

December 2024

Small Islands Alliance: Guardians of the Ocean!

Acknowledging the outstanding efforts of small islands communities and stakeholders in the establishment and effective stewardship of protected areas, and their pivotal role in tackling the triple planetary crisis

Objectives

The objective of this alliance is to affirm the crucial role played by small islands territories of less than 150 km² in the creation of effectively managed protected areas in the world. The alliance will address the triple planetary crisis— comprising climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss— by advocating for international support and the integration of traditional knowledge and community-led initiatives in protected areas management. This focus extends to any islands, regardless of their administrative status, in any ocean.

Perspectives

The 150 000, or so, small islands of less than 150 km² in the world are often regarded as indicators of change, offering early insights of the broader impacts of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. The cultural heritage of small island communities, which is deeply intertwined with their natural environment, is also at risk. The loss of biodiversity and shifting environmental conditions can erode traditional knowledge, practices, and cultural identities, and in extreme cases, pose a threat to the very survival of island communities. Small islands also possess a unique and invaluable inspiring value, providing a sense of place and cultural identity, and showcasing a remarkable adaptability of their communities in the face of several environmental changes during the past.

By harnessing the inherent strengths and knowledge of island communities, we can create resilient and effective protected areas on the long run that not only protect marine biodiversity but also support the social and economic well-being of those who depend on these ecosystems. The engagement of local communities and stakeholders in the governance and management of protected areas ensures that conservation efforts are grounded in local realities and are more likely to be successful and sustainable in the long term. This alliance aims to galvanize international collaboration to speak as one voice and reinforce the pivotal role of small islands in the global effort to safeguard marine biodiversity and address the triple planetary crisis.

Preamble

ACKNOWLEDGING that small islands are unique ecosystems with high levels of biodiversity and endemism, while simultaneously being places of specific cultural and social expressions.

CONSIDERING that the triple planetary crisis poses significant threats to marine and coastal ecosystems, which are particularly vulnerable on small islands.

RECALLING that human terrestrial pressures are particularly significant for small islands and directly impact marine ecosystems, which highlights the importance of the land-sea link in protected areas management.

RECOGNIZING that effectively managed protected areas are essential tools providing multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits for conserving marine biodiversity, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and supporting the livelihoods of island communities in terms of food security, jobs and local economy.

CONSCIOUS of the essential role that island communities and stakeholders can play in the stewardship and sustainable management of protected areas, leveraging traditional knowledge and local practices.

ACKNOWLEDGING the increasing global necessity to create Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and support Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), including commitments under international frameworks such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (2010) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

RECALLING Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (2021), which aims to ensure that at least 30% of terrestrial and inland waters, as well as marine and coastal areas, in particular areas of high importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are adequately conserved and managed through the establishment of ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably managed protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures by 2030.

RECALLING the significant areas of the exclusive economic zones of island countries and their essential role in achieving the previously mentioned target.

TROUBLED by the ongoing challenges faced by small islands, which often contend with limited resources, vulnerability to natural disasters, and external economic pressures, which can undermine the resilience of island communities.

AFFIRMING that a collaborative and inclusive approach involving local communities and stakeholders, private companies, multilevel governments, and international partners is critical for the successful creation and management of MPAs and/or OECMs on small islands.

RESPECTING the profound interconnectedness between small islands and the oceanic ecosystems they are part of, which are vital for global biodiversity and climate resilience.

Operative Section

United as members of the **Small Islands Alliance**, we present the following proposals to strengthen and protect our communities and ecosystems:

1. Integrate traditional knowledge

Ensure that management plans for protected areas incorporate local and traditional island knowledge, as well as community-led practices, to promote culturally appropriate and sustainable approaches. Make provisions for tenure security and rights recognition for indigenous and local communities, in alignment with the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries Voluntary Guidelines.

2. Enhance representation in decision-making

Strengthen the inclusion of island peoples and governments in international, regional, and national decision-making forums, ensuring their perspectives shape global environmental and social policies.

3. Increase media visibility

Encourage the international media to pay particular attention to micro-islands communities and stakeholders, by highlighting their territories, the environmental challenges they face, and their conservation and sustainable ecosystem management efforts.

4. Recognize small islands in global conservation efforts

Advocate for the international community to recognize small island communities and stakeholders as essential contributors to global biodiversity targets, supporting their protective measures for terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

5. Address the Triple planetary crisis

Promote comprehensive international strategies that integrate marine and coastal ecosystem conservation and restoration, specifically through MPAs and OECMs on small islands.

6. Mobilise financial and technical support

Facilitate access to funding and technical support for small island communities and stakeholders to create, manage, and expand protected areas, with dedicated resources for small islands to strengthen their ecological resilience and capacity for ecosystem preservation. This can be achieved by streamlining dedicated funding specifically for protected areas on small islands, ensuring these communities have the necessary resources and expertise to safeguard their unique ecosystems.

7. Foster partnerships and cooperation

Build alliances among small islands, regional authorities and organisations, and international stakeholders to share best practices, resources, and innovations in MPA and OECM management and creation, enhancing collaborative conservation efforts.

8. Advance capacity-building in blue skills

Develop and support awareness and training programs focused on blue skills for island communities and stakeholders, empowering them to lead in marine conservation and sustainable development through participatory and ethical approaches that reinforce local resilience.

9. Implement nature-based solutions

Promote the restoration and conservation of blue carbon ecosystems to build climate resilience on small islands and support adaptation and mitigation measures aligned with nature-based solutions, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

10. Standardise monitoring methodologies

Develop and implement standardised methodologies and indicators, including socio-economic ones, for assessing the effectiveness of protected areas on small islands, tailored to their specific contexts and the diversity of local ecosystems.

11. Strengthen Maritime Spatial Planning

Prioritise land-sea interaction monitoring and regulation within maritime spatial planning frameworks to support balanced development and sustainable urban growth in vulnerable coastal areas.

12. Promote eco-responsible practices across sectors

Develop sector-specific guidelines to support biodiversity-friendly agriculture, small-scale low-impact fisheries, and eco-conscious tourism that preserves natural and cultural heritage. This includes promoting agricultural practices that do not impact negatively biodiversity and ecosystems, fostering local and small-scale fisheries to support sustainable ocean-based economies, and encouraging sustainable and accountable tourism that preserves natural resources and cultural heritage. Encourage the adoption of low-carbon, locally tailored energy and transport solutions to protect island ecosystems.

13. Support community-led scientific research

Encourage the production of traditional and scientific knowledge by small island communities and stakeholders through participatory and multidisciplinary research approaches that address the impacts of human activities and climate change on local and marine ecosystems, fostering community-driven understanding and behavioural change.