Accelerating action for ocean health: The critical role of seagrass meadows

Project Seagrass strongly supports the Accelerating action theme of the United Nations Ocean Conference. To meet global climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development targets, we must act urgently—and decisively—for the ocean.

At the heart of our mission are the oceans seagrass meadows—globally expansive foundation habitats now considered an Essential Ocean Variable. Seagrass meadows underpin marine biodiversity, delivering a wide range of ecosystem services vital to planetary health, climate resilience, and human wellbeing, and contributing to targets within *all* of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Seagrass meadows are among the most productive ecosystems on Earth, stabilising coastlines, cycling nutrients, sequestering carbon, and supporting rich biodiversity. They do this, to varying degrees, across their *near global range*, yet remain underrepresented in global scale conservation and climate initiatives.

Project Seagrass places people at the centre of its efforts to conserve and restore seagrass meadows. Effective conservation is only possible when delivered in cooperation with multiple stakeholders integrating science, policy deliverables, local knowledge, cultural values, and engaged communities.

To catalyse global momentum, Project Seagrass is actively building partnerships and capacity through the development of innovative and accessible tools, as well as looking to innovative and diverse funding mechanisms based on principles of equity and inclusion. Our Global Seagrass Challenge Fund, for example, supports high-impact, community-led seagrass conservation projects. Our global mapping programme, SeagrassSpotter, empowers citizen scientists to map and monitor seagrass meadows worldwide, whilst SeagrassRestorer facilitates restoration scaling efforts that begin with science-based, community-driven knowledge sharing—identifying what's working and what's not working to co-produce advanced knowledge drawing from both restoration successes and failures. We hope that this approach will provide a safe co-learning space and circumnavigate the problem of only success stories being shared.

In 2025, halfway through the Ocean Decade, conserving seagrass, critically, requires addressing continued root causes of degradation. Land-based activities remain the primary driver of seagrass loss across its range—marine pollution derived from insensitive agricultural practice, mismanagement of wastewater, and intensified coastal development. Without integrated land-sea governance structures and management, efforts to restore seagrass ecosystems and reverse decline are, and will continue to be undermined. Managing land-based impacts must be a central pillar of ocean conservation policy.

Seagrass meadows are vital to the livelihoods and food security of millions of people. Wherever seagrass is found, people fish—whether for subsistence, income, or cultural

fulfilment. In emerging economies these fisheries are often small-scale, artisanal, and critically important to coastal communities, many of whom live in poverty. In this context, seagrass is more than habitat—it is a lifeline. As we manage seagrass ecosystems, we must uphold the principle of equity and inclusion, ensuring no one is left behind in the transition to sustainable ocean use.

Seagrass systems are a powerful illustration of planetary interlinkages as confirmed by their recognition within the Convention on Migratory Species, placing the onus upon signatory states to ensure their conservation. They support diverse marine and coastal species—fish, invertebrates, birds, mammals, and reptiles (often as a nursery habitat for commercially valuable species)—while contributing to climate change mitigation by storing carbon in their biomass and sediments.

Seagrass systems are essential providers of blue food—fish and invertebrates rich in key micronutrients. For many low-income communities, the biodiversity dependent on seagrass meadows is a critical source of household nutrition. Research by Project Seagrass has shown that in Indonesia alone, seagrass meadows support the nutritional needs of 6.5 million people living in poverty, contributing over $1 billion annually in poverty alleviation support through food provisioning.

We urge UN member states and ocean stakeholders to:

- Uphold and facilitate legal frameworks to protect and conserve seagrass meadows.
- Support community-led, science-based conservation through technology transfer and capacity building.
- Adopt integrated land-sea governance to address root causes of degradation.
- Recognise seagrass as a cornerstone of the blue economy.

At this critical midpoint of the Ocean Decade, seagrass meadows represent a strategic, scalable, and socially just solution for ocean health. The time to act is now. By investing in seagrass protection and restoration, we are investing in climate resilience, biodiversity, food security, and a sustainable future for all.

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