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The 30x30 target in the ocean: make the high seas count

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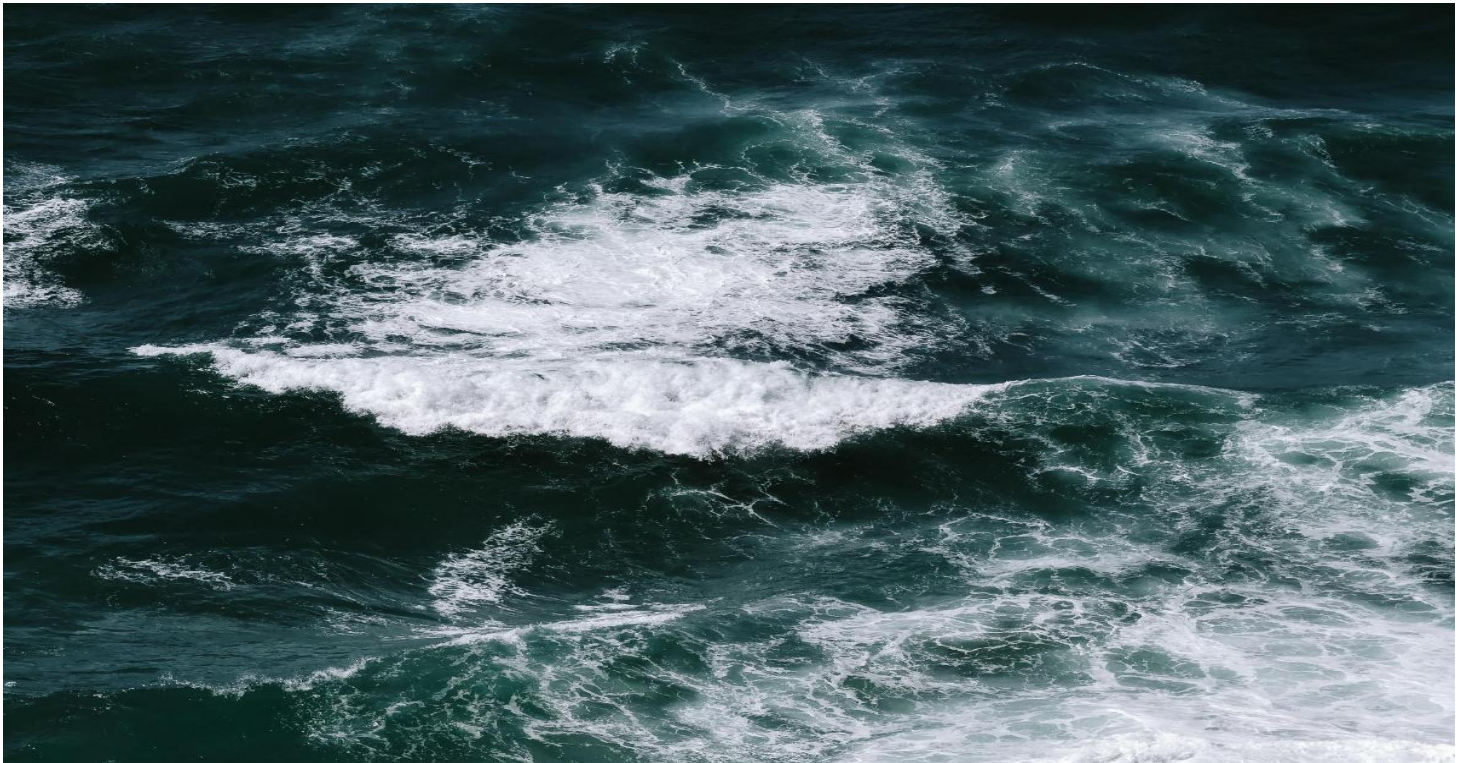
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Florence Morel sur LinkedIn : L'Office français de la biodiversité (OFB) recrute un chargé de mission...

The 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will provide an opportunity to discuss the implementation of the [Kunming-Montreal Agreement](#), including its flagship Target 3.1 As of today, only 8% of the global ocean is covered by marine protected areas (MPAs), and the international community is therefore confronted with a significant challenge to achieve the target within the next six years. Recent IDDRI publications make the case for States to include the high seas in this effort, and highlight key conditions for success.

If designed and managed following internationally recognized standards and the best available science, MPAs offer the most effective tools for protecting ecosystems and species, rebuilding marine life, increasing resilience to climate change, enhancing ecosystem services, and supporting economic development. In 2023, States adopted the international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). The treaty establishes a mechanism for the creation of High Seas MPAs (HSMPAs), which was missing until now, and will facilitate the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Agreement.

Since then, there has been a global momentum to [achieve the 60 ratifications required for it to enter into force](#). Meanwhile, some States and other stakeholders are anticipating the implementation challenges of the treaty and are preparing proposals for the first high seas MPAs.² Several initiatives are currently underway across various marine regions and it is crucial to strengthen and expand them, especially through [three specific directions](#): (i) identifying candidate sites; (ii) launching the collaboration and consultation process outlined in Article 19(2) of the BBNJ Treaty; and (iii) anticipating the challenges of implementing future MPAs. Concerning this last point, IDDRI has recently explored two critical elements for the effective management of future HSMPAs.

Innovative technologies: part of the solution, no silver bullet

The first paper explores the [monitoring, control and surveillance \(MCS\)](#) of human activities, a key enabling condition to avoid “paper parks” and a specific challenge in the high seas, given the remote nature of these areas. In this regard, the international community should harness the power of emerging technologies such as satellite imagery, remote sensing, and AI (Artificial Intelligence)-powered analytics to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of MCS activities. These technological tools, provided by companies and non-profit organizations, can bring a significant added value to the implementation of management plans of future HSMPAs, by optimizing resource allocation and providing near real-time insights into suspected illegal activities. However, technology alone will not be enough. Supporting policy and technical measures—such as addressing capacity gaps, fostering cooperation for maritime patrols, strengthening port State controls, reforming national judicial systems, and facilitating adequate information sharing—will be essential to operationalize technology and ensure the effective management of future HSMPAs.

Costs assessment of future high seas MPAs, a key condition to secure long-term sustainable financing

Another key condition of success for future HSMPAs is to ensure their long-term sustainable financing. This inevitably raises the question of assessing their future costs. This is a complex issue for States, given the limited experience with HSMPAs and the fact that insights from the extensive literature on coastal MPA costs are not fully applicable to the high seas. In this context, the second IDDRI paper provides an initial methodological approach for

considering the [management costs of future HSMPAs](#). It highlights the various factors that can influence—either increase or decrease—management costs and their distribution, and shows that there are opportunities to manage, reduce and share costs. It also demonstrates that these costs will widely depend on the choices made by States regarding the governance model (i.e. cooperative, centralized or decentralized governance), conservation objectives and zoning of future HSMPAs—strictly protected MPAs being generally less costly to manage than multi-purpose MPAs.

COP16 of the CBD should undoubtedly put the 30x30 target, and the role of the high seas in efforts to achieve it, back at the heart of international discussions. Recent analysis by IDDRI highlights that, alongside ongoing ratification efforts, States must proactively consider the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of future HSMPAs, paying specific attention to MCS needs and cost assessments. These are key issues to consider during the informal discussions expected to take place among champion States and civil society in Cali.

1 This target calls for 30% of the earth's land and sea to be conserved through the establishment of protected areas and other area-based conservation measures.

2 For ease of reading, this blog post uses the term "High Seas MPAs" to designate these areas, which can be established both on the high seas, i.e. the water column beyond the exclusive economic zones, and on the seabed beyond the continental shelves of coastal States, formally known as "the Area".

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