



AUSTRALIA



A BLUEPRINT FOR AUSTRALIAN OCEANS LEADERSHIP

'AMBITION IS OUR ONLY OPTION' - SUMMARY REPORT 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WWF-Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of lands, waters and sky throughout Australia. We honour their strong connection to Country, and the protective relationship that connection inspires. We pay our respects to Traditional Owners' deep expertise in managing and protecting Country over thousands of generations, and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

WWF-Australia has been working to create a world where people live in harmony with nature since 1978. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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SCAN ME



AMBITION IS OUR ONLY OPTION

'The Australian Government understands the urgency of the challenge facing our planet, and we are committed to being a full partner in the global fight to solve it. ... There is no such thing as a healthy ocean without a healthy climate. Ambition is our only option.' - The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Environment and Water, 29 June 2022.

When elected in 2022, the new Australian Government set a bold agenda for ocean protection and management. The government promised to 'put the environment front and centre – back where it belongs', framing nature protection as a human right as well as an economic, foreign policy and security issue. To help realise this vision, WWF-Australia's Blueprint for Oceans Leadership sets out 10 areas for action and around 50 specific recommendations. Of these, immediate action is required on the three priority areas within this summary.

We are halfway through the United Nations Oceans Decade and six years from 2030, by which time the international community has pledged to restore and conserve at least 30% of the world's oceans. For Australia, two key documents to be launched in 2024/25 will map the path to achieving this: the Sustainable Oceans Plan and our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Both must articulate a clear vision, be action-oriented, and world-class in their level of ambition and resourcing. Through their implementation, Australia can reestablish its track record as a true world leader in ocean protection.

This ambitious action agenda is needed to drive progress on the priorities outlined within this summary, and across the 10 areas outlined in detail in the full Blueprint. Cutting across the entire action agenda is the critical need to stabilise global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This must be the cornerstone of all ocean protection efforts. Oceans/Sea Country are our lifeblood, connecting and sustaining our Blue Pacific Continent and all life on Earth. We can and must care for them better; this Blueprint sets out critical steps to do so.

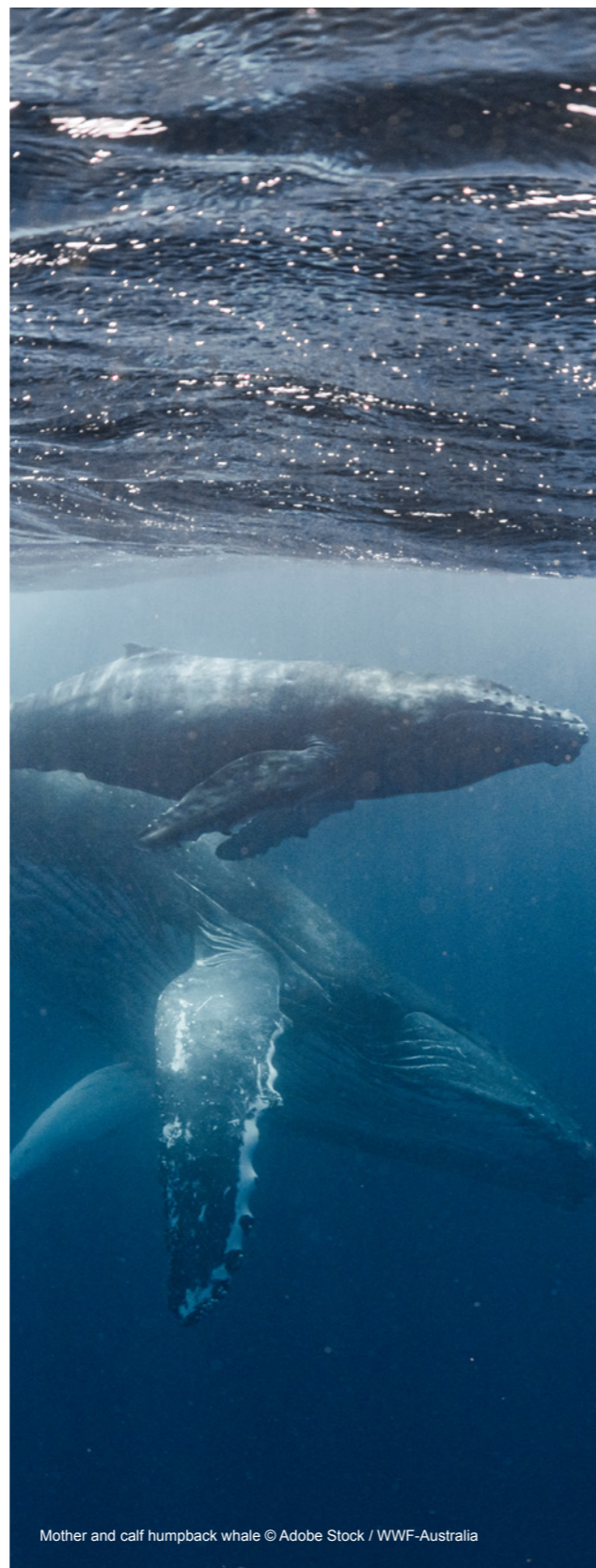
1 ELEVATE FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP FOR HEALTHY SEA COUNTRY, HEALTHY PEOPLE

First Peoples coined the phrase ‘healthy Country, healthy people’ and understand the truth and implications of this saying in a way that many Australians do not. The Indigenous-led *Heart of the Reef* statement sums up the health of our environment in clear terms: ‘Today Country is sick...we are all suffering, and we can’t continue this way’. Following epic levels of environmental harm since colonisation, healing Country is needed more urgently than ever before. This is a job for all Australians, working together with elected representatives and governments.

In recent decades, Australia’s governments have started to integrate First Nations leadership into policymaking and management to care for Country. While not a panacea for healing Country, these efforts are a critical step towards inclusive conservation; they are also a recognised driver of *Closing the Gap* employment and legal rights/interests in the sea targets. But barriers to inclusive conservation remain, including equitable and durable funding, job creation and gender equity in conservation roles, and legal reform to remedy a range of issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Establish a Commissioner for Country as a voice for Country, empowered to lead and support work to heal Country.
- 1.2 Double the area of Sea Country Indigenous Protected Areas from 5.5 million hectares to 11 million hectares, with sustained and adequate funding allocated to management.
- 1.3 Commit to creating and employing 5,000 Indigenous ranger roles by 2030 and achieving gender equity by 2026.
- 1.4 Allocate \$10 million over three years to expand and operate a women rangers’ network, supporting their entry, retention and ability to excel in their field.
- 1.5 Undertake policy and regulatory reform to enable Indigenous rangers to assume responsibilities for enforcement and compliance activities in their Sea Country.



Mother and calf humpback whale © Adobe Stock / WWF-Australia

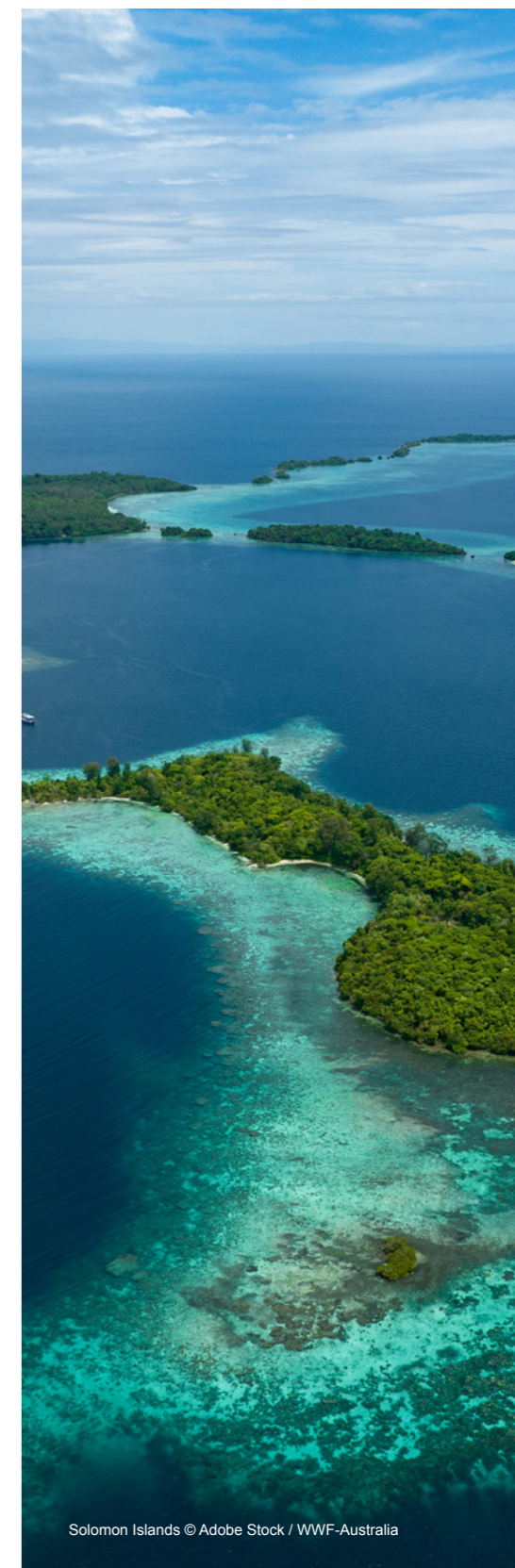
2 CATALYSE 30X30 IN AUSTRALIA AND OUR REGION

Globally, 30x30 marine protection is recognised as a **minimum requirement to mitigate unacceptable levels of biodiversity loss**. The scientific evidence base supports 30-70% protection of land and sea internationally, 30-50% of each habitat or ecosystem in each bioregion in areas like Australia, and higher for areas such as turtle nesting beaches. Some mega-biodiverse regions and countries will need to contribute more substantially to global 30x30 goals than others. This includes the Oceania region, which is distinguished by ‘immense biodiversity’, including species found nowhere else on Earth.

Australia is well positioned to influence and catalyse ocean conservation and sustainable management in the southern hemisphere. WWF-Australia advocates approaching the marine component of Target 3 (also known as 30x30) from a regional perspective. Under such an approach, high-capacity countries such as Australia should lead by example in high-level protection within its own EEZ, as well as championing and supporting efforts within our region and internationally. The Australian Government should respect and partner with Pacific leaders on ocean and nature conservation. This should include building investment in and collaborating on key regional initiatives and shared commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework and towards high seas marine protection under the new High Seas Treaty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Through Australia’s Sustainable Ocean Plan and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, ensure at least 30% of Australia’s degraded marine areas and waterways are under restoration, and plans are advanced to fully protect at least 30% of Australia’s EEZ by 2027.
- 2.2 Work with Asia-Pacific states to prioritise areas for protection and effective conservation, focusing on connectivity and ensuring comprehensive, adequate and representative protection.
- 2.3 Help to catalyse sustainable financing from public and private sources into ocean protection and sustainable management across the Oceania region.
- 2.4 Work with other leading ocean countries to advance protection of all seamounts globally and ensure full protection (including no bottom trawling) in Australia’s EEZ.
- 2.5 Strengthen high-level political advocacy at the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and other forums to implement a network of Southern Ocean MPAs in East Antarctica, the Antarctic Peninsula and Weddell Sea.



Solomon Islands © Adobe Stock / WWF-Australia

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BECOME A WORLD LEADER IN BLUE CORRIDOR CONSERVATION FOR KEY SPECIES

Marine mammals, sharks and turtles are key indicators of marine ecosystem health, and the trend of their conservation status is cause for grave concern. One in four of the world's cetaceans – whales, dolphins and porpoises – are threatened with extinction, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Six out of seven marine turtle species are threatened with extinction, and the potential imminent population collapse of the leatherback and hawksbill turtle – both of which occur in the Coral Triangle, Pacific and Australian waters – is of particular concern.

WWF and partners *Protecting Blue Corridors* report collates 30 years of migratory data of whales from 50 research partners and outlines a vision to safeguard their blue corridors worldwide. The analysis helps to identify solutions to emerging and cumulative impacts and how we can better conserve, connect and protect critical habitats worldwide. Governments are taking notice. The 'Americas for the Protection of the Ocean' coalition is a commitment by nine countries in the Eastern Pacific Ocean from Canada to Chile to deliver regional 30x30 goals, informed by the blue corridors approach. Strategies to strengthen transboundary management will help improve ecological connectivity for marine megafauna and lead to stronger conservation outcomes for vulnerable species.

RECOMMENDATIONS

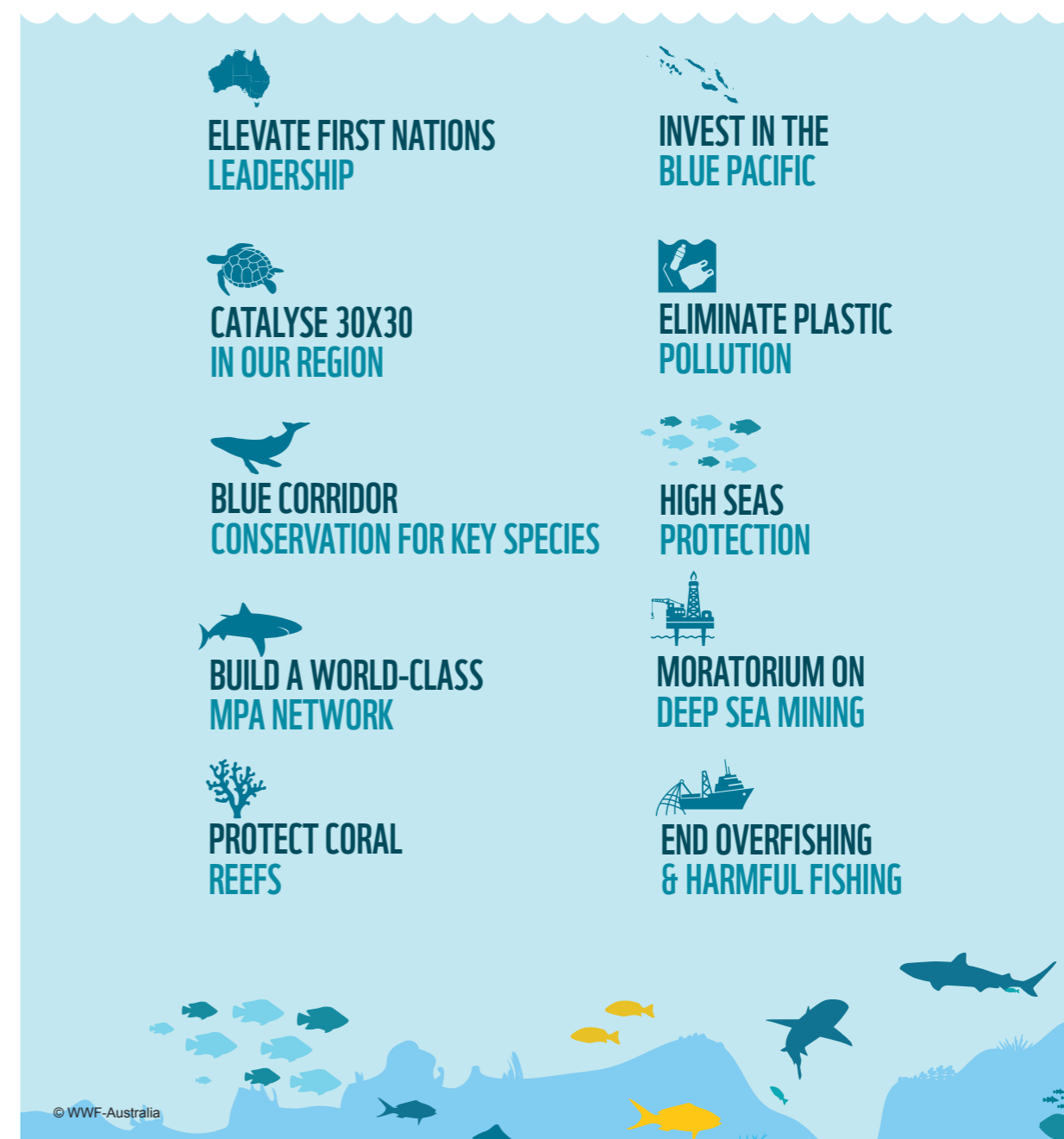
- 3.1 Protect critical habitats and migration corridors for whales and dolphins through establishment of blue corridors, including through:
 - a. Increasing coverage of IUCN Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs - currently covering more than 130 species) within Australia's Marine Park Network.
 - b. Using whale-critical habitats, migratory routes and IMMAs to inform areas to implement shipping speed limits.
 - c. Reducing fisheries bycatch: The joint Australian and Queensland government program to permanently phase out commercial gill-net fishing from the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area has been a major conservation breakthrough; opportunities to achieve similar outcomes in other jurisdictions should be identified and pursued.
 - d. Establishing 'whale safe' ship routes: Use whale critical habitats, migratory routes and IMMAs to inform areas to implement mandatory shipping speed limits to reduce the risk of ship strikes and underwater noise pollution.
- 3.2 Invest in blue corridors conservation and research gaps for other species, including turtles, rays and sharks, including through:
 - a. Assessing genetic and ecological turtle connectivity (nesting, foraging and migration) and pinpointing those most at-risk and those that require greatest protection.
 - b. Proposing important marine turtle areas (IMTAs) and increasing marine turtle conservation through marine protected areas and other effective conservation and management designations.

The full *Blueprint for Australian Oceans Leadership* includes ten areas for action as pictured below, including a suite of comprehensive recommendations under each action area. We urge the Australian Government to step up efforts to meet these challenges, noting that isolated action in a few areas only will not deliver the change we need at the scale required.

Our oceans face severe and multiple pressures, but it doesn't need to be this way. **There is strong bipartisan support for Australian global leadership on oceans.** By working together, we can turn the tide toward healthier and more productive oceans, using proven tools that allow marine species and ecosystems to recover over time, enhancing their resilience to climate change. These include protection and restoration of ocean habitats, science-based fisheries management, community-led conservation and targeted species conservation measures.

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THE CRITICAL DECISIONS WE MAKE TODAY WILL SHAPE AUSTRALIA'S TOMORROW.



Working to sustain the natural
world for the benefit of people
and wildlife.

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