



important regulations like bans on plastics and address other tourism-related issues in a comprehensive and inclusive manner, ultimately improving the overall tourist experience. Moreover, this approach allows us to identify and leverage the unique natural and cultural assets of each locality, fostering the development of distinctive tourism offerings.

PLASTIC-FREE AND LOW-CARBON TOURISM

In our commitment to a greener future, we need to embark on a journey towards a plastic-free environment and low carbon tourism. Various regions in Vietnam are already “greening” tourism. For instance, Hoi An and Co To islands are actively reducing single-use plastics, showcasing a commitment to environmental stewardship.

Through initiatives like “Reducing plastic waste in tourism in Viet Nam” project that is implemented by the Viet Nam Tourism Association (VITA) and UNDP, we have undertaken the important task of disincentivizing and monitoring plastic waste produced from tourism.

The project focuses on empowering tourism enterprises to go plastic-free, with the development of clear criteria for recognition of such entities, the introduction of a mobile app for waste management and monitoring, and the implementation of a robust action plan to curtail plastic waste in the sector.

In addition, green transport holds great potential for advancing green tourism. Encouraging green transport in tourism will provide an additional flexible and eco-friendly means of transportation for tourists visiting the destinations. This initiative will contribute to improving the local air quality and aligning the tourism sector with the government’s commitment to achieving net zero emissions.

SUSTAINABLE NATURE-BASED TOURISM

Viet Nam embraces an extensive cluster of terrestrial and marine protected areas which are key resources for the development of nature-based tourism where indigenous cultures, biodiversity conservation, and rural economic growth meet.

However, implementing NBT in a sustainable manner will require meticulous planning and thoughtful consideration. This involves assessing the potential impacts on the fragile ecosystems within these protected areas, ensuring that any tourism activities align with conservation goals, and actively involving local communities in decision-making processes to promote both environmental preservation and socio-economic development.

Through the “Promoting wildlife conservation and responsible nature-based tourism in Viet Nam” project, UNDP and Vietnamese partners (MONRE, MOCST, Quang Binh and Ninh Thuan provinces) are actively working to bring this vision to life. Our efforts have focused on leveraging private investment via public-private partnerships, evaluating tourism sites’ readiness to welcome visitors, fostering community involvement, establishing fair benefit-sharing arrangements, and promoting a shift in societal attitudes towards sustainable nature-based tourism.

UNDP stands ready to support the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism, Vietnam Tourism Association, and other stakeholders in transforming Vietnam into a competitive and responsible tourism destination. A green transition in tourism not only poses as one of the major driving forces for economic growth but also safeguards Viet Nam’s precious natural resources for generations to come ■

The global ocean - Earth’s seas, including the Arctic, Atlantic, Indian, Pacific, and southern oceans - provide more than half of the oxygen we breathe, and providing food and livelihoods for billions of people worldwide. It is also home to many magical wildlife species, from tiny plankton to the largest creature that has ever existed - the blue whale. The extraordinary diversity of ocean life and the services they provide to humans are of great value.

THE IMPORTANCE AND CURRENT STATUS OF THE OCEANS

The ocean accounts for more than 70% of the Earth’s surface, playing an important role in the socio-economic development of humanity. It is estimated that the goods and services the ocean provides – from fishing to tourism and coastal protection – are worth at least \$2.5 trillion each year; two-thirds of global marine product depends on a healthy ocean; 30% of human CO₂ emissions are absorbed by the ocean; 500 million people depend on coastal resources for food; 90% of the world’s seafood comes from small-scale fisheries.

Yet the ocean has undergone significant changes over the past century. The world has lost half of its coral reefs and mangrove forests. And humans have pushed many important fish stocks to the point of decline, threatening people’s livelihoods and food security, while harming other species



High sea treaty for oceans conservation

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including seabirds, turtles and dolphins. Furthermore, migratory marine species are freely distributed between national waters and the high seas, of which two-thirds of the world's oceans are beyond the control of individual countries, but currently there is only about 1% protected marine areas, leaving marine species and ecosystems exposed to the impacts of unsustainable industrial fishing practices.

In addition to the potential degradation of an ocean ecosystem, the inequality of the fishing industry is a matter of concern. Fishing, shipping, tourism and ocean protection are currently controlled by states and about 20 international organizations. However, their regulations only apply to distances of 200 nautical miles (370 km) from the coast, i.e. exclusive economic zones (EEZ). Outside these areas are international waters. Although international waters cover more than half of the Earth's surface and 61% of all oceans, only 1% of this area is protected. There is illegal fishing, overfishing and other forms of damage to ecosystems.

In West Africa, fish stocks are being seriously depleted due to large fishing vessels from Europe operating offshore. This is causing food insecurity across the region and harming the livelihoods of fishermen who provide for their families through trading. The problem is most acute in coastal areas - home to some of the most valuable natural resources but also more densely populated than anywhere else on Earth. Coastal communities are increasingly vulnerable to storm damage and food shortages due to the loss of coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds.

Pollution from plastic to oil spills and agricultural chemicals also harms nature, contaminating the food chain. About 80% of global wastewater is currently sent into the oceans without filtration. In the world's poorest countries, this figure is nearly 95%. This wastewater pollutes, contaminates, and destroys oceans and coastal areas. Therefore, building sustainable wastewater treatment systems, especially in developing countries, will protect ocean ecosystems and contribute to better drinking water supplies in many places.

Climate change is making the ocean hotter and more acidic, which will spell disaster if left unchecked. More than half of the oxygen in the atmosphere is produced by organisms

in the ocean. At the same time, the oceans store 50 times more carbon dioxide (CO₂) than what is currently in our atmosphere. The warmer the ocean gets, the less CO₂ it can store. Thus, the oceans are less able to protect the planet from extreme weather events. If temperatures continue to rise at the current rate, scientists say many shellfish species such as clams and snails will not be able to survive. That is due to ocean acidification, if the CO₂ content in sea water increases, the pH in the water will change. Increasing acidity interferes with the production of crustaceans' chalky shells. This unbalances the entire biosphere and can therefore threaten marine economies.

Rising temperatures in the atmosphere from burning coal, oil and gas also change ocean currents as the water gets warmer. This means death for many marine creatures, such as coral reefs. These ocean forests live in symbiosis with algae. Water warming can lead to the death of seaweed, which means more stress for corals, causing many species to lose their color, a phenomenon known as coral bleaching.

THE HIGH SEA TREATY ON OCEAN CONSERVATION

On December 19th, 2022, in Montreal, Canada, the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15 CBD) approved the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework with the participation of 190 countries aim to orient the conservation of nature and biodiversity globally to 2030 and a vision to 2050. Accordingly, countries around the world commit "To take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet". The framework includes four overarching goals supported by 23 targets, but the one that has received the most attention is the commitment to protect and conserve at least 30% of the ocean and ensure that 30% of degraded will be restored by 2030. This is a global task.

The Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), also known as the Agreement on the High Seas, is an important step towards implementing the Kunming - Montreal of the United Nations. The Agreement was officially adopted at the 5th session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Conference on June 19th, 2023 in New York (USA)... The birth of the High Seas Treaty is considered a historic victory following the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in building and enforcing legal order at sea.

UNCLOS is a document considered the Constitution of the seas and oceans, which sets out regulations on freedom of navigation, freedom of fishing and freedom of scientific research at sea in areas outside the exclusive economic zone.... However, UNCLOS does not have any provisions



▲ *Ocean is also home to many magical wildlife species*

specifically addressing access, use and sharing of benefits from marine biodiversity resources located outside areas under national jurisdiction, nor there is no mechanism to coordinate and control activities at sea to protect genetic resources from decline and depletion. Meanwhile, biodiversity in waters beyond national jurisdiction is currently facing many risks. Sea areas, which do not belong to any country's jurisdiction, have special species that only live in deep waters or offshore, bringing great values in terms of biodiversity and economically, is under serious threat.

Competition to extract value from areas beyond national jurisdiction is increasing in pursuit of the enormous economic benefits that marine genetic resources bring. However, currently only developed countries and private companies possessing advanced marine technology and biotechnology, with abundant financial resources, are capable of collecting marine genetic resources and developing profitable applications.

The High Seas Treaty provided the legal framework to conserve marine life and limit harmful activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Ocean Agreement sets out regulations on marine conservation zoning measures, aiming to balance conservation and sustainable use of protected areas. In addition, regulations on environmental impact assessment are also expected to contribute to balancing the need for scientific research and the goal of preventing harm caused by activities on the high seas to marine biodiversity. The treaty has created a framework and method for member countries to share benefits with each other, helping countries, especially developing countries, to receive more equitable benefits from marine genetic resources. In addition to economic benefits, developing countries will also have more opportunities to participate in marine scientific research, capacity building and technology transfer...

As a coastal country, Vietnam participated in the document negotiation process from the beginning. On

September 20th, 2023 in New York, within the framework of the High-Level Week of the 78th United Nations General Assembly, Vietnam signed the Agreement on the High Seas. Signing The Agreement has many important meanings for Vietnam, demonstrating that Vietnam is an active and responsible member of the international community, joining hands with countries around the world to

solve global problems and contribute into peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

The agreement opens up opportunities for Vietnam and other developing countries to participate in scientific research, transfer marine technology, and benefit economically from the fact that other countries have greater advantages in financial science and technology potential, to exploit genetic resources in the high seas and share benefits. This is especially meaningful in the context of Vietnam's marine economic development strategy to 2030, vision to 2045, which identifies "Development of science, technology and training of high-quality marine human resources"... as one of the key breakthroughs and solutions to realize the goal of "Vietnam becoming a strong maritime nation with sustainable development, prosperity, security and safety; The marine economy makes an important contribution to the country's economy, contributing to building our country into a modern industrial country with a socialist orientation."

The Agreement creates and encourages international cooperation mechanisms and regional marine cooperation with the goal of preserving and sharing benefits from marine genetic resources. These are opportunities for Vietnam to promote cooperation, strengthen the overlap of interests, and contribute to protecting the Fatherland.

The High Seas Treaty marks an important turning point in protecting ecosystems in vast international waters. This is considered a historic agreement to help save ocean biodiversity and promote sustainable development. The Treaty will contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, while protecting the rights and interests of all countries involved ■