

WHITEPAPER

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE PROTECTION OF MARINE ECOSYSTEMS, RESILIENT COASTAL COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS AND ENHANCING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

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BNP PARIBAS



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Ocean Risk and Resilience
Action Alliance

The bank for a changing world

Best practices for the protection of marine ecosystems, resilient coastal community livelihoods and enhancing economic resilience



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Marine ecosystems are vital to the planet's health and to the livelihoods of millions who depend on fisheries, tourism, and coastal resources. Yet, coastal and ocean habitats face increasing threats from climate change, overexploitation, pollution and weak governance. This whitepaper outlines global best practices to enable the protection of marine ecosystems and enhance economic resilience while ensuring the economic and social well-being of vulnerable coastal communities, positioning Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as a pathway to long-term resilience and shared prosperity — a balance at the heart of the regenerative and sustainable blue economy.

INTRODUCTION

MPAs serve as a cornerstone for sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem services. However, their effectiveness depends on integrating ecological, social, and economic strategies that empower local communities, build resilience, and enable self-sustaining financing mechanisms.

KEY THREATS TO MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND COASTAL LIVELIHOODS

01. •

Ecological and environmental threats

- Habitat degradation from destructive fishing, unsustainable tourism, and coastal development.
- Pollution from land-based runoff, plastics, and untreated sewage.
- Climate change impacts such as coral bleaching, ocean acidification, and intensified storms.
- Invasive species that disrupt native ecological balances.

02. •

Socio-Economic Threats

- Over-reliance on fisheries and resource extraction.
- Uneven tourism benefits and revenue leakage.
- Insufficient infrastructure for sustainable economic activities.

03. •

Institutional and Governance Challenges

- Fragmented authority across governments, traditional owners and Indigenous rights-holders.
- Limited enforcement, monitoring, and financial autonomy.
- Weak legal frameworks and inconsistent policy enforcement.

04. •

Cultural and Social Challenges

- Erosion of traditional conservation practices.
- Social inequities and limited participation in decision-making.
- Declining public trust in conservation institutions.

05. •

Technological and Data Gaps

- Incomplete data systems for ecological monitoring.
- Limited digital tools for enforcement and transparency.

ENABLING A REGENERATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY: CORE LEVERS FOR SUCCESS



Ecological and Environmental Enablers

- **Ecosystem Restoration:** Rehabilitation of coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass meadows.
- **Ecosystem-Based Management:** Zoning and carrying capacity limits to regulate use.
- **Climate Resilience:** Blue carbon initiatives and early warning systems.
- **Habitat Protection Technology:** Use of mooring buoys and vessel tracking to reduce reef damage.



Institutional and Governance Enablers

- **Integrated Governance:** Align local, provincial, and national roles with clear mandates. Manage networks of MPAs as part of 100% EEZ² zoning and management, supporting regenerative and sustainable economic activities to provide funding for the whole system, including fully and highly protected areas.
- **Collaborative Management:** Engage communities, traditional owners (such as indigenous peoples), NGOs, and private sector partners.
- **Strong Law Enforcement:** Combine modern surveillance with locally led authority.
- **Policy Coherence:** Align spatial, tourism, and conservation policies. Create strong national policies which safeguard marine assets and enable sustainable economic activities.



Technological and Knowledge Enablers

- **Digital Monitoring Systems:** Use integrated databases for patrols and ecosystem tracking.
- **Science-Based Management:** Continuous data collection and adaptive management.
- **Green Infrastructure:** Invest in
 - Renewable energy
 - Low-impact facilities in coastal zones
 - Light infrastructure potable water points
 - Waste management low-impact technologies to mitigate pollution



Economic and Financial Enablers

- **Flexible Financing Models:** Empower MPAs with financial autonomy through mechanisms like Public Service Agencies (BLUD¹ equivalents).
- **Revenue Diversification:** Introduce revenue generating mechanisms and enterprises such as user fees, tourism (including eco-tourism) levies, and carbon, biodiversity, or resilience credits. Develop and structure finance instruments which can connect global capital markets to locally and nationally led MPA networks, such as blue bonds.
- **Local Economic Integration:** Strengthen value chains linking conservation, community enterprises, and tourism. Clearly articulate the value proposition of marine asset protection and management.
- **Transparency in Finance:** Digital systems for public reporting and fee management. The role of risk mitigation instruments like guarantees, disaster risk and political risk insurance.



Social and Cultural Enablers

- **Community Empowerment:** Build capacity in eco-enterprises, sustainable fishing and aquaculture, and tourism.
- **Revive Indigenous Practices:** Integrate traditional resource management / community-based regulation systems (like sasi or tabu)³ into modern frameworks.
- **Social Inclusion:** Promote gender and youth participation in marine governance.
- **Education and Awareness:** Cultivate stewardship and cultural pride in marine conservation. Support peer-to-peer learning networks which build replication and scaling pathways.



Conclusion

Protecting marine ecosystems and sustaining livelihoods requires holistic management that connects ecology, economy, and equity. When healthy natural systems, empowered communities, and transparent governance work in harmony, the blue economy can transform conservation into a driver of inclusive growth — ensuring the ocean remains both productive and protected for generations to come.

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