

LIFE ON SHORE

Effective marine and coastal restoration for nature and people

Messages from the UN Ocean Decade Conference satellite event LIFE ON SHORE

09 April 2024 | 11:30 - 13:30 | Port Olímpic, Barcelona

An event organised by the EU H2020 MISSION ATLANTIC project



2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development



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Focus

This policy brief provides key messages for policy makers and administrators to promote effective marine restoration. Emphasis is laid on solutions to the OCEAN DECADE Challenge 2 “Protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity”. This challenge is suggested to be overcome by “understanding the effects of multiple stressors and ocean ecosystems, and develop solutions to monitor protect, manage and restore ecosystems and their biodiversity under changing environmental, social and climate conditions.”

Why we need it

We have used so much money to degrade and destroy ecosystems. Now, we have the urgent need and shared responsibility to restore ecosystems, using scientific knowledge. This brief is aimed at contributing to the expected outcome by the OCEAN DECADE, fostering “a healthy and resilient Ocean, where marine ecosystems are understood, protected, restored and managed”.

Context

Healthy ecosystems are the backbone of our ocean and are vital for human wellbeing. However, the continuous degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems, mainly due to the human activities, such as direct exploitation, climate change, pollution, sea use change, and introduction of invasive alien species, jeopardizes both the health of the ocean and the supply of essential nature's contributions to people's needs for well-being, livelihoods and health. Therefore, there is a pressing need to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems.

Active ecosystem restoration holds promise for safeguarding biodiversity and delivering multiple co-benefits, including poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation, while also supporting indigenous and local communities. But restoration efforts face multiple challenges, including poor stressor management, limited funding, inadequate monitoring, and insufficient engagement with indigenous and local communities.

To address these challenges, the Horizon EU marine research projects MISSION ATLANTIC, FutureMARES, OCEAN CITIZEN and MARCO-BOLO, along with the initiative Kelp Forest Challenge and the NGOs Wetlands International, have 14 key messages to improve ecosystem restoration efforts.



Key Messages

1. Manage pressures and stressors acting on ecosystems: effectively address the effects of activities such as fishing, energy production, and tourism and recreation, otherwise any ecosystem restoration effort will fail.
2. Protect and conserve healthy ecosystems, avoiding the need to restore them.
3. Focus scientific research to prioritize ecosystem restoration and protection initiatives.
4. Invest in the development of new ecosystem restoration methodologies, focusing on reducing costs and on increasing scalability.
5. Monitor and document ecosystem restoration effects: all actions should include a viable, effective and transparent monitoring system to report back to society about impact and progress.
6. Promote and invest in best practices and evidence-based restoration actions: these will more likely result in sizable, diverse, functional, and self-sustaining ecosystems.
7. Innovative Edge: explore investment opportunities in cutting-edge ecosystem restoration solutions and tools, including an economic viability evaluation as an integral part of the restoration initiative.
8. Align Actions: encourage and support collaboration between scientists, policymakers and the broader community, including citizens, private and finance sectors, philanthropists, NGOs, artists, environmental activists, practitioners, local communities and indigenous groups.
9. Support policy changes that facilitate ecosystem restoration efforts, such as those that result in less bureaucratic permit granting.
10. Co-design and co-develop ecosystem restoration efforts from the start with relevant stakeholders, including the private sector as well as indigenous and local communities.
11. Address societal needs: engage the broader local community along with the restoration process fostering social inclusion, gender balance, and opening opportunities for ecological connection for children and the youth.
12. Focus resources on the development of viable business models and sustainable finance tools, and increase long term funding for restoration initiatives: currently most projects are short term and dependent on philanthropy or grants, this is not sustainable and leads to stop-start dynamics.
13. Consider the need to futureproof ecosystem restoration actions in the face of climate change, and discuss the ethical implications (e.g., genetic modifications) of such actions.
14. Enhance support for advancing ocean literacy and improving communication of ecosystem restoration successes: society should understand why restoration efforts are important, empowering people to be actively involved in restoration initiatives.

Conclusion

The urgency of ecosystem restoration within the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development underscores the need to build global partnerships and making this period as the decade of decisive action. Research findings underpin the urgency of our situation: we do not have much time left. Beyond ensuring sustained contributions of nature to current and future generations, ecosystem restoration can immediately provide important new opportunities for improved health, livelihoods, job-creation, and the emergence of new blue economy ventures.



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Initiatives



Projects

