



2021 United Nations Decade  
2030 of Ocean Science  
for Sustainable Development



April 8-9, 2024

# BECOME AN MPA MANAGER FOR A DAY!

A roleplaying game at the 2024 UN  
Ocean Decade's satellite event "Marine  
Protected Areas Forum"

Report prepared by  
**SUBMARINER Network**

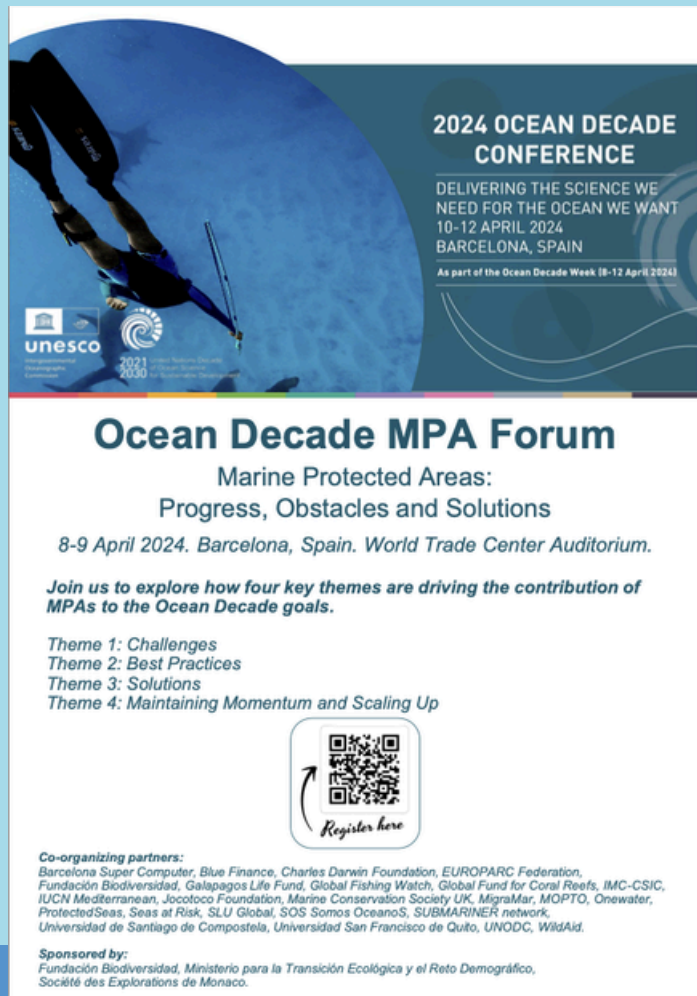


# MPA Forum



## Context

As part of the [UN Ocean Decade Conference](#), which was held in Barcelona between April 8-12th, 2024, the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) forum was co-organised at the World Trade Center with panelists from across the globe, to explore challenges, best practices and solutions regarding MPAs.




**2024 OCEAN DECade CONFERENCE**  
 DELIVERING THE SCIENCE WE NEED FOR THE OCEAN WE WANT  
 10-12 APRIL 2024  
 BARCELONA, SPAIN  
 As part of the Ocean Decade Week (8-12 April 2024)

**Ocean Decade MPA Forum**  
 Marine Protected Areas:  
 Progress, Obstacles and Solutions  
 8-9 April 2024. Barcelona, Spain. World Trade Center Auditorium.

**Join us to explore how four key themes are driving the contribution of MPAs to the Ocean Decade goals.**

*Theme 1: Challenges*  
*Theme 2: Best Practices*  
*Theme 3: Solutions*  
*Theme 4: Maintaining Momentum and Scaling Up*



**Co-organizing partners:**  
 Barcelona Super Computer, Blue Finance, Charles Darwin Foundation, EUROPARC Federation, Fundación Biodiversidad, Galapagos Life Fund, Global Fishing Watch, Global Fund for Coral Reefs, IMC-CSIC, IUCN Mediterranean, Jocotoco Foundation, Marine Conservation Society UK, MigraMar, MOPTO, Onewater, ProtectedSeas, Seas at Risk, SLU Global, SOS Somos OceanoS, SUBMARINER network, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, UNODC, WildAid.

**Sponsored by:**  
 Fundación Biodiversidad, Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, Sociéte des Explorations de Monaco.



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## Global context

In the global effort to safeguard our oceans, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have emerged as indispensable tools for conservation and sustainable management. As nations worldwide grapple with the urgent need to address the escalating threats facing marine ecosystems, the role of MPAs has assumed paramount importance in political agendas.

The political landscape surrounding MPAs is characterised by a complex interplay of competing interests, divergent stakeholder perspectives, and evolving policy frameworks. At the heart of this intricate web lies the imperative to balance environmental conservation with socio-economic development, a delicate equilibrium that often eludes easy resolution.

In the face of mounting pressures from overfishing, habitat degradation, pollution, and climate change, the UN established the Ocean Decade, a 10-year framework initiative to identify, generate and use critical ocean knowledge to manage the ocean sustainably. In parallel, the European Commission's Mission Ocean attempts to reduce marine pollution, protect and restore marine habitats, promote sustainable fisheries, and mitigate the impacts of climate change on Europe's aquatic ecosystems, both by 2030. Against the backdrop of such ambitious international targets including the 30 by 30 goal, which aims to designate 30% of Ocean area as protected areas, and 10% as strictly protected areas by 2030, the establishment and effective management of MPAs have become central tenets of global marine governance. However, despite these ambitions, the sobering truth remains: only 7.6% of the world's oceans are protected, 17.5% considering marine areas under national jurisdiction (UNEP-WCMC et al., 2021)\*, and a significant portion of MPAs across the globe lack comprehensive management plans\*\*, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and degradation.

Recognising these challenges, it becomes clear that merely designating areas as protected is insufficient to guarantee the effective conservation of our marine environments. To enhance the efficacy and sustainability of MPAs, it is essential to adopt adaptive management approaches that are co-created with the involvement of local stakeholder groups. However this, together with the pressures each MPA faces, poses various challenges of its own. From navigating conflicting stakeholder interests to securing adequate resources for monitoring and enforcement, the responsibilities entrusted to MPA managers are crucial. In this context, the need to understand the complexities of MPA management becomes paramount.

## The game

We thus considered that putting the audience in the shoes of the MPA managers to explore the environmental, social, economic, multi-use, and policy challenges that MPAs might face, would help everyone gain invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics shaping marine conservation efforts, and we considered the best way to do so was through a roleplaying game. We presented a story of an imaginary MPA called 'the Blue Sanctuary', explaining the context and have few people act on stage the position of each stakeholder group they were assigned (fishers, authorities, investors, scientists, local community, MPA managers and Marine Spatial Planners). After knowing the state of play we then split the crowd into 5 groups to discuss and make them come up with a solution for the Blue Sanctuary, present it to the audience and vote on the best solution. The winning team took a prize home: they adopted a shark they can actually track and see where it's swimming! The shark is named 'Isla' and the winning group is the official adopter ❤️

\*UNEP-WCMC, IUCN, and NGS (2021). *Protected Planet Live Report 2021*. Available online at: <https://livereport.protectedplanet.net/chapter-2> (Accessed January 22, 2021).

\*\* <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/news/only-18-eu-mpas-management-plans>

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## The story

In a coastal Marine Protected Area (MPA), called the Blue Sanctuary, a pressing set of challenges threatens the delicate balance of its ecosystems. Traditional fishers, marginalised and with low education, persist in illegal clam harvesting within the MPA's boundaries. Despite being culturally accepted, this practice jeopardizes the area's biodiversity, with no studies conducted on the clam species' capacity and thus, sustainability.

Compounding these issues is the MPA's financial difficulties, leaving it unable to enforce regulations or provide alternative livelihoods to fishers. Meanwhile, the presence of an invasive fish species exacerbates the ecological concerns. potential developers show interest in the region, which makes conservation efforts much more difficult. Amidst these obstacles, potential developers show interest in the MPA area for potential development of a project, further complicating conservation efforts.

The situation calls for an urgent need for sustainable solutions to safeguard the MPA's biodiversity while addressing the socio-economic needs of its local communities. Balancing conservation, regulation enforcement, community engagement, and economic development is paramount to ensure the long-term health and resilience of the MPA and its ecosystems.



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## Solutions presented (and voted) by the audience

1

Initiate a community-based project involving scientists in the first stage to address policy coherence, education, and data gaps. In the second phase, alternatives such as aquaculture, improved fishing practices, and a restaurant promoting eco-tourism will be introduced. Investors will fund these potential solutions and recoup their investments through the restaurant revenues.

2

A collaborative stakeholder board is seeking co-solutions that respect cultural values, securing funding for ecological assessments and data collection. This includes long-term investments based on ecosystem evaluations, financing scientific research, and promoting gender inclusiveness.

3

We would launch a restoration project to assess the impact of clam fishing and develop a clam harvesting procedure. Furthermore, scuba diving activities would be introduced to demonstrate traditional clam fishing techniques to tourists. We would open a sustainable 'chiringuito' onshore, offering eco-tours to showcase the local beauty of the area. Lastly, we would target invasive species for fishing and establish a sustainable fish brand to market our products at the chiringuito.

4

In the first step we would initiate a participatory dialogue to facilitate mutual understanding and exchange of knowledge, needs, problems, and solutions. Following this, the idea would be to implement a zoning approach where designated areas for tourism development would be established, and funded by investors. These funds would also support capacity building within the fisheries sector, including compensating fishermen for their time invested in this initiative through a partnership with the government. This collaboration would enable them to assist the research community in collecting data to enhance area management practices.

5

Over the span of five years, we would adopt a collaborative, science-based approach, beginning with social science research to comprehend local area usage. Fishermen would be actively involved in data collection through citizen science initiatives. Key actions would include the development of sustainable aquaculture on land to bolster local economies and exploring the possibility of an offshore wind farm as a sustainable development option. A management committee, comprising a balanced mix of stakeholders, would oversee the implementation, with industry excluded from the design phase. This committee would ensure adaptability to new findings and ecological priorities. The overarching goal of this strategy is to effectively integrate conservation with socio-economic development.

# About the organising projects

## Blue4all



BLUE4ALL, a project under Mission Ocean, working with 25 Living Labs and Information Sites in the Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea, and North-East Atlantic regions to develop **tools for preserving and restoring the marine environment in a socially sustainable and acceptable way**, by aligning the diverse needs and expectations of MPA managers on a bottom-up approach, with the overarching goals of marine conservation and regulatory expectations from a top-down approach.



MSP4BIO stands for **Improved Science-Based Maritime Spatial Planning to Safeguard and Restore Biodiversity in a coherent European MPA network**. It is a project that has the overall aim of mainstreaming biodiversity into policy decisions on different governance levels and be developing an integrated socio-ecological management of the marine ecosystems.



ULTFARMS is an Ocean Mission project that is **set to transform the future of Low-Trophic Aquaculture (LTA) systems** by generating a profitable, sustainable, and ecological production chain of low-trophic level species, such as seaweed and mollusks, in offshore wind farms located in the North Sea and Baltic Sea.

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# Subscribe to our Blue Horizons newsletter

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YOUR GO-TO SOURCE NEWSLETTER ON MARINE CONSERVATION IN EUROPE



# BLUE HORIZONS IS OUT!





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# Thank you



to all participants!

Organiser entities:



Contact:

Questions? Get in touch!

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