

Our Challenge

The impact of climate change is affecting marine World Heritage sites at an unprecedented rate. Rising temperatures and sea levels, extreme weather and mass bleaching events all compound existing pressures such as illegal and unreported fisheries, marine pollution or unsustainable coastal developments. Most marine World Heritage sites struggle to address the increasingly dangerous mix of cumulative and combined effects.

Our Mission

Launched in 2005, the mission of the World Heritage Marine Programme is to ensure effective conservation of existing and potential marine areas of Outstanding Universal Value so they will thrive for generations to come. The Programme has three main areas of focus to fulfill its mission.

“Safeguarding our ocean legacy from the past to pass it on to future generations.”



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50 UNESCO World Heritage Marine Sites

Beacons of Hope in a Changing Ocean



What we Do



Monitoring State of Conservation

Every site on the UNESCO World Heritage List is continuously monitored. In collaboration with Advisory Bodies, the Programme monitors and prepares evaluations on how countries protect their sites. Information is gathered through field missions, scientific data and analyses. Results inform the World Heritage Committee which holds nations accountable for their action (or non-action) including through its Danger Listing mechanism.



Connecting a Flagship Network of Site Managers

World Heritage marine sites share similar conservation challenges and hold a wealth of information about best practices and solutions. Tapping the vast expertise contained across the network is at the heart of the Programme's work and accelerates reaching the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for effective, efficient and equitably managed World Heritage sites.



Building Resilience and Climate Adaptation Capacity

Climate change has become the biggest threat to marine World Heritage. The Programme's work focuses on building resilience through the reduction of on-site pressures, empowering local communities toward holistic climate adaptation strategies and assessing the impacts of climate change across World Heritage-listed marine protected areas.

Where we Work

The 1972 World Heritage Convention

The 1972 World Heritage Convention unites nations behind a shared commitment to preserve the world's outstanding heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. It recognizes that the protection of these exceptional places is the duty of the international community as a whole and it ensures that the preservation of these special sites becomes a shared responsibility.

World Heritage Marine sites

Since the inscription of the first marine site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1981, our network has grown into a global collection of unique ocean places. Today, the List includes 50 ocean places of Outstanding Universal Value to humanity across 37 countries. They are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage for their exceptional marine biodiversity, singular ecosystem, unique geological processes and incomparable beauty.

50 World Heritage Marine Sites

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List

- World Heritage site in Danger
- Natural World Heritage site
- Mixed cultural and natural World Heritage site

