

OUR PACIFIC OCEAN, OUR STORIES

Why we should tell our stories about our Pacific Ocean

The Pacific is the world's largest ocean, covering nearly one-third of the Earth's surface, it is our region's largest resource that helps defines us as Pacific people, underpinning our livelihoods and way of life.

Although most Members of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) have small populations and economies, they are Large Ocean Island States responsible for managing more than ten per cent of the planet's oceans. Approximately 98% of this area, totalling over 30 million square kilometres, is contained within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of SPREP Members.¹

Our Pacific Ocean is home to many of the world's marine species, and supports Pacific island ecosystems with its diverse corals reefs, the deepest oceanic trenches and the healthiest and in some cases largest, remaining populations of many globally rare and threatened species such as whales, sea turtles, dugongs and saltwater crocodiles.

It's time we shared more stories about our Pacific ocean!

Did you know?

The ecosystem services provided to the entire planet by the ocean in, the SPREP region can be valued in many billions of dollars annually. For example, Pacific Ocean-based fishing and tourism provide USD 3.3 billion to the national economics of Pacific countries and territories.² Micronesia's ocean economy has an estimated worth of USD 548 billion, or USD 5.4 billion annually.³ Globally, coral reefs protect at least USD 5,995 million of built capital, with other estimates exceeding this value.⁴

Ocean threats

- Marine pollution is a significant threat, with at least eight million tonnes of plastic leaking into the ocean each year.
- Marine ecosystems are affected by both marine and land based invasive species, the lead cause of extinction of endemic Pacific species.⁵
- Climate change leading to ocean acidification and coral bleaching threatens aqua life by wiping out marine habitats.

Is it "Coastal", "Sea" or "Ocean"?

Many definitions exist for coastal, inshore, sea and oceanic waters. The geographic boundaries of these water bodies can be very non-precise, and there are many important ecological connections between them. The term "ocean" may be used to include coastal waters and seas, however "oceanic waters" usually refers to the waters beyond the continental shelf.

Coastal – Coastal areas are commonly defined as the interface or transition areas between land and sea, including large inland lakes. Coastal areas are diverse in function and form, dynamic and do not lend themselves well to definition by strict spatial boundaries.⁶

Sea - Seas are smaller than oceans and are usually located where the land and ocean meet. Typically, seas are partially enclosed by land.⁷

Ocean – The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "ocean" as the whole body of salt water that covers nearly three fourths of the surface of the earth, and any of the large bodies of water such as the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Antarctic and Arctic Oceans – into which the greater world ocean is divided. Oceans may include the coastal waters and seas adjacent to the main landmasses, however "oceanic waters or habitats" usually refers to the marine waters and habitats beyond the continental shelf.⁸

1 American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna.

2 Seidel & Lal. 2010. Economic value of the Pacific Ocean to the Pacific Island Countries and Territories. IUCN. Gland. 75 p https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/economic_value_of_the_pacific_ocean_to_the_pacific_island_countries_and_territories_p.pdf

3 Spalding et al. 2016. Atlas of Ocean Wealth. The Nature Conservancy. http://oceanwealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Atlas_of_Ocean_Wealth.pdf

4 Ibid.

5 SPREP. 2014. State of Conservation in Oceania : Key Findings and Full Report. SPREP, Apia.

6 FAO. 1998. Integrated coastal area management and agriculture, forestry and fisheries. FAO, Rome. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/W8440e/W8440e02.htm>

7 NOAA. 'What's the difference between an ocean and a sea?' <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/oceanorsea.html>

8 Webster. 2018. Online Dictionary – 'Ocean'. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ocean>



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Talking the talk

- **Ecological** – The relation of living organisms to one another and their surroundings
- **Endemic** – A plant or animal native or restricted to a certain place.
- **Marine ecosystems** – are among the largest of Earth's aquatic ecosystems. Examples include salt marshes, intertidal zones, estuaries, lagoons, mangroves, coral reefs, the deep waters and seabeds of seas and oceans. They can be contrasted with freshwater ecosystems, which have a lower salt content. Marine waters cover two-thirds of the surface of the Earth.
- **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** – An ocean or sea zone over which a state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources, including energy production from water and wind, as prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It stretches from the baseline out to 200 nautical miles (nmi) from its coast. (http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part5.htm)
- **Marine Protected Area (MPA)** – Protected areas of the ocean, seas, estuaries or lakes, where human activity is restricted for conservation purposes, usually to protect natural or cultural resources.
- **Marine Park** – A park consisting of an area of sea (or lake) sometimes protected for recreational use, but more often set aside to preserve a specific habitat and ensure the ecosystem is sustained for the organisms that exist there.
- **Marine Spatial Planning** – is a process of analysing and monitoring the distribution of human activities affecting coastal and marine areas in order to make informed and coordinated decisions amongst all users of the ocean, including government, conservation, recreation and tourism, energy and industry. A key goal is to balance ecological, economic, social and cultural objectives.

Telling our Pacific stories

How much do you know about your national Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ)? How large is it? How much of it is a sanctuary for marine species or a Marine Protected Area or a Marine Park? What structures are in place to protect your national EEZ? What ocean based industries are in your country and what do they do?

The more you know about your EEZ, how it is managed and what happens within it, the stronger your ocean stories will be.

People to contact: Do you have contacts in your environment and marine fisheries departments? Are there national NGO's that work to conserve and protect your ocean and marine species? Who are the local communities that rely on our ocean or coastal waters for their survival?

Knowing the right people to talk to at the right time can form the basis for your story, as you know a good solid contact base makes all the difference!

Issues to think of: What successful initiatives are happening in your country and what are the benefits of these? What challenges is your EEZ facing and how is that effecting Pacific communities?

Understanding the actions underway in your country provides opportunities for a wide range of Pacific stories to be told with Pacific voices.

The Ocean Factsheets by the UN Environment Programme and SPREP are a good place to start when looking for more information.

