

Let's Be *Nice* To The Ocean:

Thinking Outside the Box before the Third UN Ocean Conference

Nice, June 2025

Making Ocean Protection the
Norm rather than the Exception -
Modalities, Opportunities & Risks

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (November 2023)

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Mangrove forest in Fiji.
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Executive Summary

Published less than two years before the 3rd UN High-Level Ocean Conference takes place in Nice, France, in June 2025, this paper is part of a series started in 2021 to trigger and encourage conversations about innovative ways to improve ocean protection and governance.

Human activities have disrupted the relative climatic and ecological

stability of the *Holocene epoch* and pushed our planet into the uncharted waters of the *Anthropocene*,¹ a new historical era where the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, the rate of species extinction² or unpredictability of natural processes are bound to increase globally. The *Anthropocene* is accelerating in the ocean faster than anywhere else.³

1. Waters, C.N., Zalasiewicz, J., Summerhayes, C., Barnosky, A.D., Poirier, C., Gałuszka, A., Cearreta, A., Edgeworth, M., Ellis, E.C., Ellis, M. and Jeandel, C., 2016. The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene. *Science*, 351(6269).

2. Dirzo, R., Young, H.S., Galetti, M., Ceballos, G., Isaac, N.J. and Collen, B., 2014. Defaunation in the Anthropocene. *science*, 345(6195), pp.401-406.

3. Jouffray, J.B., Blasiak, R., Norström, A.V., Österblom, H. and Nyström, M., 2020. The blue acceleration: the trajectory of human expansion into the ocean. *One Earth*, 2(1), pp.43-54.

Climate change-induced ocean heatwaves are intensifying and becoming more frequent,⁴ overfishing has increased almost uninterruptedly since the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) started releasing statistics in 1974,⁵ and mass, heat-induced coral bleaching events are undoing coral gardening restoration efforts. The interplay between the ocean's declining health and the climate crisis is becoming more apparent than ever before. The ocean, which has absorbed 93%

of excess heat and close to 20% of the anthropogenic CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere, is reaching tipping points which will lead to many ecosystems to irreversible regime shifts and collapses.⁶ These drastic changes threaten the provision of paramount ecosystem services for humanity and the rest of our planet's inhabitants. **The Ocean is nice to us humans, to say the least; it is time for us to be *Nice* to the ocean.**

Co-hosted by the governments of France and Costa Rica, **the third**

High-Level United Nations Ocean Conference will take place in the city of Nice on the French Mediterranean riviera in June 2025. By the time of writing, we have less than a year and a half to ensure the truly transformative outcome the ocean and marine life so desperately need. Less than two years to be *Nice* to the ocean. More tangible ocean conservation and sustainable management efforts, alongside the urgent decarbonization of the economy, are needed today to bend the curves of the climate and marine biodiversity crises.

This paper is the culmination of three years of *thinking outside the box* by an inter- and trans-disciplinary community of experts,

undertaken by the Varda Group, supported by Bertarelli Philanthropy, TBA21 Academy, the Tara Ocean Foundation, the MedPAN network, the Ocean Born Foundation, and the Ocean and Climate Platform, and hosted by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, to propose innovative actionable ideas, principles and frameworks that can support a lifeline to the ocean during the Anthropocene. At the time of writing, there are less than 18 months to flesh out the following ideas into operational propositions for the Nice UN Ocean Conference:

4. Smale, D.A., Wernberg, T., Oliver, E.C., Thomsen, M., Harvey, B.P., Straub, S.C., Burrows, M.T., Alexander, L.V., Benthuyssen, J.A., Donat, M.G. and Feng, M., 2019. Marine heatwaves threaten global biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services. *Nature Climate Change*, 9(4), pp.306-312.

5. FAO. 2022. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022. Towards Blue Transformation*. Rome, FAO.

6. IPCC AR6: Eyring, V., et al. (2021). Human Influence on the Climate System. In: *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 423–552.



Artisanal fishing boats, El Cardón,
Baja California, 2023.
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The Protection Principle

A paradigm shift through which the burden of proof is not placed on those seeking conservation and sustainable management measures, but rather on those who wish to pursue extractive or polluting activities.

We have identified three key areas where some of these ideas may be tested opportunistically in the context of the Nice Conference: the Deep Ocean, the Southern Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.

Blue Finance

Contrary to conventional belief, ocean action does not necessarily

require more money but a wiser and more rational use of existing public funds, especially the billions of USD which are expected to be available from the agreed reduction of harmful incentives and subsidies after 2025.

Zero Discharge targets

Put in place in priority industrial and geographical sectors to complement and reinforce current efforts to address marine pollution, especially from plastic wastes, and achieve clean seas through the elimination of toxic discharges and emissions in order to protect marine ecosystems, seafood, and human health.

Ministries of the Ocean

From global internet fibre optic cables to the majority of international trade, to the nutrition and livelihood of three billion people, the future of the ocean is intrinsically linked to the functioning of our current and future economy. Its sustainable and equitable governance and use deserves priority ministerial recognition and attention.

Reformed governance of migratory and straddling biodiversity

To develop new ways of operationalizing the UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA), including by overhauling the outdated regional fisheries management systems and establishing Regional Ocean Management Organizations, putting at the heart of their mandates ecosystem sustainability and equity in the context of climate and ocean change.

Cap de la Nao.
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