



## RESOLUTION 6

As amended and accepted by contact groups on the 29th and 30th August 2024

### Ratify the High Seas Treaty

#### WHEREAS

There is no question about the ecological importance that the ocean provides not only for humankind, but for the entire Earth. Historically, the ocean has been falsely viewed as a vast and inexhaustible resource. As with the tragedy of the commons, international waters have facilitated widespread, unregulated ecological exploitation and habitat loss. Despite targets to preserve the ocean, such as the UN's goal to protect 10% of the ocean by 2020, global governments continue to fall short. Nearly halfway through the new decade, only around 8% of our oceans are protected. Meanwhile, the ambitious target of protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030 (30x30) looms just a few years away. Achieving this goal is a critical step toward the broader vision of protecting 50% of the planet by 2030, under the "Nature Needs Half" initiative, which is vital for addressing the dual biodiversity and climate crises as well as protecting the cultural integrity and food sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples.

Conservation priorities can be loosely divided into a two-pronged approach. The first, and most common, strategy is to protect and restore hotspot areas. These are regions of high biodiversity and endemism that face significant human threats. The second approach focuses on proactive wilderness protection, which is a less resource-intensive method aimed at safeguarding ecosystems that are still intact with minimal human disturbances. This dual strategy ensures the preservation of both highly threatened biodiversity hotspots and relatively undisturbed wilderness areas.

While terrestrial wilderness has guided conservation priorities since Dr. Russell Mittermeier defined and mapped it in 1988, marine wilderness has been relatively neglected. It was not until 2018 that Dr. Kendall Jones and his team defined and mapped marine wilderness, identifying areas most devoid of intense human impact. The study revealed that only 13.2% (55 million km<sup>2</sup>) of the world's oceans still qualify as marine wilderness, primarily located in the high seas of the polar regions and the southern hemisphere. To date, marine conservation strategies have generally targeted hotspots within Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), leaving most marine wilderness unprotected in the high seas and in deep water ecosystems.

Alongside climate change, bottom trawling, and pollution, mining poses an additional threat to deep sea ecosystems, which constitute a major portion of marine wilderness. Over 800 marine scientists have declared that deep sea mining would result, "in the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning that would be irreversible on multi-generational timescales." In addition,

a new study by Sweetman *et al.* (2024) found that “polymetallic nodules” – deep sea minerals that produce a small electric current – are believed to be producing *dark oxygen* in a process called *saltwater electrolysis*. This finding could have major implications in how we understand oxygen production on Earth, and how deep sea mining could further exacerbate climate change and biodiversity loss.

With only 8% of the world’s oceans protected, securing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) has proven to be a complex task involving challenges in politics, funding, and enforcement. A major roadblock for MPA implementation has been the lack of jurisdiction in the high seas, which cover 64% of our oceans. The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) granted the International Seabed Authority (ISA) jurisdiction over the seabed, including areas in the high seas, with a dual mandate to authorize and control mining and protect ecosystems. However, it lacks a framework for establishing MPAs in the high seas and has no mention of the inclusion of the rights of Indigenous People and future generations. In addition, ISA deliberations have favored mining interests over environmental concerns in recent years. The UNCLOS of 1982 is sorely out of date compared to other more recent UN declarations and treaties. It is therefore imperative to have a new vision for the protection of the high seas.

In September 2023, the United Nations signed the High Seas Treaty in potentially one of the largest conservation victories to date. However, for it to enter into force, 60 countries need to ratify it by June 2025. As of August 2024, only 8 countries have ratified while 91 have signed. If ratified, the High Seas Treaty would provide an updated framework that prioritizes marine conservation, including MPA implementation in the high seas, and Indigenous rights.

### **THEREFORE**

Ratifying the High Seas Treaty before June 2025 is essential to achieving the 30×30 conservation target, protecting the entirety of remaining marine wilderness, and combating deep-sea mining prospects. Governments of countries that have signed but not yet ratified the treaty must be urged to act. This treaty would establish the legal framework to incorporate the rights of Indigenous Peoples and traditional knowledge, create MPAs in international waters, and enable a more versatile approach to marine conservation. The High Seas Treaty would play a critical role in safeguarding biodiversity and sustaining large-scale ecological processes in the areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The delegates to the 12th World Wilderness Congress (WILD12), convening in He Sapa, the Black Hills of the Oceti Sakowin Oyate are hereby

### **RESOLVED**

- A. To urge immediate action from all countries to ratify the High Seas Treaty by June 2025.
- B. To increase awareness about the High Seas Treaty and to mobilize public support in order to pressure governments to ratify and implement the treaty.

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