

## A sustainable future: making waves for a blue economy



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**My-Linh Ngo**  
Head of BlueBay  
ESG Investment,  
Portfolio Manager,  
Responsible Investment  
BlueBay Fixed Income Team



**Camilla Windus**  
BlueBay Director,  
Global Financial Institutions  
BlueBay Fixed Income Team

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From deforestation to overfishing, there is no denying that humans are exploiting and destroying nature. And with climate change and biodiversity loss continuing to sit high on the global agenda, we highlight the important work being done by our charity partner, Blue Marine Foundation (“Blue Marine”)<sup>1</sup>, to protect our oceans.

### The importance of the blue economy

Not only is safeguarding our marine world important from an environmental perspective, but it is also clear that, as with climate, loss of nature and biodiversity represents a systematic risk for economies. This is because when we look beyond the intrinsic value of ocean, sea and coastal resources, it is clear that the global economy is highly dependent on the functioning of industries related to the ocean. The oceans are estimated to represent EUR2.5 trillion in annual output of products and services, and this is expected to expand at twice the rate of the mainstream economy by 2030<sup>2</sup>. As such, its collapse could cause widespread instability.

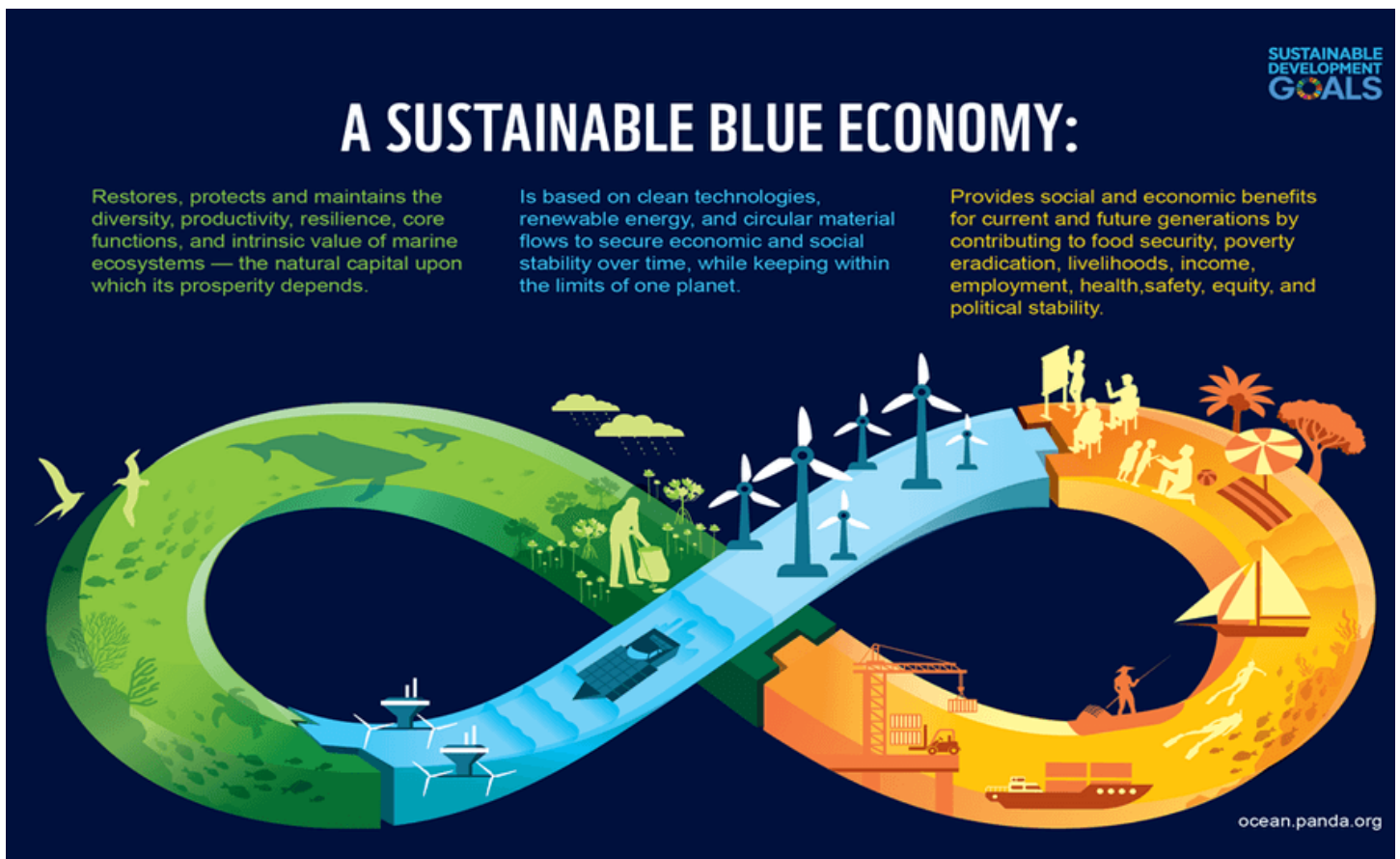
The World Bank defines the ‘blue economy’ as the “*sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health.*” It encompasses many activities, namely renewable energy, fisheries, maritime transport, tourism, climate change and waste management<sup>3</sup>.

Attention and efforts on the policy level are being stepped up, with the aim of more sustainably managing our marine environment. On a global level, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) for 2030, a framework for how governments can achieve sustainable development, includes an explicit goal (number 14) of ‘life below water’ which seeks to “*conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*”. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (“UN COP”) also has a vision of ‘living in harmony with nature’ by 2050. The COP15 biodiversity summit in December last year yielded a ‘historical’ deal to halt the loss of biodiversity. In March this year, governments reached a deal to protect the high seas, which will pave the way for the creation of more marine protected areas. Then in June, countries also moved forward on creating a legally binding treaty to regulate plastic waste, with pollution one of the five main drivers of biodiversity loss.

<sup>1</sup> [www.blumarinefoundation.com](http://www.blumarinefoundation.com).

<sup>2</sup> [www.unepfi.org/blue-finance](http://www.unepfi.org/blue-finance).

<sup>3</sup> [What is the Blue Economy? \(worldbank.org\)](http://What%20is%20the%20Blue%20Economy%20(worldbank.org)).



Source: Blue Economy: Awareness, Education and Financing: National Maritime Foundation (maritimeindia.org).

### The work of the Blue Marine Foundation

In our [recent piece](#) on the 'blue economy', we talked about how, in 2020, we selected Blue Marine as one of our corporate charity partners. Blue Marine's mission is to see at least 30% of the world's ocean under effective protection by 2030 as defined by global scientists, in order to safeguard biodiversity and build ocean resilience to climate change. Combining top-down intervention to improve governance of seas with bottom-up project delivery to support local communities at the front line of ocean conservation, Blue Marine works around the world, addressing overfishing and the destruction of biodiversity.

The work of Blue Marine plays a vital role in the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems. Continuing to engage and work with Blue Marine, alongside other organisations, is key to building the momentum and action on protecting our oceans while ensuring economic and social prosperity.

### Italian MPAs: protecting critical marine areas

An example of Blue Marine's work is an initiative, launched in 2022, which will connect seven Marine Protected Areas ("MPAs") across the coastal waters of Italy, in Tuscany, Puglia, Sicily and Sardinia. MPAs are defined geographical areas of the marine environment, established and managed to achieve long-term nature conservation and sustainable use.

Only 1.6% of Italian MPAs are effectively managed and only 0.1% are fully protected. Italian waters are some of the Mediterranean's most biodiverse, and host an estimated 14,000 marine species, of which 10% are unique to the area<sup>4</sup>. That is why Blue Marine is working on an ambitious project, to establish a network of effective MPAs and secure protection for Italy's remarkable coastal waters.

Blue Marine's approach in Italy is geographically broad, and it seeks to build local conservation capacity and restore threatened marine life. This promotes healthy oceans that are resilient to climate change and are managed pragmatically, so the Mediterranean can be enjoyed sustainably by the people who depend on it the most.

<sup>4</sup> [www.bluemarinefoundation.com](http://www.bluemarinefoundation.com).

The network initiative aims to protect tens of thousands of species, many of which are found nowhere else. They include sandbar sharks, common eagle rays and the ultra-rare monk seal, of which there are only 700 still in existence<sup>5</sup>. In 2023, communication and outreach campaigns are being developed to build local support and educate the wider community on the importance of marine conservation.

**“If we do not actively protect the ocean and manage the exploitation of its resources, the cost in economic, social and environmental terms will be immense.”**

At a wider level, the scheme will drive change in line with the UN SDGs for 2030, and the UN COP’s vision of ‘living in harmony with nature’ by 2050.

### Education and raising awareness can make a world of difference

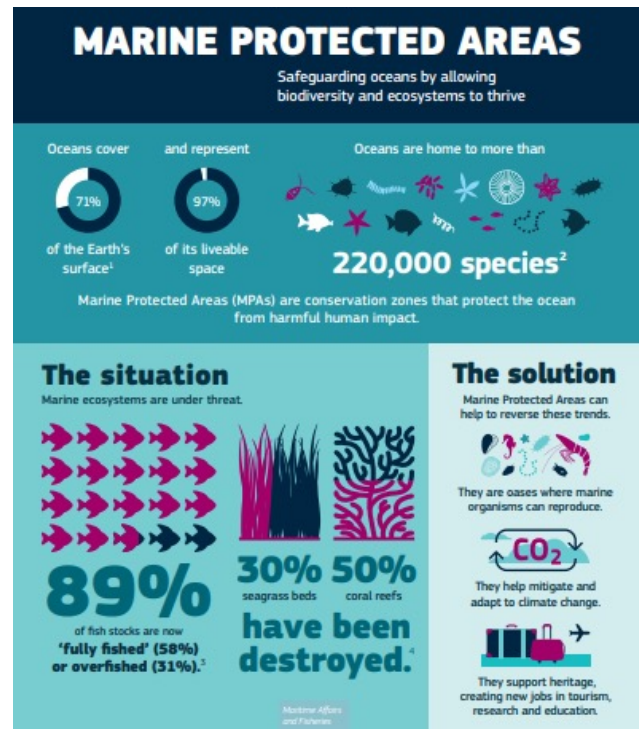
It is clear that we are at a critical point for ocean conservation. If we do not actively protect the ocean and manage the exploitation of its resources, the cost in economic, social and environmental terms will be immense. However, a global deficit in marine education has prevented knowledge about the crisis and possible solutions from reaching the general public, which in turn slows uptake into environmental policy. Education, therefore, serves both the ecosystems we strive to protect and the young people whose future depends on them.

Blue Marine is working to bridge this gap through innovative educational materials, community engagement, capacity building, connecting with schools and enhancing career opportunities for young adults. Below we give an example of one of Blue Marine’s conservation education projects.

### The Aeolian Islands: fishing and education

To help address the growing disconnect between young Italians and the older fishing community, fishermen who are signed up to Blue Marine’s Responsible Fishing Group were paid to take groups of local high school students out on their fishing boats to teach them about methods of sustainable fishing, the history and importance of small-scale fishing for communities, and the general life of an Aeolian fisherman.

The students were asked to fill out questionnaires about their experience and how it had changed (or not) their views on fishing and marine conservation. Results from the questionnaires were very positive. After the programme, 93% of students thought that creating MPAs is a good idea, 82 per cent are trying to use less plastic and 74% want to learn more about the sea. Students were also taught about the importance of marine protection alongside sustainable fishing. Almost three times as many students said they knew ‘a lot’ about MPAs after taking this programme, compared to before.



Source: European Commission.

### The role of investors in financing the blue economy

While governments are stepping up efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss, there are limits to what they can do, given the scale of the challenges faced. Closing the funding gap requires the private sector and financial market participants to play a role. Indeed, divisions over money remain one of the most complicated issues at both the UN climate and biodiversity summits. With regards to nature and biodiversity, while commitments for some funding have been agreed, the challenge is scaling up contributions from donors to support global efforts. Of the 17 UN SDGs, goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and its resources remains one of the least invested, attracting amongst the lowest share of investments at 3.5%<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> [www.blumarinefoundation.com](http://www.blumarinefoundation.com).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unepfi.org/blue-finance/>.



There remains a critical role for the financial sector in providing financial capital for the blue economy. This can occur in many different ways:

- Banks can ensure their lending policies include criteria requiring companies which have the most impact on marine environments to operate to high standards.
- Investors can work to integrate blue economy risks and opportunities in their investment analysis of companies and use this to inform on their investment decisions. They can also use their influence as owners or lenders to companies to encourage more responsible practices. This should result in reduced pollution and the promotion of healthy oceans.
- Participants in the investment value chain should collaborate and partner to identify and develop innovative solutions. This would enable banks and investors to support the blue economy by better directing their funds for issuers. This can be done through the issuance of blue economy-related labelled bonds where proceeds are earmarked for marine projects, or ambitious targets set to halt marine biodiversity loss. We are already seeing sovereigns issue debt-for-nature swaps, which commit them to fund marine conservation in return for a reduction in their debt.
- Different stakeholder groups need to work together to source data and develop tools which appropriately account for the value and benefits the blue economy provides to mitigate climate change, to enable this to be incorporated into decision-making. Just as for climate, 'green' carbon credits have emerged as a power mechanism, developing 'blue' carbon markets could play an equally important role.

There remains much to do over the coming years, however we are optimistic of progress, as stakeholders come together with creative and innovative solutions. It is time to make waves for the blue economy.



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We would like to thank the Blue Marine Foundation for their input into this piece.



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