The new High Seas Treaty sets up a global process for the establishment and effective management of networks of representative and well-connected marine protected areas in the High Seas, including highly and fully protected areas where no harmful industrial activities are allowed.

Imagine a mountain range the length of the southern Andes – 110 volcanic peaks, stretching nearly 3,000 km end to end. Imagine these mountains are filled with rare, spectacular wildlife, and imagine that nearly half the species that they shelter live nowhere else on Earth. And imagine that the majority of these underwater mountains have not been explored, and that scientists are discovering new life forms with every expedition.

Now stop imagining, because these mountains are real: the Salas y Gómez and Nazca ridges exist deep in the waters of the South-East Pacific. These two unique chains of sub-marine slopes and summits are separated from South America by the rich, cold waters of the Humboldt Current and the yawning abyss of the Atacama Trench. They provide critical habitats and migration corridors for at least 82 threatened or endangered species, along with many others of ecological and economic importance.

Thousands of years ago, Polynesian and other seafarers used this hidden landscape on their voyages of expansive human migration and discovery, with their cultural heritage uniquely preserved by the Rapa Nui on nearby Easter Island. Today, the chains of ridges remain culturally important and provide all of us with an essential service as a global carbon sink, playing a part in everybody's future.
Numerous studies have concluded these life-filled seamounts are among the most unique and ecologically significant areas globally. Far below the waves, intricate gardens of slow-growing corals and gorgonians adorn the rocky slopes in some of the clearest waters on the planet, and in the plankton-abundant upwellings over the Ridges, sharks, turtles, whales and seabirds gather to forage. This unique region is a vital habitat for commercial species too, from swordfish to jack mackerel, underpinning sustainable food security for millions – but only as long as we look after it.

The Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges are still largely ecologically intact. Not much fishing has taken place in the area, and it is crucial that this remains the case because the Ridge's biodiversity and ecosystem resilience are vulnerable. Where fishing has occurred, deep-water trawling has already destroyed coral and seabed habitats, and bycatch has taken a heavy toll. Floating plastic debris - much of it comprised of lost fishing gear - is drawn to the area by the South Pacific Gyre, driving the risk of ingestion and entanglement for many species. Meanwhile, climate change is making the sea warmer, less oxygenated and more acidic, all of which pose an existential threat to marine biodiversity.

The natural wealth of the Ridges is not limited to its biodiversity. The region contains cobalt and other mineral deposits on the seafloor which, unfortunately, may one day be targeted by deep sea mining - leading to wholesale ecosystem destruction. While no contracts have yet been issued for exploration, none of this area is officially closed to mining.

So imagine not destroying this incredible mountain range and its matchless biodiversity – imagine actually playing a part in saving it. We have a time-sensitive window of opportunity before the chance is lost forever. Chile and Peru have afforded some protection to the Ridge features within their own waters – but the rest is a global responsibility: 73% of the seamounts are in international waters with no protection. With the majority of these underwater mountains still unexplored, there is surely so much more to discover.

By permanently closing the area to fishing and mining and establishing a High Seas marine protected area through the High Seas Treaty, we can protect the Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges for ourselves and for future generations.

If you would like to see this area protected, ask governments to Save the ocean. Ratify the High Seas Treaty Now! Keep updated with the High Seas Alliance on Twitter.