

HSA: WHO WE ARE

"We must defend the ocean as if our lives depend upon it, because they do."

Sylvia Earle, Feb 2014, United Nations



A strong voice for the conservation of the high seas

The High Seas Alliance (HSA) is a partnership of organizations and groups aimed at building a strong common voice and constituency for the conservation of the high seas in order to strengthen high seas governance, and protect the 50 percent of the planet that is the high seas. Now, more than ever, the health and sustainability of our ocean is under siege from numerous anthropogenic threats as well as new and emerging uses. While limited provision for high seas biodiversity protection exists under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), enforcement and implementation of these existing obligations is severely lacking.

The HSA currently comprises 29 NGOs, plus the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Together, we are committed to working with global leaders to:

- facilitate international cooperation to improve ocean governance; and
- ensure the protection and preservation of the marine environment, including through the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) and the establishment of high seas marine protected areas.

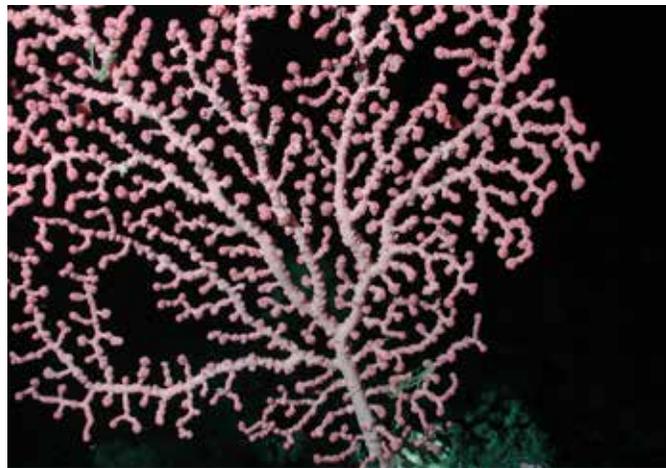
HSA members commit to working towards these goals, both as members of a collaborative effort and as individual organizations.

A new marine biodiversity treaty

At the June 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development (the Rio+20 summit), governments committed to “address, on an urgent basis, the issue of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ¹) including by taking a decision on the development of an international instrument under UNCLOS” (para. 162, *The Future We Want*) by the end of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly (September 2015).

In June 2015, after a decade of discussion and negotiation, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 69/292, moving forward the development of this new legally binding instrument (or treaty). This is the first global treaty process related to the ocean in over two decades and the only one targeted specifically at the protection of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.

The Resolution stresses “the need for the comprehensive global regime to better address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.” It allows for a two-year preparatory process (PrepCom). During this time governments will carefully explore and consider the range of options and detailed proposals on the elements that could comprise the agreement, including conservation measures such as area-based management tools, which include marine protected areas (MPAs) and reserves, environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and marine genetic resources, and questions on benefit sharing, capacity building and the transfer of marine technology.



NOAA/MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

The HSA and its members will be actively engaged throughout the PrepCom process – both at the UN and in capitals around the world – to progress to rapid and effective negotiations of a comprehensive treaty to protect the world’s ocean beyond national jurisdiction.

Only a legally binding global instrument, which focuses on the marine biological diversity of ABNJ, will address the



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inadequate, highly fragmented and poorly implemented legal and institutional framework that is currently failing to protect the high seas and the seabed below from the multiple threats faced in the 21st century, the effects of which impact the entire ocean.

Less than 1 percent² of the high seas is a designated MPA, while, even including coastal zones and areas within exclusive economic zones (EEZs), only 3.4 percent of the global ocean is protected³. There is a very long way to go if governments are to meet Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 of the Strategic Plan for Biological Diversity, which calls for at least 10 percent of the ocean to be covered by a network of MPAs by 2020. Scientists have advised going even further in order to conserve viable populations of key species, to secure ecosystem functions and to allow sufficient connectivity between individual protected areas.

In addition, the existing legal requirements to conduct EIAs in ABNJ are all but ignored, and are urgently in need of a framework to ensure that they are undertaken as required under UNCLOS. There is also a gap in ocean governance concerning access to, and benefit sharing of, marine genetic resources in ABNJ, particularly with respect to developing countries.

Through establishment of the PrepCom process and development of a new treaty, the international community has recognized that the lack of protection of high seas biodiversity is a significant and urgent problem. Rapidly completing a robust agreement is vital for ensuring that the life-giving wonders and precious biodiversity of the high seas are conserved for the sustainable use of future generations.

FOOTNOTES

1. ABNJ includes the high seas as well as the deep seabed known as ‘the Area’.
2. The only high seas MPAs are in the South Orkneys, OSPAR and Pelagos sanctuaries.
3. UNEP Protected Planet Report, p. 11 (2014): http://www.unep-wcmc.org/system/dataset_file_fields/files/000/000/289/original/Protected_Planet_Report_2014_01122014_EN_web.pdf?1420549522