

# HIGH SEAS ALLIANCE POSITION PAPER



## Strong action needed at Rio+20 to secure a sea-change for ocean conservation

A healthy ocean environment provides crucial support for the three pillars of sustainable development. Degradation of marine ecosystems and failure to conserve marine biodiversity have significant economic, environmental and social consequences. Recognizing this, the UNCSDBureau has indicated that “management of the ocean” will be one of the seven priority areas addressed by Rio+20.

The High Seas Alliance, comprising 22 member organizations, works towards the protection, conservation and restoration of marine ecosystem health and biodiversity, particularly in areas beyond national jurisdiction. These areas comprise 64% of the world’s ocean and nearly half the planet’s surface. They support important fisheries and harbor an enormous reservoir of biological diversity that are increasingly under threat from overfishing, pollution, climate change, invasive species and habitat destruction.

The High Seas Alliance is committed to working with global leaders to improve ocean governance to ensure the protection and preservation of the marine environment including through the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of marine genetic resources. To accomplish these goals, the High Seas Alliance calls on States at Rio+20 to agree to take urgently needed action to improve the rules and regulations that govern the high seas.

**The Specifically, the High Seas Alliance welcomes and supports paragraph 80 of the UNCSDB zero draft of the outcome document, *The Future We Want* which states:**

*“We note the establishment by the UN General Assembly of an Ad Hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction, and we agree to initiate, as soon as possible, the negotiation of an implementing agreement to UNCLOS that would address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.”*

Inclusion of text on a new implementing agreement under UNCLOS in the zero draft demonstrates unprecedented and crucial political will to address failings of the current regime for managing activities with a potential to adversely impact the ocean beyond national jurisdiction. This text reinforces the language of the Oceans Omnibus resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2011 to address gaps in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity on the high seas and reflects the inputs of many States’ submissions to the zero draft process.

**The members of the High Seas Alliance strongly support the language included in paragraph 80 of the zero draft and commit to supporting progress towards the negotiation and establishment of this new agreement.**

Current governance of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction is characterized by a patchwork of regional and sectoral management mechanisms. This structure has failed to ensure effective implementation of States’ obligations to conserve and manage marine resources and protect the environment in areas beyond national jurisdiction. For example, MPAs and no-take reserves are proven and effective

High Seas Alliance members include:



tools to conserve and protect marine biodiversity, fish populations and vulnerable marine ecosystems. Yet there is no legal mechanism to establish multi-sector protected areas in the ocean beyond national jurisdiction, and currently less than 1% is protected. Prior environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and increasingly strategic environmental assessments (SEAs) are commonly required within national jurisdictions for activities with the potential to have significant adverse effects on the marine environment. In areas beyond national jurisdiction, however, prior EIAs are required for some activities but not for others, and standards governing how an EIA should be done vary widely among sectors. SEAs are not yet employed.

**Rio+20 offers a critical opportunity for the international community to forge a sustainable path for the future of the ocean.**

The members of the High Seas Alliance strongly support efforts to close existing legal gaps and enhance current ocean management so that it provides a more integrated, equitable and accountable framework, including through the establishment of a new implementing agreement under UNCLOS for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Without the institutional framework in place to ensure that high seas areas are effectively protected, the ocean - Earth's life support system - will face continued degradation and unsustainable exploitation, jeopardizing the ocean's potential to provide essential ecosystem services for current and future generations.

**States at Rio+20 must agree to take urgent action to conserve and protect the ocean.**

**For further information**

Contact: [info@highseasalliance.org](mailto:info@highseasalliance.org)

**Links**

- Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition: [www.asoc.org](http://www.asoc.org)
- BirdLife: [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)
- Greenpeace: [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org)

- IUCN: [www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)
- Iceland Nature Conservation Association: [www.inca.is](http://www.inca.is)
- IPSO: [www.stateoftheocean.org](http://www.stateoftheocean.org)
- Marine Conservation Institute: [www.marine-conservation.org](http://www.marine-conservation.org)
- Migratory Wildlife Network: [www.wildmigration.org](http://www.wildmigration.org)
- Natural Resources Defense Council: [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)
- Pew Environment Group: [www.pewenvironment.org/ip](http://www.pewenvironment.org/ip)
- Pretoma: [www.pretoma.org](http://www.pretoma.org)
- WDCS: [www.wdcs.org](http://www.wdcs.org), [www.cetaceanhabitat.org](http://www.cetaceanhabitat.org)
- WWF: [www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org)



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