



# Global Marine Programme

*Restoring the balance*

## High Seas

### Ocean Territory under Threat

#### Background

An estimated 64 percent of the oceans lies beyond national jurisdiction and these areas are known as the high seas. In recent years the high seas have come to be appreciated for the wealth of their resources such as fisheries and minerals, for their role in influencing global climate and for their unique habitats, such as deep sea corals, seamounts, hydrothermal vents and submarine canyons that support high levels of biological diversity.

The high seas are open access common areas, subject to international or regional agreements. As such, the high seas are increasingly being exploited and degraded by industries that are not restricted in any way from exploiting their resources.

Threats to high seas, their adjacent exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and their habitats include commercial fishing, oil and gas exploration and production, seabed mining, shipping, bioprospecting, marine scientific research and pollution.

High seas marine protected areas (HSMPAs) or "high seas site specific management regimes" are conservation tools for the effective management of marine species and habitats without necessarily prohibiting non-damaging resource use.

Implementing high seas management regimes will require new thinking and innovative approaches to test existing legal and technical frameworks, apply enforcement actions over large areas offshore and to adapt management to changing threats.

Once international legal and technical regimes for high seas management can be modified to accommodate HSMPAs or other management frameworks, we will turn a corner towards adequate protection for the resources and habitats of the high seas.



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*Nearly all whale species were once hunted to the brink of extinction. Today, WWF is working to establish high seas marine protected areas to help ensure that important migratory corridors and nursery areas for whales are protected from major threats.*

#### International Attention

WWF has identified the high seas as an enormous gap in the global protected seas system that must be addressed. Together with IUCN and WCPA, we are developing a strategy and framework for establishing a management and conservation regime for the high seas. WWF has been influential in working with States in establishing MPAs worldwide and is well positioned to take the high seas agenda forward internationally.

In recent months, WWF has worked to increase international attention for high seas conservation. At the 2003 UN Informal Open-ended Consultative Process on the Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) meeting, WWF was invited to address the plenary. We called for a high seas pilot area to be identified as a case study on high seas regimes, and for an increased focus on the management and conservation, including HSMPAs, for these vast expanses of open ocean.

Adding to this, WWF had a major role in developing a recommendation on high seas conservation and management at the 2003 World Parks Congress. These have since led to a recommendation for at least five HSMPAs to be developed by 2008.

WWF is also actively working to ensure that high seas conservation is included in the agendas of relevant international meetings, such as the Conference of Parties for the Convention on Biological Diversity.



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*Shipping, fishing and extractive industries have been unregulated on the high seas for decades. While these industries are important to our global economy, there are some areas where their activities can adversely impact marine biodiversity.*

## Mobilising Action for the High Seas

As we work to build international support for high seas marine protected areas, recognising that this is a long-term process, WWF is joining the global effort to immediately protect high seas resources and to address problems related to industry exploitation of marine resources in the open ocean. Some recent examples include:

- WWF and other NGOs have forwarded a letter to the UN General Assembly, calling for immediate action and temporary moratorium on bottom trawling fisheries on seamounts and deep sea corals, until actions can be taken to secure their protection.
- Working with IUCN and WCPA, WWF has developed a 10-year action plan to deliver high seas marine protected areas. Currently, WWF is working to set up the international legal framework needed to allow for high seas conservation and is developing pilot projects in places like the Grand Banks of Canada.
- A meeting of 40 leading marine experts from around the world was held in Malaga, Spain, to discuss HSMPAs. One of the key outcomes of the meeting was the identification of several urgent priority sites for high seas and deep seas conservation that the international community must work to protect.
- WWF issued a joint statement to the UN with the International Transport Workers Federation and Greenpeace on the reinforcement of flag State jurisdiction, encouraging the new UN Task Force on Flags of Convenience to take the steps necessary to increase the transparency of flag State responsibilities.
- WWF is involved in promoting the utilisation of existing international legal regimes, which may include the negotiation of additional codes of conduct and voluntary guidelines, as well as the development of new and supplementary agreements.
- WWF is also developing cooperation with government bodies in South Africa and France on extending the Heard Islands and McDonalds Islands MPA to include also the Kerguelen Islands in the Southern Ocean.
- Together with several government ministers and IUCN, WWF is a member of an IUU Task Force within the OECD that is developing recommendations for reducing IUU fishing on the high seas.



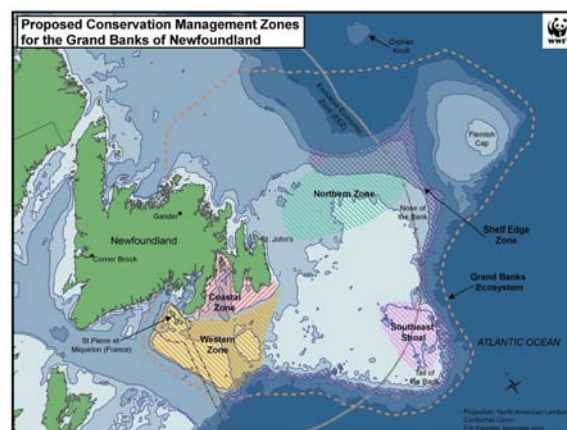
WWF has identified the Kerguelen Islands as an urgent priority for a high seas MPA or management regime due to its importance for fisheries and marine biodiversity.

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Establishing high seas MPAs is one way to help manage fishing activity on the high seas, as the industry continues to search further offshore and at deeper depths for fish.

## Building a Conservation Vision for the Grand Banks



Establishing a marine protected area beyond national jurisdiction will present both a challenge and an opportunity for the international community.

The Grand Banks off the coast of Newfoundland is one of the richest and most overexploited ecosystems in the world. The area covers both national jurisdiction and the high seas. Because of its importance to biodiversity and fishing activities, WWF has identified the Grand Banks as a potential pilot high seas management site.

Working with governments, the fishing industry and many other stakeholders, WWF is developing a management plan for high seas conservation that will protect marine resources and provide for their sustainable exploitation.

WWF is pursuing practical and feasible steps that can be taken to advance:

- implementation of an ocean zoning approach, including protected areas, for the conservation and management of the Grand Banks.
- development of international and institutional legal and technical mechanisms to operate both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

Sustained international public support for a Grand Banks conservation vision will be necessary to mobilise investment and support. A combined effort from government, non-governmental organizations, industry and the private sector will be essential for the project to succeed.

### Contacts

**Charlotte BREIDE**, WWF International  
+41 22 364 9025, cbreide@wwfint.org

**Sarah BLADEN**, WWF International  
+41 22 364 9019, sbladen@wwfint.org