

Interim review and Strategic Plan

Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action



COMMUNITIES OF OCEAN ACTION

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 14



Prepared by Dr Paul Marshall, Reef Ecologic
For UN Environment Programme & International Coral Reef Initiative
December 2018

Contents

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	5
STATUS OF THE CORAL REEF COMMUNITY OF OCEAN ACTION	7
UPDATES AND NEW VOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS	7
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CORAL REEF COA	8
SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES OF THE CORAL REEF COA	15
EMAIL GROUP & NEWSLETTER	15
ATTENDANCE AT ASIA-PACIFIC DAY FOR THE OCEAN	15
WEBINAR	15
ATTENDANCE AT CO-FOCAL POINTS MEETING IN NAIROBI	16
PRESENTATION ON COA TO ICRI GENERAL MEETING	16
ONLINE FEATURE STORIES OF PROFILED VCS	16
REFLECTIONS ON EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS	17
FOLLOW-UP ON IMPLEMENTATION	17
CATALYZE AND GENERATE NEW VOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS	18
FACILITATE COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING	18
TOWARD A STRATEGY FOR COA SUCCESS	19
INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS	19
PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF COA MEMBERSHIP	19
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO COA SUCCESS	19
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING THE COA	20
SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS	20
SUGGESTIONS FOR LONGER-TERM STRATEGIES	20

Purpose of this report

This report has been prepared by Dr Paul Marshall (Reef Ecologic) under a contract with UN Environment Programme and International Coral Reef Initiative. The report provides a summary of progress made under the contract to accelerate activation of the Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action (COA). It provides background information about the Coral Reef COA and a review of its status and early achievements since inception of the accelerated activation program in October 2018. The summary and review provide the foundation for an analysis of successes and challenges in activating the Coral Reef COA. The report concludes with a list of recommendations and suggestions for further strengthening the COA in the lead-up to the next UN Ocean Conference planned for 2020 in Portugal.

For further information:

Jerker Tamelander – Head, Coral Reef Unit. UN Environment Programme

tamelander@un.org

Francis Staub – International Coral Reef Initiative

fstaub@icriforum.org

Dr Paul Marshall – Reef Ecologic

Paul.marshall@reefecologic.org

Executive Summary

The Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action (COA) was established to support progress and reporting on voluntary commitments relating to coral reefs that are registered as contributions to implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

As at 13 December 2019 there were 125 Voluntary Commitments (VCs) from 105 entities (COA members) registered under the Coral Reef COA on the United Nations Ocean Conference website (oceanconference.un.org). A total of USD\$444 million of activity has been committed, with commitments coming from all coral reef regions.

United Nations Environment Programme and the International Coral Reef Initiative are the co-focal points for the Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action. Initial efforts to activate the COA and engage members have catalysed 11 new voluntary commitments and seen the proportion of VCs with progress updates increase from 11% to nearly 25%.

Observations by the co-focal points, discussions between COAs and consultation with members of the Coral Reef COA have helped evaluate successes and capture lessons from the early phases of activation of the COA. These provide the foundation for a strategic approach to improving the Coral Reef COA and positioning it for a strong contribution to the next Oceans Conference planned for 2020 in Portugal. Key recommendations for immediate implementation include:

- *Develop incentives for reporting of progress toward VCs, such as certificates for VCs that have demonstrated progress and made contributions to implementation of SDG14.*
- *Provide a list of all VCs relevant to SDG14 on a country-by-country basis to SDG focal points of each State Party. Create a reporting page on the UN Ocean Conference website that consolidates VCs (including progress updates) on the basis of State Parties.*
- *Organise webinars involving COA members who can share skills and expertise that addresses key capacity gaps for the COA membership.*
- *Continue to develop online stories about exemplar VCs to share experiences and inspire collaboration among COA members.*
- *Produce a flyer or brochure that explains the Coral Reef COA and invites registration of new VCs (for electronic distribution); distribute through coral reef networks.*

The review also identified additional measures that might strategically increase the value and efficacy of the COA, including:

- *Create a spatial interface such as google maps for exploring the VC registry & promote it among industry and development groups (eg. chambers of commerce).*
- *Promote the COA and explain the VC registration process within the private sector; communicate to private sector organisations about the opportunities to support implementation of VCs; encourage private sector organisations to register VCs that support other VCs.*
- *Institute regional or national “COA Chapters”. These could convene regular meetings/workshops, create networks and provide a platform for collaboration.*
- *Promote, support or re-invigorate information repositories relevant to the coral reef COA (such as ReefBase, ICRI Forum or CBD Coral Portal).*

Background & Context

At the high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) - The Ocean Conference - held in June 2017 at UN headquarters in New York, close to 1,400 voluntary commitments for concrete action to advance implementation of SDG 14 were made by governments, the United Nations system, civil society organizations, academia, the scientific community, and the private sector. Each of the Ocean Conference voluntary commitments (VCs) addresses one or several of the SDG 14 targets, often with associated positive impact on other SDGs, including for example SDG 3 on good health and well-being and SDG13 on climate action, among others.

As at 13 December 2019 there are 1491 voluntary commitments that have been registered to support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14). These represent concrete actions being implemented by governments, the United Nations system, civil society organizations, academia, the scientific community, and the private sector.

The UN have launched nine thematic multi-stakeholder Communities of Ocean Action (COAs) to follow-up on the implementation of these voluntary commitments, to catalyze and generate new voluntary commitments and to facilitate collaboration and networking amongst different actors in support of SDG 14. The nine Communities of Ocean Action (Figure 1) are:

1. Coral reefs
2. Implementation of international law as reflected in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
3. Mangroves
4. Marine and coastal ecosystems management
5. Marine pollution
6. Ocean acidification
7. Scientific knowledge, research capacity development and transfer of marine technology
8. Sustainable blue economy
9. Sustainable fisheries.

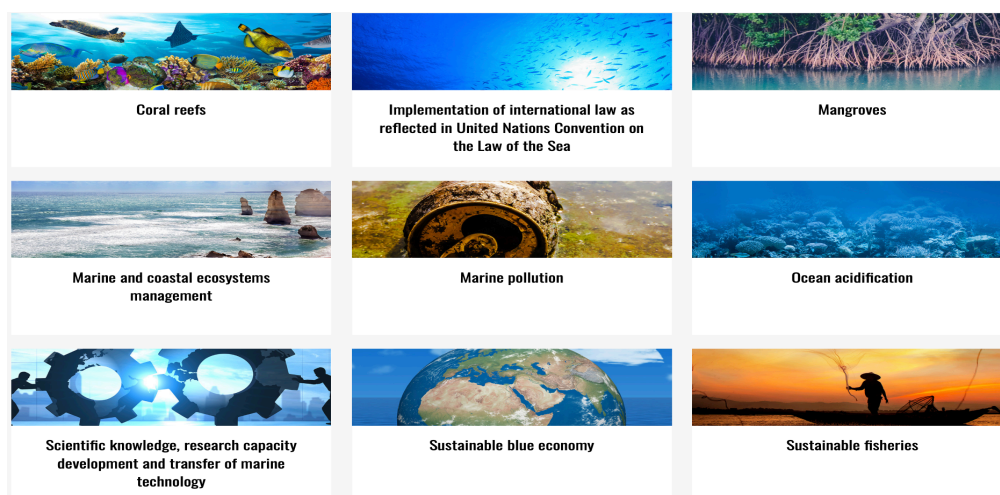


Figure 1 The nine Communities of Ocean Action.

Each community is coordinated by designated focal points who work together with United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson, and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in carrying out the activities.

The Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action (COA) is coordinated by the Executive Director of UN Environment Programme and Co-Chair of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI). A consultant was appointed October-December 2018 to accelerate activation of the Coral Reef COA.

Status of the Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action

In this section I provide an analysis of status and attributes of the Voluntary Commitments that comprise the Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action. All data are derived from the VC registry database provided by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. I also summarise changes that have occurred during the 3-month period since implementation of the accelerated activation project (mid-October to mid-December 2018).

The Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action (COA) was established to support progress and reporting on voluntary commitments registered under the coral reef theme. As at 13 December 2019 there were 125 Voluntary Commitments (VCs) from 105 entities (COA members) registered under the Coral Reef COA on the United Nations Ocean Conference website (oceanconference.un.org). The collection of VCs represented by the Coral Reef COA benefit coral reef areas all over the world (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Nations with coral reefs listed as beneficiaries of Voluntary Commitments under the Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action.

Updates and New Voluntary Commitments

At the onset of the Coral Reef COA activation program (18 October) there were 114 VCs registered. Eleven new voluntary commitments were added over the two months to 13 December, bringing the total to 125. The proportion of VCs with updates on progress grew from approximately 10% in mid-October (12 out of 114) to just under 25% (31 out of 125) by mid-December (Figure 3).

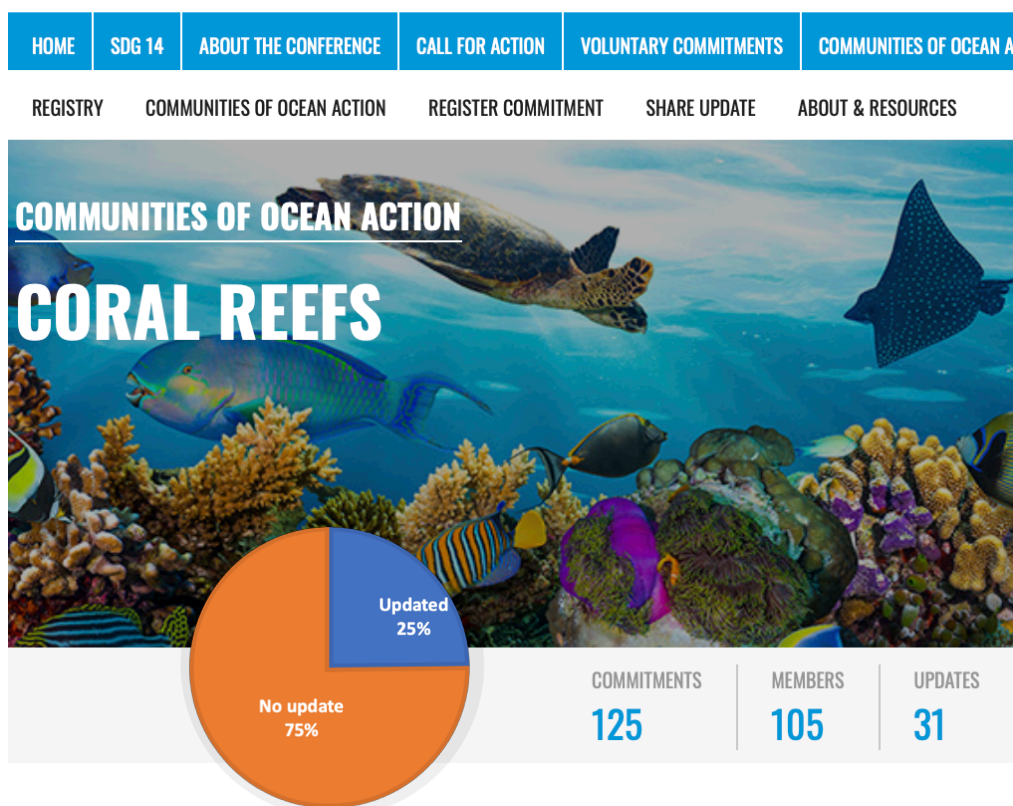


Figure 3 Summary of number of voluntary commitments and proportion with updates on progress (inset graph) as at 13 December 2019

Characteristics of the Coral Reef COA

The voluntary commitments registered under the coral reef Community of Action are being implemented by a diversity of organisations (Table 1). While the majority of VCs are being led by Government (29%) and non-government (conservation) organisations (25%), the private sector is also significantly involved (10% of VCs). Similar levels of involvement are represented by UN entities (9%), academic institutions (8%), intergovernmental organisations (7%) and civil society organisations (7%).

The types of inputs provided through voluntary commitments were categorised as either financing, staff/technical expertise, in-kind or other (Table 2). Most projects involved some form of financial (44%) or staff/technical expertise (37%).

The geographic base for implementation of VCs was diverse, with 41 countries being registered as the home location of implementing organisations (Figure 4). These included Indonesia (9 VCs), followed by USA (7), the Maldives (5), France (5), India (4) and the Philippines (4). Twenty-six VCs are being led by global or multi-national coalitions.

Table 2 Types of organisations responsible for coral reef voluntary commitments

Type of organisation leading VC	Proportion of VCs
Government	29%
Non-governmental organization (NGO)	25%
Private sector	10%
United Nations entity	9%
Academic institution	8%
Intergovernmental organization	7%
Civil society organization	7%
Scientific community	3%
Philanthropic organization	2%
Partnership	1%
Other relevant actor	1%

Table 1 Types of inputs provided through VCs

Type of inputs associated with VCS	Proportion of VCs
Financing	44%
Staff / Technical expertise	37%
Other, please specify	10%
In-kind contribution	9%

A regional breakdown shows that the majority of VCs are coming from organisations based in southeast Asia (19%) or who identify as international entities (19%), followed by Europe (14%), the Pacific (13%) and south Asia (12%) (Figure 5).

There was quite strong geographical alignment between the sources of VCs and the beneficiaries of VCs, with four of the five top regions for providing VCs also being in the top five beneficiary regions (Figure 6).

Voluntary commitments were quite variable in the timelines that they were working to (Figure 7). While some indicated that they would deliver outcomes in as little as 1 month, over ten VCs were either ongoing activities or had delivery timelines beyond 25 years. Most, however, aimed to deliver outcomes in 7 years or less, with an average duration across the entire Community of 5.5 years.

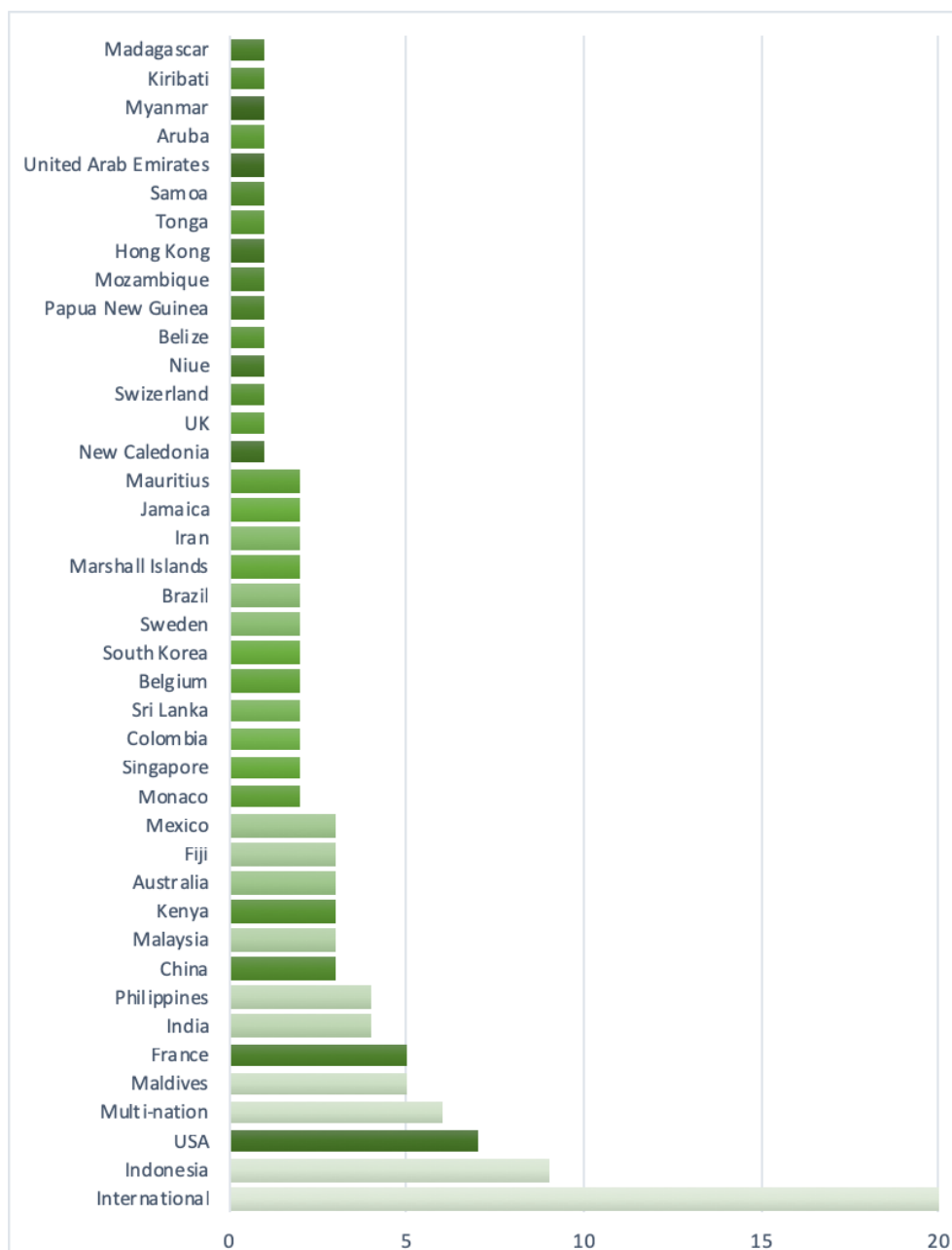


Figure 4 Number of VCs per country

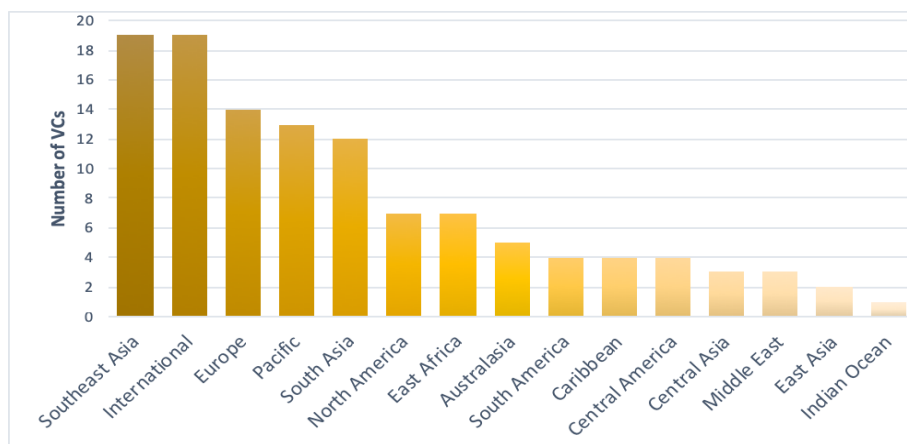


Figure 5 Regional sources of VCs

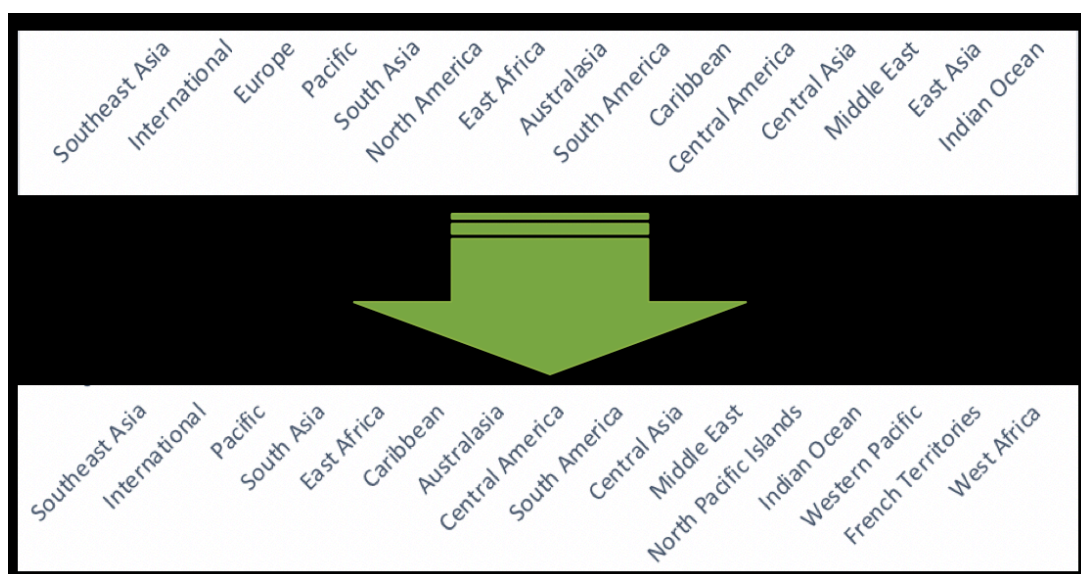


Figure 6 Flow of benefits: the rank order of regions providing VCs (top) aligned with the rank order of regions benefitting from VCs (bottom)

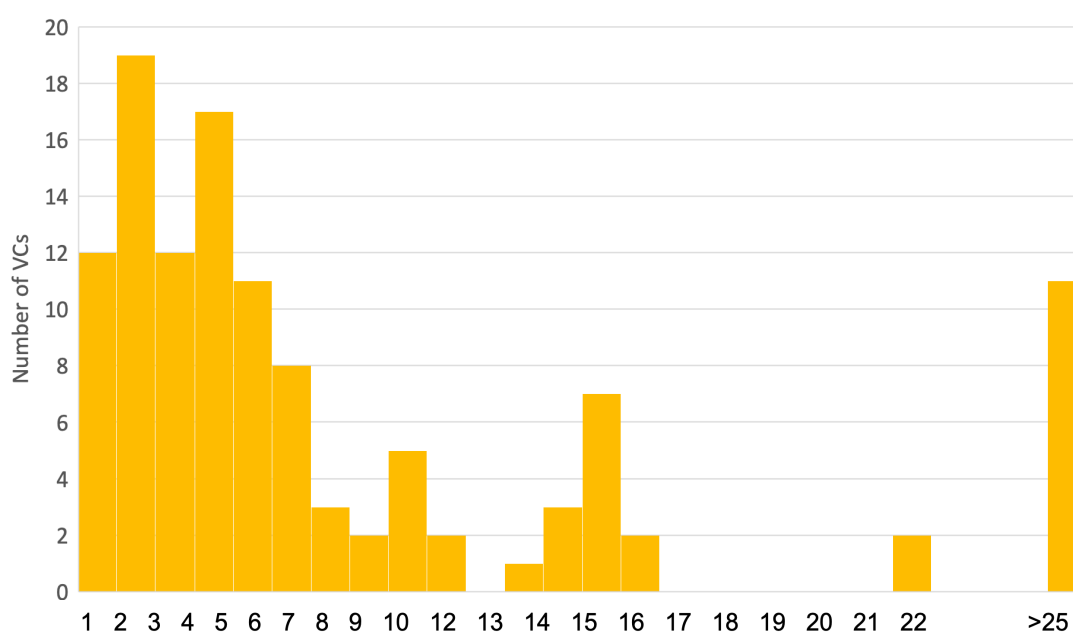


Figure 7 Duration of voluntary commitments.

The total value of each voluntary commitment could be calculated by the sum of the financial and in-kind inputs listed in each registry entry. This revealed the huge range in scale of projects represented in the Coral Reef COA. A total of 44 VCs had values exceeding USD\$100,000 (Figure 8). While the majority of projects had a combined value of inputs of less than USD\$500,000, ten voluntary commitments indicated over USD\$5 million in financial and/or in-kind contributions. The average value of inputs per VC was USD\$3.8 million. It is worth noting that this average is heavily influenced by two exceptionally large VCs with claimed input values of USD\$200 million (ID#14807 Multi-Sites Deployment of Pilot

Scale Technology for Integrated Nearshore and Ocean Farming) and USD\$95 million (ID#15123 Fish Forever - RARE). The total value of all VCs in the Coral Reef COA, based on stated financial and in-kind inputs, was an impressive USD\$444 million.

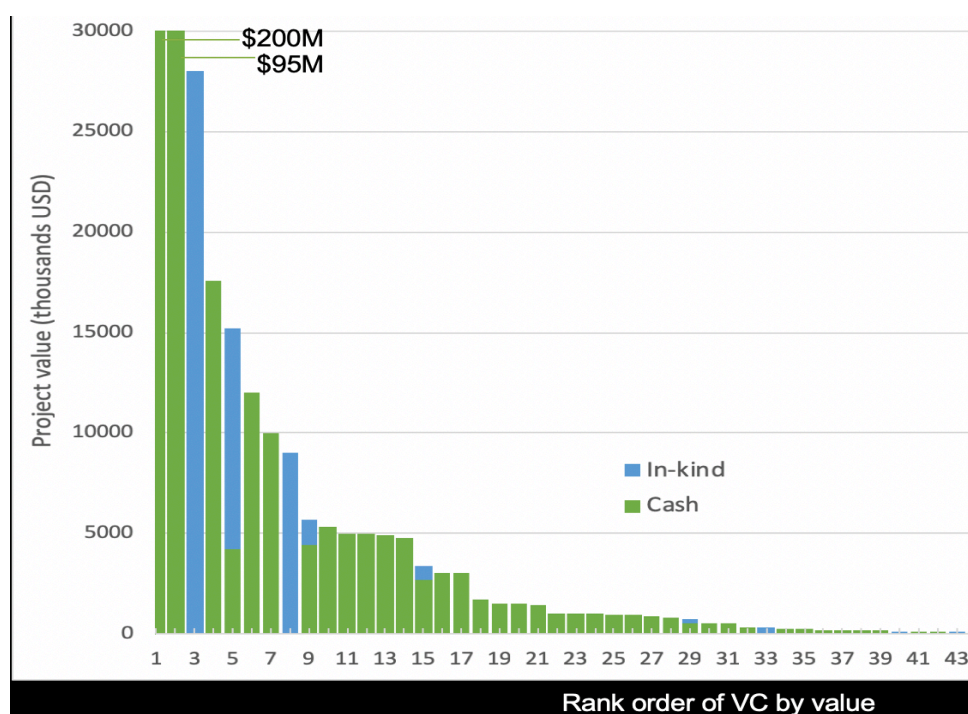


Figure 8 Rank order of total input value for VCs (only projects with a value exceeding USD\$100K are plotted).

The VCs that comprise the Coral Reef COA address the full spectrum of targets listed under Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Figure 9). While approximately 15% of VCs were focussed on a single target, most listed 2-5 targets (Figure 10). A few VCs claimed to be addressing all ten targets of SDG14. VCs address the full suite of Targets under SDG14. The VCs also varied in the targets that they were addressing, with some receiving focus from more VCs than others (Figure 11).

The SDG14 targets that are receiving the most attention from VCs in the coral reef Community of Ocean Action are:

- **14.2** By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans (88 VCs)
- **14A** Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries (58 VCs)
- **14.7** By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism (54 VCs)

- 14.1**
By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine **pollution** of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution
- 14.2**
By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their **resilience**, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans
- 14.3**
Minimize and address the impacts of **ocean acidification**, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels
- 14.4**
By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end **overfishing**, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics
- 14.5**
By 2020, **conserve at least 10%** of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information
- 14.6**
By 2020, prohibit certain forms of **fisheries subsidies** which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation
- 14.7**
By 2030, increase the economic benefits to **Small Island developing States** and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism
- 14.A**
Increase **scientific** knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine **technology**, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries
- 14.B**
Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and **markets**
- 14.C**
Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing **international law** as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of The Future We Want

Figure 9 The ten targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14

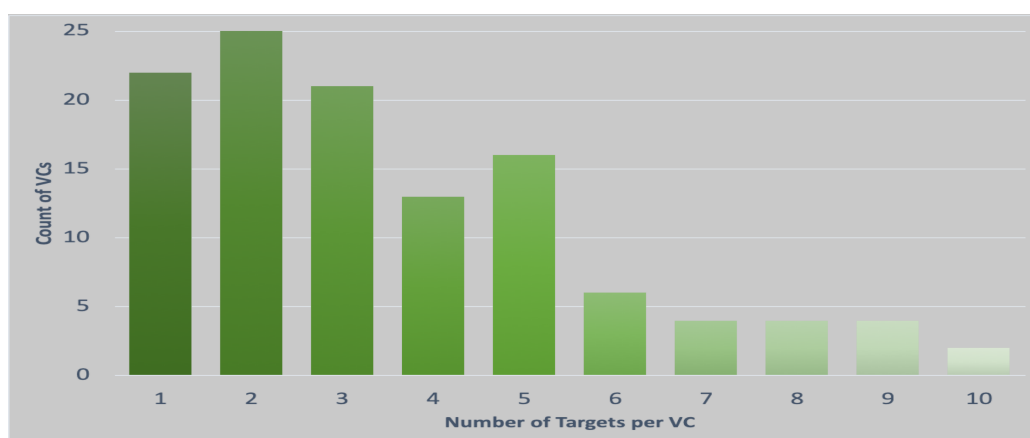


Figure 10 The number of VCs addressing one or various combinations of SDG14 targets

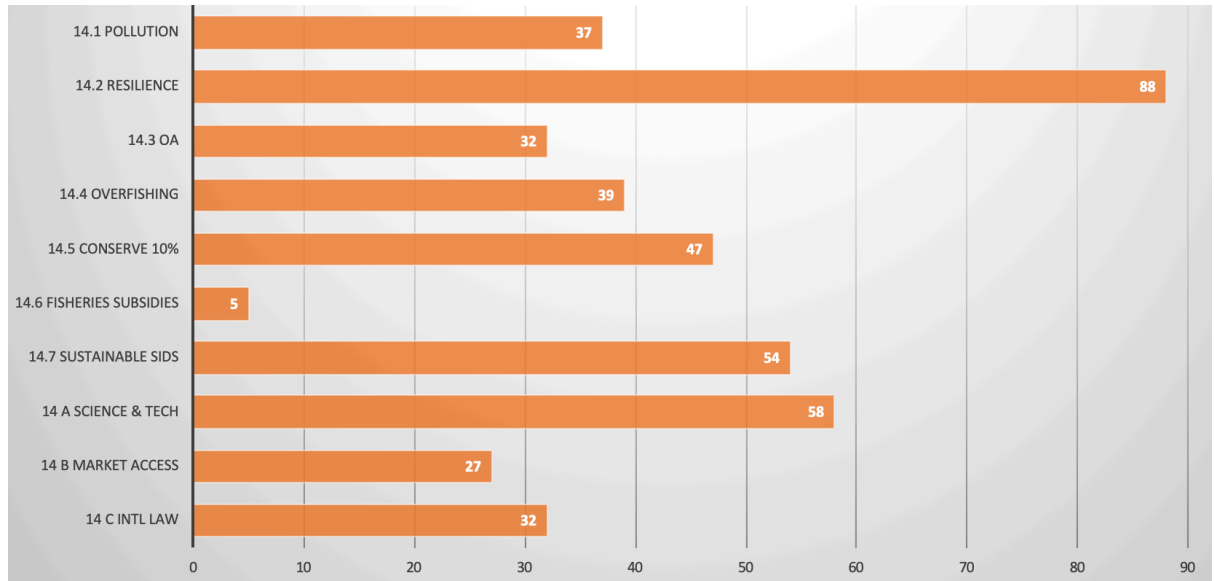


Figure 11 The number of VCs addressing each of the SDG14 targets (see Figure 8 for detailed description of each Target)

Summary of activities of the Coral Reef COA

UN Environment Programme and the International Coral Reef Initiative have implemented a range of activities to activate and support the Coral Reef Community of Ocean Action, including establishing an email group and newsletter, facilitating member attendance at the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean, planning a Webinar, attending the Co-focal points meeting in Nairobi, presenting to the ICRI General Meeting, and production of a series of online stories about featured VCs.

Email group & newsletter

An email group and newsletter (via Mail Chimp) have been established for all members of the Coral Reef COA. This has been used by the co-focal points to actively engage with COA members and to encourage communication and networking within the Community. The email group has been used to introduce members to the concept and intent of the COA, to advertise opportunities for sharing experiences and to encourage members to submit update reports to the VC registry. The significant increase in update reporting and the good response to invitations to be profiled in a series of VC stories indicate that members are beginning to engage with the Community.

Attendance at Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean

In November 2018, the co-focal points supported attendance by coral reef COA members at the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean, convened by UN ESCAP in Bangkok (20 November). This included funding travel for 3 VC leads, representing projects in Myanmar, Indonesia and Hongkong. These COA members gave presentations on progress toward their VCs at the meeting, which were well received both by fellow Coral Reef COA members and also by other Communities of Ocean Action attending the meeting. The meeting generated valuable networking opportunities for COA members (including meeting with the UN Ambassador for the Oceans, Mr Peter Thompson, Figure 12), and stimulated conversations among COA focal points about experiences and ideas for further enhancing the COAs.



Figure 12 Members of the Coral Reef Community of Action met with Mr Peter Thompson, UN Ambassador for the Oceans, during the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean

Webinar

Building on the positive feedback from other COAs, the co-focal points for the Coral Reef COA co-focal points have planned a webinar for COA members in late January. This will provide an opportunity for COA members to directly interact with the co-focal points (UN

Environment Program and ICRI) and each other. The webinar will provide an introduction and overview to the COA, outline recent and planning activities, and encourage discussion about ways to increase the value and effectiveness of the Community. It will also feature a valuable capacity-building opportunity for members through a presentation on “Accelerating progress toward your VC: marketing, branding and partnerships for conservation outcomes” by Michael Steward from Sustainable Surf.

[Attendance at Co-Focal Points Meeting in Nairobi](#)

A representative of the Coral Reef COA attended the Co-focal Points Meeting associated with the Blue Economy Symposium in Nairobi on 25th November, where progress and experiences with activating the Coral Reef COA were shared with other COAs.

[Presentation on COA to ICRI General Meeting](#)

An overview of the Coral Reef COA was also presented to the 33rd General Meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative held 5-7 December in Monaco.

[Online feature stories of profiled VCs](#)

Ten VCs have been selected for online articles to be published on the UN Environment website. These features aim to share experiences and inspire collaboration and additional voluntary commitments.

Reflections on early achievements and lessons

Although only in the early phase of development, the COA has already made valuable progress toward the set of objectives for which the COAs were established:

- To follow-up on the implementation of voluntary commitments;
- To catalyse and generate new voluntary commitments; and
- To facilitate collaboration and networking amongst different actors in support of SDG 14.

Below is an evaluation of progress made toward these objectives, based on observations by the Coral Reef COA leadership team (representatives of UNEP and ICRI as the co-focal leads and consultant), discussions with co-focal leads from other COAs, feedback from COA members, and discussions at the Bangkok and Nairobi meetings. Ingredients of success and opportunities for enhancing the COA in 2019, in the lead up to the 2020 Oceans Conference, are provided in the following section.

Follow-up on implementation

The excel spreadsheet of registered VCs provided by UNDESA has provided a valuable resource for reviewing key parameters for each of the 125 VCs. However, in the form currently available for download, contact details for the lead persons nominated against each VC are not available. A separate email list is available, but this is not readily reconcilable against the master list of VCs. Contact details for each VC had to be manually copied from the Registry website into the spreadsheet to make a comprehensive database for managing and tracking members in the COA. Once compiled however, this database provided a sound basis for communicating with all members to follow up on implementation.

Regular communication with COA members via direct emails and email newsletters has proven effective at increasing the proportion of VCs with progress updates submitted to the registry. However, while our communications efforts more than doubled the number of VCs with updates, the proportion of VCs that have officially reported on progress toward implementation is still only around 25%.

Consistent with this relatively low rate of reporting to date is the relatively low level of engagement with email communications. Replies to emails, even those offering funding opportunities (for attendance at the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean), were relatively rare, representing only a small proportion of the member population.

However, on the positive side, members who did take up the opportunity to attend the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean were extremely interactive and engaged. They energetically sought networking opportunities, responded thoughtfully to each other's presentations, and participated actively in discussions about how to improve the COA. The level of energy and engagement during these face-to-face interactions was in strong contrast to that experienced through electronic channels.

Catalyze and generate new voluntary commitments

Eleven new voluntary commitments were added to the Coral Reef COA during the three-month effort to activate and accelerate the COA. While it is not possible to definitively attribute these to any specific activity of the COA, anecdotal observations made during email and face-to-face discussions with members revealed that interactions between members and discussions about the range of potential benefits of registering an activity as a VC triggered expressions of intent to generate new VCs. This suggests that increased communication about the benefits of registering activities as VCs and the benefits of becoming part of the COA are likely to further catalyse and generate new VCs going forward.

Facilitate collaboration and networking

The relatively low level of interaction achieved through email and online communication methods so far means that these mechanisms have not been highly effective at facilitating collaboration and networking. Forums that allow real-time interaction, such as webinars, may improve the utility of online communications for collaboration and networking, but this would depend on the level of participation in webinars. This is an opportunity that will be explored more in 2019 when the first webinar will be held.

In contrast to the online mechanisms for interaction, the in-person meeting among members enabled by the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean was characterised by very energetic collaboration and networking. As outlined above, the level of engagement and information sharing among the 6 attendees from the Coral Reef COA was very high. A strong network was established among the attendees, some of whom continue to be in contact to explore potential for sharing experiences and ideas into the future.

Toward a strategy for COA success

The initial activation phase for the Coral Reef COA has provided valuable lessons and insights that can be used to shape future efforts to make the COA a success. In this section I summarise insights about the ingredients of success so far, comprising perceived benefits of COA membership and factors contributing to positive experiences for members. Then I provide suggestions and recommendations for future activities that can build on these early successes and lessons to help ensure the Coral Reef COA provides a platform for effectively supporting implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

Ingredients of success

Face-to-face meetings and interviews with members who participated in the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean provided valuable insights about the perceived benefits of participation in the COA and the factors that have contributed to its early successes. These are summarised below.

Perceived benefits of COA membership

- A key benefit of registering activities as VCs has been the ability for smaller organisations (local NGOs, community groups, etc) to visibly align their work with the UN SDGs. This can help attract attention and support from national government agencies.
- The “bottom-up” process of registering VCs (they are registered by project leads, not by state parties) bypasses many of the established tensions and politics and allows smaller organisations to engage with the SDG platform.
- The recognition and credibility that can accrue to projects through registering as a VC can help increase profile, enthuse project participants and attract partners and funding.
- VCs help to connect ground-level projects with SDGs (thus bypassing inefficient information sharing via top-down government processes ie. provincial and state government agencies often don’t know about SDGs or relevance of programs to SDGs)
- VC leads appreciate the opportunity to join and contribute to a community of practice around MPAs at a range of scales (country/region/globe)
- VC registration requires partners to be specified, encouraging formal commitments that can help deliver project success

Factors contributing to COA success

- Personal contacts and networks and person-to-person encouragement has been instrumental in achieving meaningful engagement among COA members in the early stages (especially Jerker working with individual VC leads)
- VCs get the “psychology right” (voluntary commitment better than imposed requirement/instruction/obligation)
- VC registry can inspire others to register, creating “snowball effect”
- “Bottom-up” process of registering VCs creates a “level playing field” on which smaller organisations and projects have same legitimacy as larger organisations/projects; this helps inspire and motivate more on-ground projects

- Opportunities for in-person interactions with other COA members greatly enhance opportunities for knowledge sharing and creating a sense of community among participants.

Opportunities for enhancing the COA

This section outlines key challenges and opportunities identified in the early phase of activation of the Coral Reef COA, followed by recommendations or suggestions (***in bold italics***) for enhancing the efficacy of the COA in the lead up to the 2020 Oceans Conference.

Short-term recommendations

A key challenge for the COA is to increase the proportion of VCs that have submitted progress updates to the UN SDG14 registry.

Recommendation: Develop incentives for reporting of progress toward VCs, such as offering some form of recognition (eg. certificates) that would be issued to VCs that have demonstrated progress through a self-assessment tool.

There is currently no formal mechanism to integrate voluntary commitments into the reporting responsibilities of State Parties'. This creates potential for a disconnect or conflict between the various efforts to implement SDG14. It also limits the scope for VCs to receive support from government organisations for implementation of activities that could assist with national reporting on progress toward SDG14.

Recommendation: Provide a list of all VCs relevant to SDG14 on a country-by-country basis to SDG focal points of each State Party. Create a reporting page on the UN Ocean Conference website that consolidates VCs (including progress updates) on the basis of State Parties.

COA members are likely to respond positively to increased opportunities for knowledge exchange and capacity building. The COA could provide a platform for members with particular skills and experience to share these with the wider membership.

Recommendation: Organise webinars that feature members sharing skills and expertise that addresses key capacity gaps for the COA membership.

Recommendation: Continue to develop online stories about exemplar VCs to share experiences and inspire collaboration among COA members.

A key objective of the COA is to catalyse and generate new VCs. This requires that potential VC leads not currently involved in the COA become aware of the VC registration process and the benefits of joining the COA through registering of an activity as a VC.

Recommendation: Produce a flyer or brochure that explains the Coral Reef COA and invites registration of new VCs (for electronic distribution); distribute through coral reef networks.

Suggestions for longer-term strategies

Successful and timely implementation of many VCs (and incentive for generating new VCs) would be aided in many instances by better access to funding, skill-based partnerships and other forms of support from the private sector. The COA could serve as a "Marketplace" for connecting members to private sector organisations that may be interested in supporting or partnering with VCs to contribute to delivery of SDG14.

Suggestion: Create a spatial interface (ie. google maps) for exploring the VC registry that would enable private sector organisations to identify VCs operating in their geographical area of interest/operation; promote the spatial interface (and the COA more broadly) to industry and development groups (eg. chambers of commerce).

Private sector organisations may not feel that they are well-positioned to make voluntary commitments that directly address coral reef challenges that could contribute to SDG14. However, many private sector organisations have skills, expertise and capacity that could deliver much-needed support to existing VCs.

Suggestion: Promote the COA and explain the VC registration process within the private sector (i.e. via Chambers of Commerce and industry conferences, etc); communicate to private sector organisations about the opportunities to support implementation of VCs;

Suggestion: Encourage private sector organisations to register VCs that focus on providing support to other VCs via provision of pro-bono services (eg. marketing and communications agencies).

An important opportunity for the COA to add value arises from facilitating collaboration and networking amongst different actors in support of SDG 14. Future development of the COA should focus on the ways to encourage stronger and more sustainable engagement among members who share thematic or geographic interests.

Suggestion: Institute regional or national “COA Chapters”. These could convene regular meetings/workshops (ie 2 per year) sponsored by industry or government to share experiences, create networks and provide a platform for collaboration.

Many VCs from developing countries would benefit from improved access to relevant information. With the demise of ReefBase, there is an opportunity for the COA to serve as valuable portal or clearing house for information relevant to effective implementation of coral reef VCs.

Suggestion: Promote, support or re-invigorate information repositories relevant to the coral reef COA (such as ReefBase, ICRI Forum or CBD Coral Portal).