



Center
of Excellence
in Sustainability



The 11th Our Ocean Conference Key Takeaways

Conference Overview

Research, marine protection, sustainable fisheries, and community engagement take center stage as governments and institutions commit billions to safeguarding the world's oceans.

The 2026 **Our Ocean Conference (OOC)** brought together more than 5,000 delegates under the theme “Our Ocean, Our Heritage, Our Future” during 5 days of the Youth Leadership Summit, the Research Symposium, the Executive Business & Investment Forum and the main Conference Events and Side Events. The 11th OOC reaffirmed its role as one of the world's leading platforms for international ocean governance, bringing together representatives from 104 countries and organizations. This year's conference resulted in 320 new commitments, mobilizing US\$6.4 billion in funding to support marine conservation, sustainable development, scientific research, and climate resilience.

A defining feature of this year's conference was its strong emphasis on the role of local communities in achieving healthy and resilient oceans. Participants highlighted that effective marine conservation depends not only on international agreements but also on empowering coastal communities that rely directly on marine ecosystems.

ACG commitments

Among the institutions presenting new commitments **The American College of Greece**, announced two research initiatives aimed at advancing ocean sustainability:

1. Research on further developing **nature-based solutions** to strengthen coastal resilience against climate change and coastal hazards.
2. **Strengthen ocean-related research and women's participation in marine science** through the **FemmeSTEM** initiative of the Center of Excellence in Sustainability, encouraging greater female representation in STEM disciplines connected to the marine environment.



Center
of Excellence
in Sustainability



Conference Key takeaways - presented in the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Special Standing Committee on Environmental Protection, Hellenic Parliament

[Expanding Marine Protected Areas](#)

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) remained at the heart of discussions throughout the conference. An independent assessment published in June 2026 concluded that the Our Ocean Conference has made an exceptional contribution to global marine conservation efforts. According to the report, more than one-third of all Marine Protected Areas established worldwide originated from commitments announced at previous Our Ocean Conferences, covering more than 10 million square kilometres of ocean.

This year's conference continued that momentum. Chile announced the establishment of two new Marine Protected Areas in the Juan Fernández region, protecting approximately 337,000 square kilometres of ocean. Portugal also confirmed the approval of the Azores Marine Park, covering 287,000 square kilometres and creating the largest network of protected marine areas in the North Atlantic.

Despite these achievements, experts stressed that declaring protected areas is only the first step. Effective management, enforcement, and long-term monitoring remain essential to ensure these areas deliver meaningful conservation outcomes.

[High Seas Treaty Moves into Implementation](#)

Another major milestone celebrated during the conference was the entry into force of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), widely known as the High Seas Treaty. The agreement officially entered into force on 17 January 2026, following the required 60 ratifications, and had reached 90 parties by the time of the conference.

Attention now turns to the first Conference of the Parties (COP), scheduled for January 2027 in New York, where participating countries will establish governance structures and operational procedures for implementing the treaty.

One of the treaty's most significant provisions enables the designation of Marine Protected Areas in international waters, an essential step toward achieving the global target of protecting 30% of the world's land and oceans by 2030.



**Center
of Excellence
in Sustainability**



Several important announcements reflected this new momentum. South Africa and the European Union presented plans for a proposed transboundary Marine Protected Area linking existing protected areas in the sub-Antarctic waters of South Africa and France. Meanwhile, Senegal, Mauritania, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau committed to establishing at least two transboundary Marine Protected Areas along the West African coast.

Deep-Sea Mining Remains Under Scrutiny

Although deep-sea mining was not among the conference's primary agenda items, it featured prominently in several side events. Discussions focused on strengthening international safeguards, improving oversight, and limiting mining activities until sufficient scientific evidence can ensure that fragile deep-sea ecosystems are adequately protected.

Protecting Climate-Resilient Coral Reefs

The conservation of climate-resilient coral reefs also received considerable attention. Building on commitments first announced during the Third United Nations Ocean Conference in 2025, four additional countries—Comoros, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, and the United Kingdom—joined the international pledge to protect coral reefs considered most likely to survive climate change.

Signatory governments committed to identifying and prioritizing resilient reefs, integrating coral conservation into national policies, reducing local pressures such as overfishing and pollution, implementing national monitoring programmes, and working closely with local communities to ensure equitable and effective conservation.

The initiative aims to secure 31 signatories, representing 80% of the world's coral reef coverage, by the time of COP31 later this year.

Fisheries Transparency and the Fight Against Illegal Fishing

One of the conference's most significant policy outcomes was the adoption of the Mombasa Declaration, which seeks to improve transparency in global fisheries and strengthen efforts to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The declaration recognizes IUU fishing as a major driver of marine resource depletion and ecosystem degradation. Participating governments committed to increasing transparency and accountability within the fisheries sector, enhancing monitoring and enforcement cooperation, strengthening national capacities to implement transparency reforms, and expanding ocean observation systems alongside the use of open-access data.



Center
of Excellence
in Sustainability



Looking Ahead

The Our Ocean Conference continues to serve as a catalyst for international cooperation on ocean conservation, translating political commitments into measurable action. The next conference will be held in **Halifax, Canada**, from **9–11 May 2027**. The conference will not take place in 2028 due to the **Fourth United Nations Ocean Conference**, to be jointly hosted by **Chile** and the **Republic of Korea**. The 2029 edition (13th OOC) is scheduled in **Jamaica**, while interest is already growing among several countries to host the landmark **2030 conference**, reflecting the symbolic importance of achieving the global "30 by 30" conservation target by the end of the decade.