are essential. The conference aims to be a pivotal moment, echoing the impact of the 2015 Paris Agreement, by initiating the 'Nice Ocean Agreements' for sustainable ocean governance. Key goals include ratifying the BBNJ Agreement to govern international waters, boosting funding for a sustainable blue economy, and enhancing oceanic scientific knowledge. France and the UK, both leading maritime nations, are collaborating on initiatives such as a treaty on plastic pollution, a carbon fee on shipping emissions, and green shipping corridors. The ambassador emphasizes the collective global responsibility to protect the ocean, which supports livelihoods, fuels economic activity, and is vital to the health of the planet. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/636f79b6-ef19-461f-9604-2918af3b5387?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://time.com/6261890/high-seas-treaty-protect-oceans/> - On March 4, 2023, decades-long negotiations culminated in the successful conclusion of the U.N. High Seas Treaty at the United Nations in New York. Recognized as a historic moment, the treaty aims to fill governance gaps over high seas, which cover 40% of the planet's surface and 64% of the ocean. The treaty addresses rampant marine pollution, overfishing, and declining biodiversity, exacerbated by climate change. The scientific consensus calls for 30% of the planet to be protected by 2030, a goal affirmed by December's Global Biodiversity Framework. The treaty establishes mechanisms for designating and governing marine protected areas on the high seas, currently only 1.2% protected. Embracing equity and fair sharing of benefits, no country can claim sovereign rights over high seas marine genetic resources. The successful conclusion of six international conferences has provided momentum, yet much work remains for national ratifications and implementation. The third U.N. Ocean Conference in 2025 in Nice, France, will serve as a lighthouse guiding ongoing efforts. ([time.com](https://time.com/6261890/high-seas-treaty-protect-oceans/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.axios.com/2023/06/20/un-adopts-first-high-seas-treaty-marine-life-oceans> - The United Nations has adopted the historic 'Treaty of the High Seas,' marking the culmination of nearly two decades of negotiations. This landmark international treaty is the first-ever legally binding global agreement designed to protect marine life and biodiversity in international waters, which make up more than 60% of the Earth's surface. With only 1.2% of the world's ocean areas currently protected, the treaty provides a necessary framework for environmental protections. UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the critical importance of this achievement in combating climate change impacts and pollution, ensuring the sustainability of ocean areas beyond national jurisdictions, which account for over two-thirds of the ocean. This treaty aims to address significant threats to marine ecosystems and foster international cooperation for ocean conservation. ([axios.com](https://www.axios.com/2023/06/20/un-adopts-first-high-seas-treaty-marine-life-oceans?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://apnews.com/article/e65dbc624babda34ae1bcef2b9a6372b> - In an interview at an international ocean conference in Athens, the UN special envoy for the ocean, Peter Thomson, emphasized that the global community is not doing enough to protect coral reefs, which are vital for biodiversity, underwater life, and producing oxygen. Thomson proposed that all significant coral reefs should be incorporated into the '30x30' initiative, aiming to protect 30% of the world's land and oceans by 2030. Recently, scientists reported that coral reefs are undergoing their fourth global bleaching due to warming oceans caused by climate change. This bleaching results in the expulsion of algae that corals rely on, potentially leading to coral death if severe and prolonged. Despite ongoing protection efforts, the primary driver of these bleaching events is fossil fuel consumption resulting in greenhouse gas emissions. Thomson stressed the urgency of transitioning away from fossil fuels to prevent further ecological disaster and highlighted the importance of preserving coral reefs for a healthy planet. He also underscored the economic benefits of coral reefs for tourism and fishing and pledged to continue advocating for their protection for future generations. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/e65dbc624babda34ae1bcef2b9a6372b?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2024/06/05/ocean-is-warming-at-an-unprecedented-rate-warns-unesco_6673831_114.html> - El Océano se está calentando a un ritmo 'sin precedentes', advierte la UNESCO en su informe 'Estado del Océano 2024'. El cambio se debe a actividades humanas que están dañando el océano, afectando al ciclo del carbono y al aumento del nivel del mar, que se ha duplicado en los últimos 30 años. La pérdida de oxígeno y la contaminación, especialmente por plásticos, están degradando los ecosistemas marinos. Las praderas marinas y los manglares, esenciales para la biodiversidad y el almacenamiento de carbono, han disminuido un 20% a 35% desde 1970. Además, la acidificación y la desoxigenación del océano están causando graves consecuencias ecológicas. Aunque la investigación es vital, la falta de avances en apoyo científico es preocupante. La situación actual requiere acciones inmediatas para tratar los problemas derivados del calentamiento, acidificación y contaminación, con un llamado a los tomadores de decisiones para actuar y mitigar estos impactos. Las áreas marinas protegidas ofrecen un leve respiro, albergando especies en peligro debido a la regulación de la pesca. ([lemonde.fr](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/environment/article/2024/06/05/ocean-is-warming-at-an-unprecedented-rate-warns-unesco_6673831_114.html?utm_source=openai))