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# NEWSBRIEF



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*The Opening Ceremony, 11th Our Ocean Conference.  
© Kenya State Department for Blue Economy and Fisheries*

### WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT AFRICA'S FIRST OUR OCEAN CONFERENCE

*H.E. Marie May Jeremy, Minister for Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources, Republic of Seychelles, and WIOMSA President, addresses delegates at the African Ministerial Side Event, "Africa's Blue Frontier: Strengthening Ocean Governance for Africa's Blue Economy for People and Nature," hosted by WIO-C. Photo: © East African Wild Life Society*



**The 11TH OUR OCEAN CONFERENCE (OOC11), held in Mombasa, Kenya, from June 16–18, marked a milestone for ocean conservation. For the first time, the global conference was hosted on African soil, bringing together more than 5,000 participants from over 100 governments, research institutions, civil society organizations, businesses and coastal communities.**

By the close of the meeting, delegates had announced 320 new commitments worth US\$6.4 billion and reported progress on hundreds of earlier pledges, signalling a growing shift from ambition to implementation.

For the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), however, the conference was about more than new commitments. It demonstrated how regional collaboration is becoming central to delivering healthier oceans and stronger coastal livelihoods.



*Dr. Jared Bosire (Head, Nairobi Convention), Ms. Nancy Ogonje (WIO-C President & CEO, East African Wild Life Society), H.E. Ahmed Omar (State Minister, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Somalia), Ms. Nanette Laure (Director, Environment & Natural Resources, Seychelles), Dr. Arthur Tuda (Executive Director, WIOMSA), and H.E. Abubakar Ben Mahmoud (Minister of Environment in charge of Tourism, Comoros) at the launch of the Mombasa Manifesto. Photo: © East African Wild Life Society*

## Driving Innovation and Protection

At the heart of the conference was the **WIO-C Pavilion**, which hosted three days of discussions showcasing how governments, scientists, civil society organizations, community groups and development partners are working together to address shared marine challenges.

The Pavilion opened with a call for stronger regional cooperation before moving on to discussions about where ocean investments can have the greatest impact. Sessions highlighted community-led conservation, transboundary management of the Northern Mozambique Channel, locally led ocean governance, mangrove restoration, sustainable financing for marine protected areas, and pathways toward achieving the global 30x30 conservation target.

The **Mombasa Manifesto**, launched during the conference, reinforced this message by calling for stronger regional solidarity, community leadership, science-informed decision-making and sustained investment to secure the future of the Western Indian Ocean.

## Science informing regional action

Several Pavilion discussions focused on translating science into policy.

Partners launched the **Regional Assessment of Our Ocean Conference Commitment Implementation in Africa**, developed through collaboration between the World Resources Institute, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, WIOMSA and CORDIO East Africa. The assessment reviews Africa's progress in implementing prior ocean commitments and identifies opportunities to strengthen accountability and regional cooperation.

Ocean acidification and blue carbon also featured prominently. Scientists, governments and regional organizations discussed the development of a Western Indian Ocean Regional Ocean Acidification Action Plan under the Nairobi Convention and highlighted growing efforts to protect mangroves and seagrass ecosystems as critical blue carbon habitats supporting both climate resilience and coastal livelihoods.

The WIO-C Marine Plastics Working Group hosted “Turning the Plastic Tides: Advancing Locally Led Approaches Towards Marine Plastic Pollution.” Photo: © East African Wild Life Society



## Communities at the centre of ocean conservation

**A recurring theme throughout the Pavilion was that durable conservation depends on local leadership.**

Sessions explored community-led fisheries management, sustainable blue tourism, mangrove restoration, marine protected areas and locally driven solutions to plastic pollution. Speakers emphasized that coastal communities are already demonstrating practical solutions, but require stronger partnerships, long-term financing and enabling policies to expand their impact.

The conference also showcased regional efforts to harmonize small-scale fisheries data, strengthen marine spatial planning in Kenya and Tanzania, and promote regenerative blue economy models that connect conservation with sustainable livelihoods.

## Looking beyond commitments

**While OOC11 generated significant financial commitments, one of its strongest messages was that implementation will depend on collaboration.**

Across the Western Indian Ocean, governments, research institutions, conservation organizations, Indigenous and local communities, youth networks and development partners are increasingly working through regional platforms to address challenges that no single country can solve alone.

The WIO-C Pavilion reflected this collective approach, bringing together organizations including WIOMSA, the East African Wildlife Society, Fauna & Flora, CORDIO East Africa, WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Blue Ventures, Wetlands International Eastern Africa, IUCN, the Nairobi Convention and numerous community networks to share experiences and build new partnerships.

The conference strengthened a growing regional movement built on shared science, coordinated action and partnerships that place coastal communities at the center of WIO and Africa's ocean future.

# NAIROBI CONVENTION AT 40: A LEGACY OF REGIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND COOPERATION

| By the Nairobi Convention Secretariat

COP 11 Delegates Group Photo, Madagascar



**The Convention has evolved into a trusted regional convenor bringing together a wide range of stakeholders across the WIO region**

The Nairobi Convention marks 40 years of regional cooperation for the protection, management and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). Established in 1985 under the [United Nations Environment Programme Regional Seas Programme](#), the Convention provides a legally binding regional framework bringing together ten Contracting Parties in collective action to address shared marine and coastal environmental challenges. Since entering into force in 1996, it has evolved into a central platform for regional ocean governance, supporting coordinated responses to transboundary issues affecting marine ecosystems, coastal livelihoods and the blue economy.

Over the past four decades, the Convention has progressively expanded its scope to respond to emerging environmental challenges, including climate change, marine biodiversity loss, land-based sources of pollution, coastal degradation and increasing pressure on marine resources. In 2010, the Contracting Parties amended the Convention to incorporate these priorities, strengthening its relevance in a rapidly evolving ocean governance context.

## Operationalizing its mandate through strategic action programmes

The Convention has operationalized its mandate through strategic action programmes and flagship initiatives, including the [Western Indian Ocean Strategic Action Programme \(WIOSAP\)](#) and the SAPPHERE project. It has also implemented and concluded other key regional programmes, including African, Caribbean and Pacific countries capacity building of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the [Integrated Management of the Marine and Coastal Resources of the Northern Mozambique Channel project](#), which strengthened institutional capacity, compliance with multilateral environmental agreements and regional coordination on marine and coastal governance. Additionally, the upcoming Sustainable western Indian Ocean programme (SWIOP) is expected to further enhance integrated ocean governance, resilience building, and sustainable blue economy development in the region.

Collectively, these initiatives have supported countries in advancing ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning, biodiversity conservation, pollution reduction and climate resilience, while strengthening the generation and use of scientific knowledge for decision-making.

## Panel Discussion at the SWIOP Strategic Announcement, Our Ocean Conference



**The Convention has evolved into a trusted regional convener bringing together a wide range of stakeholders across the WIO region.** This includes its Contracting Parties, civil society organizations through the [Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean](#), the scientific community through the [Forum for Academic and Research Institutions, regional economic communities](#) and the private sector.

A key strength of the Nairobi Convention lies in its role in strengthening the science-policy interface. Through partnerships with research institutions, technical organizations and regional experts, it has supported the generation, sharing and application of marine science to inform policy and management decisions. This has improved evidence-based decision-making across the region, particularly in biodiversity conservation, pollution control, ecosystem restoration and climate change adaptation. The Convention also continues to promote multistakeholder engagement involving governments, academia, civil society and development partners in support of sustainable ocean governance.

### A new decade-long programme charts the Convention's next phase

As the Convention enters its fifth decade, the [Integrated Regional Programme 2025–2035](#) provides a strategic framework for the next phase of implementation, focusing on integrated ocean governance, ecosystem-based marine spatial planning, source-to-sea pollution management, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience and the development of a sustainable blue economy. This framework reinforces the Convention's role as a coordinating mechanism for regional action and supports the translation of global environmental commitments into practical implementation across the Western Indian Ocean.

The Convention's continued effectiveness will depend on sustained political commitment, strengthened partnerships and coordinated regional implementation to ensure a healthy, resilient and productive ocean for present and future generations.

# WIO REGION SHARPENS ITS STRATEGY AHEAD OF COP12

| By the Nairobi Convention Secretariat



Meeting outcomes will shape regional priorities and investment ahead of COP12

Dar es Salaam in Tanzania hosted a series of strategic regional meetings in May that brought together Nairobi Convention focal points, research institutions, development partners, experts and stakeholders to advance preparations for the twelfth Conference of Parties (COP12) to the Nairobi Convention. The meetings strengthened regional cooperation, aligned priorities and shaped the future of sustainable ocean governance in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.

The week commenced with the [Forum of Academic and Research Institutions](#) meeting, which focused on strengthening the science-policy interface and enhancing the contribution of research institutions to regional ocean governance. Participants discussed emerging science priorities, innovation, workforce development, marine and coastal research collaboration and opportunities to generate knowledge that can support evidence-based decision-making across the region. The meeting reaffirmed the critical role of science in addressing the complex environmental challenges facing the WIO.

This was followed by the [Global Environmental Facility](#) (GEF-9) Programme Development Stakeholder Consultation meeting where participants explored priorities for the development of a new regional programme under the GEF-9. Discussions focused on regional coordination mechanisms, national child projects, sustainable financing opportunities and collaborative approaches to addressing marine and coastal environmental challenges. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of strengthening regional partnerships and mobilizing investments

that can support long-term conservation, resilience and sustainable blue economy development throughout the WIO.

The week culminated in the Focal Points and Partners Pre-COP meeting, which officially opened under the leadership of Dr. Richard Muyungi, Permanent Secretary for Environment and Blue Economy in the Vice President's Office of Tanzania. The opening session was also attended by Alberto Pacheco Capella, chief of the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Seas Programme and Jared Bosire, head of the Nairobi Convention Secretariat.

During the three-day meeting, Nairobi Convention focal points, regional partners, experts, stakeholders and country representatives reviewed progress in implementing the [2025–2028 Work Programme](#) and [decisions adopted at COP11](#). Participants shared updates on national and regional initiatives, discussed emerging priorities for COP12 and explored opportunities to strengthen cooperation in support of sustainable ocean governance. Discussions also focused on regional frameworks and strategies, sustainable financing mechanisms and draft decision areas that will be considered during COP12, which Tanzania will host later this year.

As preparations for COP12 continue, the outcomes of these meetings will help inform regional priorities, guide future investments and support implementation of the Nairobi Convention's mandate to protect, manage and develop the marine and coastal environment of the WIO region.

# INTEGRATIVE BIODIVERSITY-INCLUSIVE MARINE CONSERVATION PLANNING FOR KENYA | *By Joseph Maina*



**A strong cross-sector recognition that marine biodiversity underpins fisheries productivity, tourism, coastal resilience and long-term blue economy sustainability**

**Kenya recently hosted a multisector workshop to advance an integrated, evidence-informed, and biodiversity-inclusive marine conservation framework.** Participants included government agencies, conservation organizations, tourism stakeholders, research institutions, and community-linked marine governance actors. The workshop contributed to Kenya's implementation of biodiversity commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, while also shaping future national ocean commitments ahead of the Our Ocean Conference.

Guided by systematic conservation planning principles, the structured process involved objective-setting, evidence review, identifying biodiversity features and ecological processes, considering pressures and trade-offs, prioritization, scenario setting, management responses, and implementation pathways. Key themes emerged, including the importance of ecological connectivity between coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, spawning and nursery grounds, migratory pathways, and offshore ecosystems.

Fisheries stakeholders emphasized protecting breeding and nursery areas and strengthening Joint Co-Management Areas, while tourism representatives underscored the reliance of coastal tourism on healthy marine ecosystems and opportunities for restoration and responsible tourism.

Discussions with Kenya Ports Authority and Kenya Maritime Authority highlighted pressures from dredging, shipping, underwater noise, invasive species, and habitat disruption. Mining and energy sector conversations raised concerns about habitat disruption, pollution, overlapping mandates, and the need for biodiversity-informed environmental assessment and spatial planning.

A major outcome was the broad cross-sector recognition that marine biodiversity underpins fisheries productivity, tourism, coastal resilience, and long-term blue economy sustainability. Participants called for improved institutional coordination, integrated monitoring systems, and shared biodiversity data repositories, with fragmented data and uneven monitoring noted as significant challenges.

The workshop explored diverse conservation and management approaches beyond protected areas, including Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, fisheries measures, restoration, monitoring, and climate-sensitive management pathways. Priorities for future national commitments include equitable and effective conservation, protecting and managing at least 30% of marine and coastal areas, strengthening ecological connectivity and climate resilience, and supporting community participation and stewardship in marine conservation and sustainable ocean management.

## WIOMSA CHAMPIONS POLICY AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE WIO



*The REPOA opening ceremony presided over by His Excellency Hemed Suleiman Abdulla, Zanzibar's Second Vice-President*

**Bridging research, policy and cross-sectoral collaboration across the blue economy**

**May and June have been months of significant regional engagement for WIOMSA as the organization continues to champion evidence-based policy, research and innovation for resilient coastal communities and a thriving blue economy.**

These engagements demonstrate WIOMSA's commitment to bridging research and policy, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and supporting member countries as they navigate the opportunities and challenges of blue economy growth.

At the REPOA 29th Annual Research Workshop in Zanzibar, WIOMSA's Dr. Obakeng Molelu delivered a keynote address on the importance of strong, long-term partnerships, robust scientific research and capacity development for advancing an inclusive and sustainable blue economy. Dr. Molelu emphasized that effective ocean governance – across fisheries, tourism, marine transport and renewable energy – depends on coordinated regional action and science-policy engagement. Discussions also spotlighted the emerging role of renewable energy in supporting livelihoods, fisheries and entrepreneurship, with a call for African-led solutions that are resilient and inclusive.

Building on this regional momentum, WIOMSA also played a leading role at the Innovate4Cities 2026 Conference in Nairobi. Drawing on lessons from the [Bandari Bora](#) project in Mombasa, WIOMSA highlighted the urgent need for integrated research and policy to address the complex challenges facing coastal cities where climate change, rapid urbanization and economic development intersect. The Mombasa case study underscored the vulnerability of urban infrastructure and livelihoods to recurring floods, advocating for locally-grounded evidence, stakeholder engagement and science-to-policy partnerships to shape resilient, climate-smart coastal cities.



*Dr. Molelu (second from left) and panellists at the Innovate4 Cities Conference in Nairobi*

## INVESTING IN PEOPLE TO STRENGTHEN MARINE CONSERVATION ACROSS THE WIO

The largest WIO-COMPAS certification event in the programme's history, with 22 candidates recommended for certification in a single assessment and a 100 percent success rate



**As countries across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) work towards protecting 30 percent of marine and coastal areas by 2030, one reality is becoming increasingly clear: conservation success depends not only on the number of protected areas established, but on the people responsible for managing them.**

This was the driving focus of the recent French-language Western Indian Ocean Certification of Marine Protected Area Professionals (WIO-COMPAS) assessment held on Sainte Marie Island, Madagascar, from 11–15 May 2026. Bringing together marine protected area professionals from Madagascar, Seychelles and the Comoros, the event strengthened one of the region's most important foundations for effective marine conservation – a skilled, recognized and connected conservation workforce.

**The event represents the largest WIO-COMPAS certification event in the programme's history, with 22 candidates recommended for certification in a single assessment and a 100 percent success rate.**

Together with one previously deferred candidate now recommended for certification, the regional network of certified WIO-COMPAS professionals increases to 174 certified practitioners working across WIO region. The event also recorded the highest scores ever achieved in

both the Level 1 and Level 2 assessments, demonstrating the growing depth of expertise within the region's marine conservation workforce.

**The assessment forms part of WIOMSA's long-term commitment to strengthening the capacity and leadership** of those responsible for managing marine protected and conserved areas. Rather than testing academic knowledge alone, WIO-COMPAS evaluates the practical competencies required to lead effective conservation, including governance, strategic planning, adaptive management, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, communication and leadership.

### Investing in people to close the management capacity gap

The assessment reflects a growing recognition that achieving the ambitions of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework requires sustained investment in people. While marine protected and conserved areas continue to expand throughout the region, assessments consistently show that management effectiveness remains constrained by institutional capacity, workforce development and access to recognized professional pathways.

**Hosting the assessment in French also represents an important step towards making professional development more accessible across the WIO region's diverse linguistic landscape.** Beyond the assessment itself, the event fostered the exchange of practical experience between professionals managing a wide range of marine conservation areas. Participants shared lessons on leadership, compliance, community engagement, monitoring and adaptive management, while guest presentations showcased emerging technologies supporting conservation, including strategic enforcement systems and experiences from the Sainte Marie Marine Protected Area.

These exchanges form an important part of the broader vision of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Area Network, which seeks to strengthen management effectiveness by connecting practitioners, facilitating knowledge exchange and supporting long-term workforce development across the region.

As the WIO region continues to advance towards global biodiversity targets, **success will be measured not only by the extent of ocean placed under protection, but by how effectively these areas are managed.** Building a skilled, connected and recognized conservation workforce remains one of the region's most important investments in ensuring that marine protected and conserved areas deliver lasting ecological and community benefits.

*Note: The French-language WIO-COMPAS assessment was delivered by WIOMSA with support from the VARUNA Biodiversity Programme and the Blue Nature Alliance, together with a dedicated team of regional assessors and mentors.*

*WIO-COMPAS Candidates during the boat and beach patrol simulation exercise*



*WIO-COMPAS boat and beach patrol simulation exercise*

## BEYOND FUNDING: HIFADHI BLU INVESTS IN STRONGER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR OCEAN CONSERVATION

Nine sites across eight countries selected to test new conservation approaches



**Nine Ocean Conservation Areas (OCAs) across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) have been selected to join the next phase of the Hifadhi Blu Programme, marking an important milestone in a regional effort to strengthen the effectiveness of marine conservation management.**

Implemented by WIOMSA in partnership with Advanced Conservation Strategies (ACS), with support from the Minderoo Foundation, Hifadhi Blu was established to address one of the greatest challenges facing marine conservation today: ensuring that OCAs are not only designated, but effectively managed.

**Across the WIO region, governments and communities have made significant progress in expanding marine conservation.** Yet, as highlighted in the [Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Areas Outlook](#), many OCAs continue to face common challenges that limit their long-term effectiveness, including constrained institutional capacity, fragmented governance, limited financial resources, weak monitoring systems, competing stakeholder interests and increasing pressures from climate change and unsustainable resource use. Improving management effectiveness therefore requires more than implementing individual conservation activities – it requires

strengthening the systems that enable conservation to succeed.

Following a competitive regional call for proposals, nine sites from Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius (Rodrigues), Somalia and South Africa were selected to join the programme. Together, they represent the diversity of OCAs found across the region, from nationally managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and a globally significant World Heritage Site to Joint Co-Managed Areas and Locally Managed Marine Areas. While each site operates within a unique ecological and governance context, many share common barriers to effective management, making them ideal candidates for testing new approaches to strengthening conservation systems.

To better understand these challenges, each grantee participated in a Collaborative Systems Workshop facilitated by WIOMSA and ACS. Project teams worked together to map the ecological, institutional, governance and social systems influencing management effectiveness within their sites. By examining how these different components interact, participants were able to identify the underlying drivers of management challenges and prioritize interventions capable of creating meaningful and lasting change.

## A phased approach builds strong foundations before scaling up

**One of the key innovations emerging from this process is the adoption of a phased implementation approach for several sites.** Instead of implementing all proposed activities simultaneously, Phase 1 focuses on strengthening the enabling conditions for effective management. Depending on the needs of each site, this may include improving governance arrangements, strengthening monitoring and data systems, building institutional capacity, enhancing stakeholder participation, or developing better mechanisms for adaptive decision-making. Larger interventions will then build on these stronger foundations as implementation progresses.

In Kenya, projects will strengthen collaborative governance within the Malindi-Watamu MPA and the Shimoni-Vanga and Malindi-Magarini Joint Co-Managed Areas. Tanzania and Mozambique will focus on strengthening community-led governance and sustainable fisheries management. Madagascar's Nosy Hara Marine National Park will enhance management systems within one of the region's most important protected areas, while the Seychelles Islands Foundation will continue strengthening the effective management of the globally recognized Aldabra Atoll. In Rodrigues, efforts will focus on improving institutional coordination and management systems within the South East MPA, while Somalia's Baraawe Marine Conservation Area represents an important opportunity to establish the governance and management foundations needed to support the first Ocean Conservation Area in Somalia. In South Africa, the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency will strengthen governance and operational management within the Dwesa-Cwebe MPA.

## Tracking system strength, not just activity, throughout implementation

**Throughout implementation, monitoring will extend beyond tracking activities and outputs to assessing whether the management systems themselves are becoming stronger.** Sites will monitor changes in governance, institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, ecological monitoring, compliance systems, decision-making processes and the use of evidence to inform management.

Through technical exchanges, peer learning and regional collaboration, grantees will share experiences, test new approaches and contribute to a growing body of knowledge on what enables effective marine conservation across the WIO region.

Ultimately, the success of Hifadhi Blu will be measured by what remains after the programme concludes. Stronger governance systems, better-informed decision-making, improved monitoring frameworks, capable management teams, lasting institutional partnerships and a culture of adaptive learning are intended to endure well beyond the life of the grants.

### Hifadhi Blu grantees

- **Kenya:** Malindi-Watamu MPA – A Rocha Kenya and Bahari Hai
- **Kenya:** Shimoni-Vanga and Malindi-Magarini Joint Co-Managed Areas – Kenya Fisheries Service
- **Tanzania:** Dokichunda Collaborative Fisheries Management Area – WATONET
- **Mozambique:** Vamizi Locally Managed Marine Area – Quirimbas Foundation
- **Madagascar:** Nosy Hara Marine National Park – Madagascar National Parks
- **Mauritius (Rodrigues):** South East MPA – Rodrigues Regional Assembly
- **Seychelles:** Aldabra Atoll – Seychelles Islands Foundation
- **Somalia:** Baraawe Marine Conservation Area – Climate Resilience and Adaptation Network
- **South Africa:** Dwesa-Cwebe MPA – Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency



*The grantees at a learning workshop in Zanzibar.*

## A NEW TIDE OF CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP RISES IN THE WIO | By Karen Allen

A new learning model sparks unexpected enthusiasm among participants



**Making a splash in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) but with a distinctly Mozambican origin, the newly established Academy of Marine Conservation Leadership is poised to transform capacity development across the region.**

Designed by [Nautilus Conservation](#) in close partnership with WIOMSA and [Mozambique's National Administration of Conservation Areas](#), the Academy is the first initiative of its kind to be designed and anchored in the country. It responds directly to Mozambique's pressing need for skilled, empowered Marine Protected Area (MPA) personnel by offering a structured, part-time, three-year curriculum delivered across ten specialized modules in Portuguese. Blending applied, accredited and professional vocational training, the predominantly online programme equips in-service conservation practitioners to achieve regionally recognized MPA management competencies with the end goal of attaining professional certification through the acclaimed Western Indian Ocean Certification of Marine Protected Area Professionals (WIO-COMPAS) programme.

The Academy launched at the end of May, hosting an orientation week for its first-ever cohort, welcoming ten trainees from around the country representing the Bazaruto Archipelago National Park, the Primeiras e Segundas Environmental Protection Area, Mágoè and Gorongosa National Parks and the Palma-Quirimbas Environmental Protection Area.

The primary focus of the orientation week centred on foundational leadership development. Led by professional

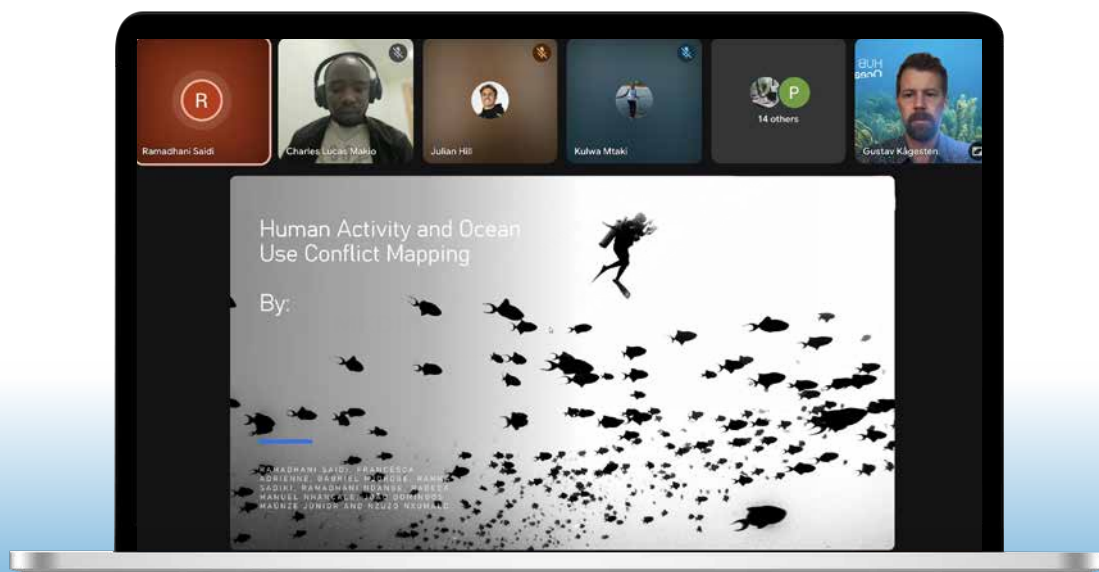
coach Sandra Ansorge from [Coachways](#), the training pushed past purely theoretical concepts and focused on the practical application of leadership principles within the context of the trainee's daily responsibilities in the field. Leadership coaching at the Academy is not treated as a standalone, one-off training tutorial, but is explicitly integrated across all ten modules throughout the duration of the programme, ensuring that personal growth evolves alongside technical competence.

Trainees also explored their personal and professional "spheres of influence" with education specialists [F&H Consultoria](#), to guide the creation of individual "passion projects". These will be built and implemented over the next three years, ensuring the cohort's leadership development translate directly into lasting, measurable impacts.

"The cohort's reception to the Academy's pioneering learning approach has been truly remarkable, far exceeding our expectations. By deliberately stepping away from traditional, teacher-led instruction in favour of an interactive, inquiry-based and differentiated model, the Academy has sparked an extraordinary level of enthusiasm and engagement among participants," said Karen Allen, Director of Nautilus Conservation.

Adding immense value to the orientation, Vanessa Muianga, Mozambique's first certified WIO-COMPAS Level 2 professional, made a special appearance to offer invaluable insight into the certification process and shared powerful testimony about how the regional qualification has enhanced her professional trajectory.

## OCEAN DATA IN THE CLOUD: PRACTICAL APPROACHES FOR THE WIO



**HUB Ocean, in collaboration with WIOMSA, delivered the *Working with Ocean Data in the Cloud: Practical Training for the Western Indian Ocean (WIO)*, a five-week online training designed to strengthen the capacity of marine and coastal scientists, students and practitioners in the Western Indian Ocean region.**

### **The training responded to a growing regional need for practical skills in accessing, managing and analysing oceanographic and geospatial data.**

While access to ocean data has improved through satellite, government and non-governmental initiatives, many users in the region continue to face challenges related to computing capacity, fragmented data systems, metadata standards, programming skills and limited exposure to cloud-based analytical platforms.

Through live online sessions and guided practical exercises, participants were introduced to the Ocean Data Platform and its tools for accessing, visualising, managing and analysing ocean datasets. The course also covered connections to GIS environments, the use of Python and R in cloud-based workflows, and the potential of AI-supported tools to assist participants with coding and data interpretation.

The training supported WIOMSA's and HUB Oceans broader commitment to strengthening data capacity for marine research, monitoring, marine spatial planning, blue economy strategies, climate adaptation and evidence-based decision-making in the WIO region.

The training encouraged participants to work together on mandatory group projects that contributed towards their grading and requirement to receive certificates. The aim was to encourage peer to peer learning and starting lasting working relationships between countries. On the last week of the course, groups presented their projects and demonstrated how they used Hub Ocean's Ocean Data Platform to solve their scenarios in fisheries, sea surface temperature and chlorophyll challenges, ecosystem monitoring, MSP and as a decision support tool. A second training is planned to take place in the last quarter of 2026, and the call will be published soon. Thank you for the first cohort of students and we wish you well on your activities and using the Ocean Data Platform.

### WIO STAKEHOLDERS CHART PATH FOR SUSTAINABLE MARINE TOURISM

*By Leslie Bayanza and Irene Mhlanga*



Participants explored issues such as governance, climate vulnerability, ecosystem degradation, benefit-sharing, infrastructure constraints and major data gaps

**A stakeholder engagement webinar on coastal and marine nature-based tourism (NBT) in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region has revealed both the opportunities and the governance, financing and data challenges facing the sector, and outlined a regional roadmap for unlocking its potential.**

Hosted by the School of Wildlife Conservation (SOWC) at the African Leadership University in partnership with WIOMSA, the webinar on 28 May 2026 was convened to share key findings from the recently published report [“State of coastal and marine nature-based tourism in the Western Indian Ocean region”](#) funded by a [SCALABLE](#) grant.

The event brought together 250 people from the tourism, marine conservation, research, academia and government sectors to discuss the contribution of coastal and marine nature-based tourism to livelihoods, employment and marine conservation across the region.

Dr. Aboud Jumbe, Permanent Secretary for Tourism in Zanzibar, opened the webinar and emphasized that “coastal and marine NBT depends on conserving the natural asset”. Leslie Bayanza from SOWC presented key findings and highlighted the challenges and opportunities facing the

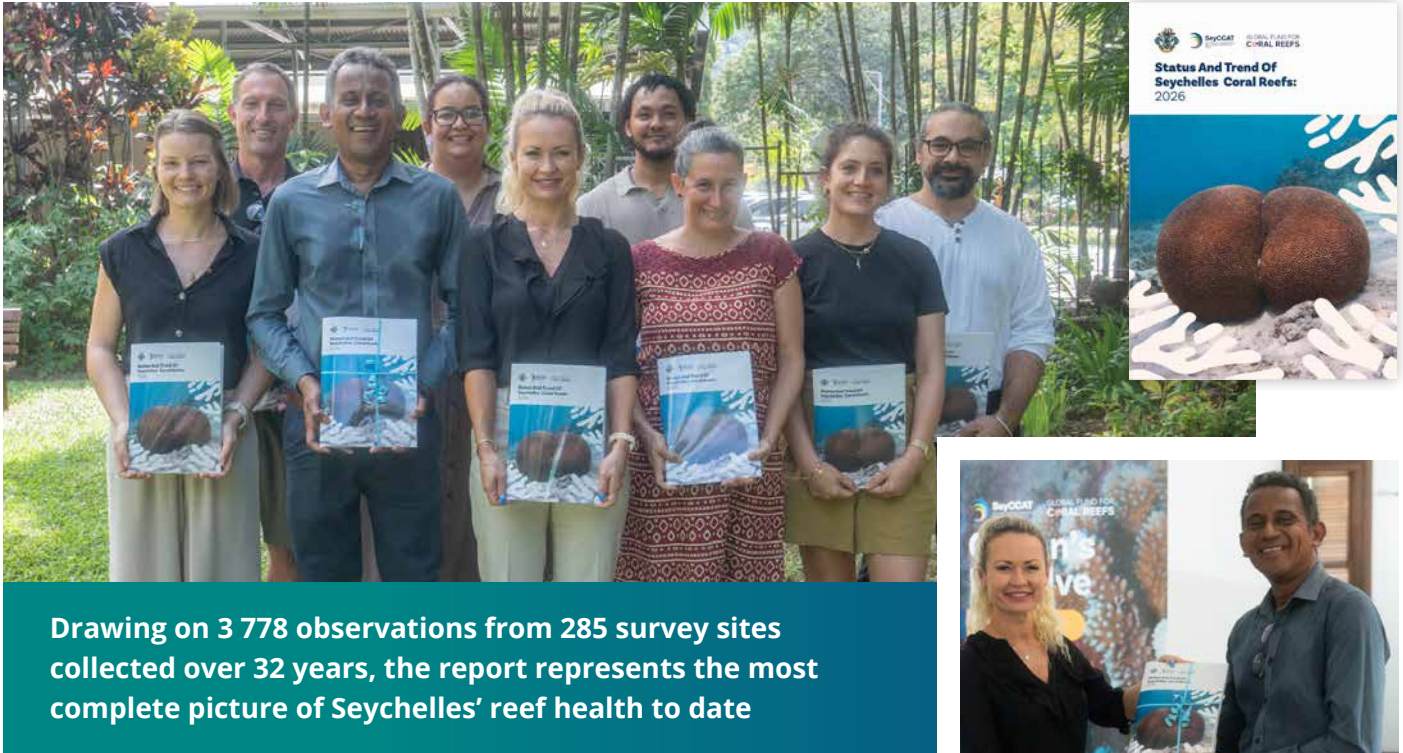
sector. She also introduced the regional roadmap aimed at unlocking the sector’s potential through stronger governance, improved monitoring systems, sustainable financing, community participation, equitable benefit-sharing and greater enforcement of conservation measures and investment.

It was noted that further research in the regions and the establishment of national-level data platforms are needed to ensure the true value of coastal and marine NBT is captured and reflected in policy and decision-making. Participants also explored issues such as governance, climate vulnerability, ecosystem degradation, benefit-sharing, infrastructure constraints and major data gaps.

The webinar ended with closing remarks from Dr. Arthur Tuda, Executive Director of WIOMSA, who reinforced the importance of regional collaboration in advancing a sustainable and resilient coastal and marine tourism sector.

A report [“Mafia Island nature-based tourism case study”](#) has been published which provides a more detailed analysis of coastal and marine NBT, including strategic recommendations for sustainable management of NBT on the island.

## NEW SEYCCAT REPORT REVEALS STATE OF SEYCHELLES' REEFS



**Drawing on 3 778 observations from 285 survey sites collected over 32 years, the report represents the most complete picture of Seychelles' reef health to date**

*SeyCCAT CEO Helena Sims presents the report to Director General Rodney Quatre, Ministry of Environment, Climate, Energy & Natural Resources*

The Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT) marked a significant milestone on 26 May this year with the launch of the [“Status and trend of Seychelles’ coral reefs 2026”](#) report. The report is among the most comprehensive coral reef assessments ever conducted in Seychelles.

SeyCCAT is an independent trust fund that strategically invests in ocean stakeholders to generate new learning, bold action and sustainable blue prosperity in Seychelles through competitive grants.

Attending the launch was Rodney Quatre, Director General of Environment, Climate, Energy and Natural Resources; Helena Sims, SeyCCAT CEO; Bee Ecological, the authors of the report; and representatives from local organizations that contributed to the report.

Drawing on 3 778 observations from 285 survey sites collected over 32 years, the report represents the most complete picture of Seychelles’ reef health to date. It was made possible by contributions from 11 dataset providers, bringing together data from multiple research institutions, government agencies and conservation organizations.

The findings are clear and urgent – national coral cover stands at just 14 percent. Seychelles has also experienced three major climate-driven thermal stress events in 1998,

2016 and 2024 as part of the fourth global coral bleaching event. In the inner islands, the 1998 event caused an estimated 90 percent loss of live coral, reducing cover to around 3 percent. The 2016 event brought heat stress that exceeded even 1998 levels. Each successive event leaves less time for reefs to recover before the next disturbance, raising the risk of long-term collapse.

The stakes for Seychelles are high. Coral reefs underpin the country's two most critical economic sectors: tourism and fisheries. It is estimated that tourism activities on reefs alone generate over USD 51.5 million annually. In addition, approximately 4 000 tonnes of reef fish are caught each year, most of which are for local consumption, sustaining national food security and the livelihoods of fisherfolk.

Financing for the new report was made possible under SeyCCAT's Ocean's Resolve programme, funded by the Global Fund for Coral Reefs. Through Ocean's Resolve, SeyCCAT is dedicated to protecting and conserving coral reefs through reef-positive business development and stronger coordination amongst partners.

The “Status and trend of Seychelles’ coral reefs 2026” report is available to download on SeyCCAT's website at [www.seyccat.org](http://www.seyccat.org)

## BENEATH THE SURFACE: WHAT'S DRIVING ILLEGAL FISHING IN TANZANIA'S SMALL PELAGIC SECTOR | By Lyidia Kapapa

*Dagaa fishing boats at the Kipumbwi landing site, Pangani District. © Lyidia Kapapa*



**Protecting Tanzania's small pelagic fisheries will depend on balancing effective regulation with practical support for the communities that depend on these resources.**

**Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing remains one of the most significant threats to marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods, both globally and in Tanzania.** As demand for fish rises due to population growth and tourism, Tanzania's fisheries – especially small pelagic species like dagaa – face increasing pressure. This is compounded by destructive fishing practices and weak enforcement, undermining efforts for sustainable management.

While foreign vessels operating illegally in Tanzania's waters have cost the country millions in lost revenue and fish stocks, local IUU fishing is also a major concern. For example, in 2009, authorities seized a Chinese vessel carrying nearly 300 tonnes of illegally caught fish. However, much of the illegal fishing occurs closer to home. A recent study focused on three productive dagaa fishing sites: Kilindoni, Kipumbwi, and Kilwa Kivinje, to understand why IUU fishing persists despite existing regulations and community management.

The findings show that IUU fishing is driven by a combination of economic hardship, governance challenges and social dynamics rather than a single underlying cause.

Among the most common IUU fishing practices were the use of prohibited fishing gear, including beach seines and cod-ends fitted with small-mesh sizes, locally known as *tandio*. These gears capture juvenile fish before they have an opportunity to reproduce, threatening the long-term sustainability of fish stocks. The study also revealed widespread fishing without valid licences. At the Kipumbwi landing site alone, researchers recorded 203 unlicensed fishers compared with just 113 licensed operators, highlighting the scale of the compliance challenge.

The study also revealed that the lack of alternative livelihood activities is a key driver of IUU fishing at the landing sites with more than 70 percent of respondents identifying it as the primary reason fishers engage in illegal practices. Institutional weaknesses further compound the problem. Beach Management Units (BMUs), which play a central role in community-based fisheries governance, reported several obstacles that limit their effectiveness. These include inadequate operational funding, weak law enforcement capacity, limited access to reliable information on illegal activities and insufficient resources to monitor extensive coastal areas.

The research concludes that stronger enforcement alone will not solve the problem. An integrated approach is needed – one that addresses both the economic needs of fishing communities and the institutional weaknesses that sustain IUU fishing. Key recommendations include developing alternative livelihood opportunities to reduce dependence on illegal fishing; strengthening BMU capacity and secure sustainable funding; improvement of enforcement and compliance mechanisms; investment in fisheries education and capacity building and increased transparency and consistency in fisheries governance, including better digital registration of vessels and fishers.

The findings align closely with Tanzania's existing fisheries governance framework, including the Fisheries Act of 2003 and the Fisheries Regulations of 2009. The study

recommends stronger implementation of these policies alongside broader reforms that integrate sustainable financing for BMUs into district council budgets and support ongoing fisheries governance initiatives.

Importantly, the research emphasizes that reducing IUU fishing also requires addressing its underlying social and economic causes. Ultimately, protecting Tanzania's small pelagic fisheries will depend on balancing effective regulation with practical support for the communities that depend on these resources.

The study was supported by the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries through the Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Governance and Shared Growth project and funded by the World Bank and WIOMSA's Marine Research Grant (MARG I) programme.



Women waiting to carry landed dagga. © Lydia Kapapa



**READ THE STUDY:**  
[Available here](#)

## TRANSITION PATHWAYS FROM VULNERABILITY TO VIABILITY OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN AFRICA AND ASIA | By Ella Kari Muhl

*Malindi Port in Unguja, Zanzibar – a boat reveals both its owner's mindset and its purpose, responding to new demands such as tourism while continuing to meet ancient needs for transport and food © Dr. Ella-Kari Muhl*



### **Small-scale fisheries support millions of people, especially in coastal and inland communities across Africa and Asia.**

However, small-scale fisheries are very vulnerable and face serious pressures, like poverty, weak decision-making systems, environmental change and growing competition from large-scale industries linked to the blue economy.

The paper examines pathways that can help to ensure small-scale fisheries are more viable and able to support people's lives over the long term. Viability is more than just economics; it also includes social relationships, culture, fairness, healthy ecosystems and the ability of people to influence decisions that affect them. The paper also shows that moving from vulnerability to viability is not a straight line. It is shaped by power, politics, history and local context and is deeply influenced by how fisheries are governed.

The five key pathways to viability identified include strengthening partnerships and governance networks; ensuring and sustaining fishing rights and access; recognizing gender and social differences; supporting diverse and environmentally sensitive livelihoods; and creating knowledge together with fishing communities, rather than for them.

Building viable small-scale fisheries requires more than technical fixes. It requires justice, inclusive governance and long-term collaboration. This research helps to set a future research agenda and supports countries working to put international small-scale fisheries commitments into practice, while reminding us that meaningful change is complex, political and deeply human.



**READ THE STUDY:**  
[Available here](#)

## CITIZEN SCIENCE REVEALS MOZAMBIQUE'S THREATENED SHARKS AND RAYS



**A new study published in *Frontiers in Marine Science* reveals how citizen science is helping uncover important patterns in the distribution and conservation status of sharks and rays along the Mozambican coastline.**

Led by Bazaruto Centre for Scientific Studies (BCSS's) Dércio Maoze and co-authored by Jule Buschmann, Acácio Chechene, David van Beuningen and Dr Lebrato, the research analysed shark and ray observations submitted to the global biodiversity platform [iNaturalist](#) between 2007 and 2025. The study represents the first comprehensive assessment of how iNaturalist contributes to understanding the species composition, spatial distribution and conservation status of elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) along the Mozambican coast.

Using 408 observations, researchers documented 44 shark and ray species, including whale sharks, manta rays, hammerheads, bull sharks, guitarfish and

stingrays. Importantly, the dataset captured 32 percent of Mozambique's documented elasmobranch diversity, demonstrating the growing scientific value of citizen-generated biodiversity data.

The findings also revealed significant conservation concerns. More than 70 percent of all observations involved species classified as threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, while over 90 percent of shark observations involved threatened species.

"This study demonstrates that citizen science can become a powerful and cost-effective tool for marine biodiversity monitoring in data-limited regions," said Dércio Maoze. "Public observations are increasingly helping researchers understand where species occur, identify conservation gaps and support evidence-based marine management."

The study found that observations were strongly concentrated in southern Mozambique, particularly in Inhambane Province, which accounted for 52 percent of all

records. Researchers suggest this pattern reflects higher tourism activity, diving effort and research presence in the region, while simultaneously revealing important data gaps in central and northern Mozambique.

Researchers also found that many observations overlapped with recognized Important Shark and Ray Areas but far fewer occurred inside legally protected Marine Protected Areas, highlighting a mismatch between conservation priorities and existing protection frameworks.



**READ THE STUDY:**  
[Available here](#)

According to the authors, citizen science platforms can complement conventional marine research by helping:

- expand species records;
- improve spatial and temporal biodiversity monitoring;
- support conservation planning;
- identify protection gaps; and
- strengthen public participation in ocean conservation.

As pressures on marine biodiversity continue to grow globally, the study highlights the increasing importance of combining scientific research with public participation to strengthen ocean conservation efforts in Mozambique and across the region.



*Round ribbontail ray*

## NEW PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES FROM WIOMSA AND PARTNERS

We are excited to announce the release of several important publications and resources aimed at advancing ocean health, sustainable fisheries and eco-friendly tourism across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region.

### A Regional Assessment of Our Ocean Conference Commitment Implementation in Africa (2026)

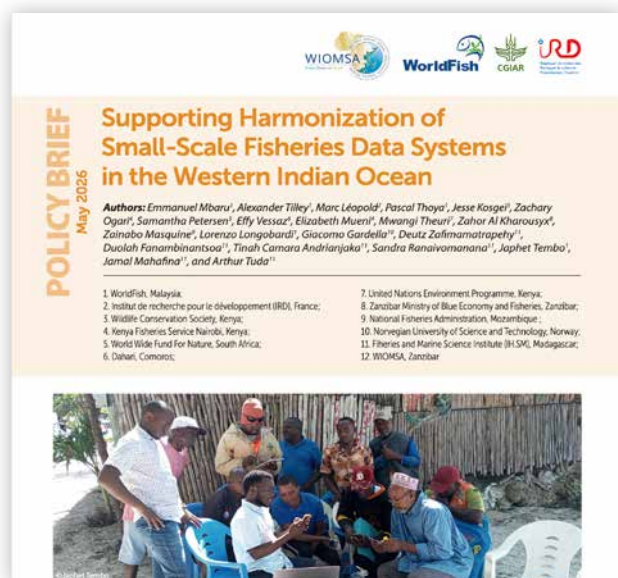
A Regional Assessment of Our Ocean Conference Commitment Implementation in Africa (2026). This working paper provides the first comprehensive analysis of Africa's implementation of Our Ocean Conference commitments. Since 2014, African nations have made 364 commitments and pledged USD 14.3 billion. Nearly 80% of these commitments are complete or underway, especially in sustainable fisheries, maritime security, and the blue economy. The report identifies factors enabling progress, persistent barriers like financial and capacity gaps, and calls for greater African-led engagement in future ocean solutions.



**READ THE REPORT: [Available here](#)**

### Policy Brief:

### Supporting Harmonization of Small-Scale Fisheries Data Systems in the Western Indian Ocean



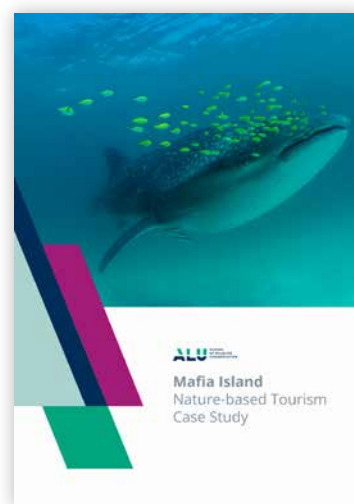
Small-scale fisheries are critical for food security and livelihoods, but fragmented data systems hinder effective management. This brief emphasizes the need for harmonized fisheries data to improve regional stock assessments and policy decisions. Recommendations include developing core indicators, enhancing data interoperability, and engaging communities. Key partners include the South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission and the Consortium for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the WIO.



**READ THE POLICY BRIEF [Available here](#)**

### Mafia Island Nature-Based Tourism Case Study

WIOMSA and the African Leadership University present a case study on Mafia Island's nature-based tourism. Home to Tanzania's oldest marine protected area, Mafia Island is a model for low-density, high-value tourism. The report outlines risks from unmanaged tourism and calls for sustainable planning and data-driven management.



**READ THE CASE STUDY [Available here](#)**

# MOMBASA COMMITMENT: SCIENTISTS UNVEIL TEN-POINT AGENDA AT OUR OCEAN CONFERENCE

| By Dr Amon Kimeli

A two-day Kenya Marine and Fisheries research institute-hosted symposium drew hundreds of researchers ahead of the eleventh Our Ocean Conference, producing a pledge to treat ocean science as strategic infrastructure for Africa's blue economy.



*Academia and Research Pre-Conference Symposium – Group Photo*

**One of the largest gatherings of marine scientists east Africa has hosted in recent years took place recently when the Scientific and Research Pre-Conference Symposium brought together researchers, policymakers and conservation leaders from across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region and beyond. Held on 14 and 15 June 2026, the symposium was organized around six thematic tracks:** marine protected areas, sustainable fisheries, marine pollution, sustainable blue economy, maritime security and the ocean-climate nexus. The opening ceremony was graced by the head of the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) management board, Professor Micheni Nthiba, and officially opened by Professor Shaukat Abdulrazak, Principal Secretary for the State Department for Science, Research and Innovation.

**Four keynote addresses followed:** Dr. Arthur Tuda of WIOMSA who spoke about marine protected areas and biodiversity targets; Dr. James Kairo of KMFRI who presented on the future of blue carbon research; Mr Ibukun

Adewumi of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission who addressed ocean science as strategic infrastructure for governing Africa's blue economy; and Mr Tony Long of Global Fishing Watch who spoke about maritime security technology.

Several WIO institutions featured prominently across both days' oral and poster sessions, including compiling the first unified WIO bathymetry grid; coral restoration using low-cost floating nurseries; artisanal fisheries microbial contamination; mangrove blue carbon finance; and a decade-long review of the sustainability of Kenya's priority marine fisheries.

Additional keynote addresses were presented on science and innovation as enablers of a sustainable blue economy; fisheries diversity; Africa's blue economy leadership; and the ocean-climate nexus in the region. Among more than 24 oral presentations and 30 poster contributions, parallel sessions covered reef fisheries governance, deep-learning-based fish monitoring and mangrove restoration.

## Key documents launched

**The National Fish Welfare Manual Standard Operating Procedures (FW-MSOP) by Africa Fish Welfare (AFIWEL):** The FW-MSOP is Kenya's first national framework dedicated to promoting fish welfare across freshwater aquaculture and mariculture systems. The manual provides science-based guidance to enhance aquatic animal health, sustainable aquaculture production, food security and responsible blue economy development.



*Pictured after the launch of the National Fish Welfare Manual Standard Operating Procedures are Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute Director-General, Dr Paul Orina (right), Kenya Fisheries Service Director-General, Dr Daisy Muriuki (left) and Africa Fish Welfare Programme Manager, Dr. Julie Bwoga (middle)*

## Kenya's blue carbon ecosystems

### **Blue Carbon Ecosystems–Nationally Determined Contributions Implementation and Investment Plan (2025–2035):**

The plan is strategic and will guide the implementation of key focal areas in ecosystem restoration and protection, community stewardship and livelihood, research, science and monitoring, policy and governance and sustainable finance and investment framework.



*The launch was led by the Honourable Ali Hassan Joho, Cabinet Secretary for Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs (second right); Dr. Deborah Mlango Barasa, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Forestry (second left); Dr. Eng. Festus K. Ng'eno, Principal Secretary for the State Department for the Environment and Climate Change (far left) and Betsy Muthoni Njagi, Principal Secretary for Blue Economy and Fisheries (far right)*

## The Mombasa Ocean Science Commitment

On 15 June, an Ocean–Climate Declaration was formally adopted, accompanied by the Mombasa Ocean Science Commitment – a ten-point pledge emphasizing that science must drive a sustainable, resilient, and equitable blue economy. The Commitment urges signatories to treat ocean science as strategic public infrastructure, bridge gaps between research and policy, and foster a regenerative blue economy. It also supports community-led ocean governance, accelerates blue carbon protection and restoration, and shifts marine protected area focus to management effectiveness.

Equity is central, with pledges to ensure women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities are fully involved in ocean decision-making and benefit-sharing. Signatories also commit to the responsible use of technologies like AI, satellite monitoring, and citizen science for transparency, enforcement, and cross-border cooperation. The Commitment advocates for sustained national and regional scientific institutions and long-term capacity development over short-term projects.

The Declaration calls for ocean decisions to be guided by science, informed by local knowledge, and dedicated to a healthy ocean for future generations. Governments, development partners, research institutions, the private sector, and coastal communities are urged to act together.



*The chief guest Professor Shaukat Abdulrazak (2nd from the right) at the opening ceremony*

### What comes next?

*Findings and the Commitment were integrated into the eleventh Our Ocean Conference, positioning Kenya and the WIO region's research community at the forefront of efforts to turn ocean science into policy and investment ahead of 2030.*

## TOLIARA DECLARATION MARKS END OF MADAGASCAR OCEAN WEEK 2026 | By Gildas Todinanahary



From 3–5 June 2026, the Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines (Institute of Fisheries and Marine Sciences) at the University of Toliara in Madagascar, hosted Ocean Week 2026 under the theme “From ocean science to the blue economy: building a sustainable transition.”

**The event brought together leading scientists, policymakers, blue economy practitioners, private-sector actors, regional organizations and development partners from Madagascar, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region and beyond.**

A key outcome was the adoption of the “Toliara Declaration for a Great Ocean Nation” which recognizes Madagascar as an ocean nation whose future, sovereignty and prosperity are inseparable from the ocean. The Declaration calls for stronger ocean governance, accelerated implementation of the 30x30 biodiversity agenda, enhanced ocean literacy and education, strengthened maritime sovereignty and greater use of science in public decision-making.



The conference also endorsed a set of strategic priorities for 2026–2030 focusing on ocean governance, maritime sovereignty, marine biodiversity conservation, ocean education, scientific research and inclusive blue economy development.

The conference also reinforced the importance of strengthening science-to-policy and science-to-business pathways, ensuring that scientific knowledge contributes more effectively to decision-making, innovation and sustainable socioeconomic development.

# FROM SCIENCE TO ACTION: MARINE BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE SETS CONSERVATION AGENDA

| By Michalda Massava and Daniela De Abreu

Bringing together stakeholders from across the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region, Mozambique hosted the fourth edition of the Marine Biodiversity Conference (CBM) on 11–12 June 2026 under the framework of the third Growing Blue Conference, organized by the Foundation for the Conservation of Biodiversity, Mozambique (BIOFUND) and partners.



*Representatives from ReGeCom, Mozambique's national network for community-based natural resource management; Conservation International; Likhulu Foundation; World Wide Fund for Nature in Mozambique; Rare; Wildlife Conservation Society in Mozambique and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations at the declaration signing event. © BIOFUND*

**The event saw more than 760 in-person participants and over 2 300 online attendees,** reflecting strong national and regional engagement from government, academia, civil society, the private sector, coastal communities and development partners.

A key milestone of the event was the signing of a Commitment Declaration by national non-governmental organizations and international organizations to implement Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, reinforcing Mozambique's alignment with the global 30×30 target. This joint commitment highlights a shift towards more inclusive and integrated conservation approaches, recognizing the role of diverse actors and sectors in contributing to biodiversity protection beyond formally designated protected areas.

The conference featured parallel sessions focused on themes such as ecosystem-based adaptation; biodiversity and shared marine resources; scientific evidence for the management and policy of coastal habitats and resources; youth, innovation and ocean sustainability; local community empowerment for marine biodiversity conservation; and marine conservation areas. These discussions were inspired by keynote speakers from across the region, including Denise Nicolau (International Union for Conservation of Nature); Obakeng Molelu (WIOMSA), Ryan Daly (Oceanographic Research Institute) and Arthur Tuda (WIOMSA).

**The scientific programme included 44 oral presentations and 38 scientific posters covering marine protected areas, megafauna conservation, climate change, ecosystem restoration, nature-based solutions, community governance, sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and coastal habitat conservation.**



The opening ceremony presided over by His Excellency, Roberto Mito Albino, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries. © BIOFUND

**A highlight of the conference was the significant participation of early-career researchers and young scientists whose contributions reflected the growing scientific capacity and leadership emerging in Mozambique and the wider WIO region.**

The overall message that emerged was that there is an urgent need to strengthen the science-policy interface to translate research into effective conservation actions and evidence-based decision-making.

A public exhibition, held from 13 to 17 June, further promoted awareness by showcasing Mozambique's rich marine and coastal biodiversity with educational materials and visual displays.

**Overall, the conference reinforced that advancing marine biodiversity conservation in the region** requires stronger partnerships, sustainable financing, more effective management of marine conservation areas, closer links between science and policy, and tangible benefits for coastal communities that depend on healthy marine ecosystems.



Dr. Molelu during the discussion session "From idea to action: youth, innovation and ocean sustainability in Mozambique". © BIOFUND



The poster session © BIOFUND

## SEYCHELLES OCEAN UPDATES: CONSERVATION, RESEARCH, AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Recent milestones in ocean governance, research, and sustainable development highlight Seychelles' ongoing leadership in marine conservation and blue economy innovation.

### Seychelles establishes permanent authority for marine spatial planning



PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON

**In a milestone for ocean governance in Seychelles, the Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning Agency Act has been gazetted, formally establishing the Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning Agency (SMSPA) as the national authority mandated to oversee, coordinate, implement, monitor and regularly review the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP).**

The creation of SMSPA marks the completion of the governance architecture envisioned during the decade-long, multistakeholder planning process and provides the institutional foundation required for long-term, adaptive management of Seychelles' ocean space. With the SMSP covering the entire 1.35 million km<sup>2</sup> of the country's exclusive economic zone, the operationalization of the SMSPA positions Seychelles to strengthen marine conservation, enhance climate resilience and advance a sustainable and inclusive blue economy.

### New community-based project to monitor whales and dolphins

**A new marine research project led by local cetacean experts from the Marine Conservation Society Seychelles and the University of Seychelles (UniSey) was launched in 2026 to improve understanding of whales and dolphins found in Seychelles waters.**

Supported by the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT) Blue Grants Fund, the community-based monitoring project aims to strengthen baseline information on cetacean ecology by collating the data from previous surveys and documenting the species, number of individuals and locations of cetacean sightings reported by the general public. This information will help predict environmental drivers of cetacean distribution to

inform conservation planning and management efforts, while actively engaging local communities in marine science.



## New study confirms D'Arros Island as key feeding ground for reef manta rays, assesses microplastic presence



Photo credit: BCSS

**New research confirms D'Arros Island and St. Joseph Atoll as critical habitats for reef manta rays (*Mobula alfredi*) in Seychelles.** The study, led by Dillys Pouponeau (Save Our Seas Foundation's D'Arros Research Centre) and published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, found that surface feeding is driven largely by tidal phase and occurs once plankton biomass crosses a critical threshold of 26.9 mg/m<sup>3</sup>. Year-round prey availability helps explain the species' presence throughout the year.

A related study led by UniSey BSc Honours graduate Monik Choppy with Dr Murray Duncan, Nuette Gordon, Dillys Pouponeau, Henriette Grimmel and Robert Bullock, assessed microplastic pollution in Seychelles' waters. Polybutylene terephthalate was the most abundant polymer (66 percent), while polyurethane, polyacrylonitrile and polyvinyl chloride were flagged as a "very high"

concern. Importantly, microplastic abundance showed no significant relationship with zooplankton biomass, indicating manta rays are not ingesting disproportionate quantities of microplastics while feeding at this site. The findings, nonetheless, highlight the vulnerability of filter-feeding species and the need for ongoing monitoring of plastic pollution, even in remote island ecosystems.

D'Arros remains Seychelles' largest known reef manta aggregation site, accounting for 66.5 percent of all national sightings recorded between 2006 and 2018.

## Seychelles Fisheries Authority symposium marks four decades of ocean stewardship

**In May 2026, the Seychelles Fisheries Authority (SFA) hosted a one-day scientific symposium to commemorate four decades of pioneering advancements and the SFA's unwavering commitment to sustainable development in the fishing industry.**

The event brought together scientists, researchers, policymakers, students and representatives from government and industry to gain insight into fisheries-related scientific work carried out by the SFA over the past 40 years. Opened by SFA Chief Executive, Dr. Jan Robinson, the symposium highlighted the critical role of long-term research and data in supporting evidence-based fisheries management and ocean stewardship in Seychelles.

## Study assesses economic and environmental impacts of cruise tourism

**A new study led by the Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Foundation, in partnership with UniSey and Mascontour, provides the first comprehensive assessment of cruise tourism in Seychelles.**

Funded by SeyCCAT, the study combined a passenger survey with 54 stakeholder interviews across Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. Key findings show that while cruise tourism brings economic benefits, these remain concentrated among a few intermediaries.

Encouragingly, 69 percent of passengers are willing to pay more for shore leave if funds go to environmental protection. The study outlines strategic priorities for aligning cruise tourism with the blue economy and Marine Spatial Plan, including strengthening Victoria as a home port and improving waste management infrastructure.



# PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT, SAFEGUARDING TANZANIA'S FUTURE FOR 40 YEARS | By NEMC



*Participants sing the national and east African anthems during the 40th anniversary gathering*

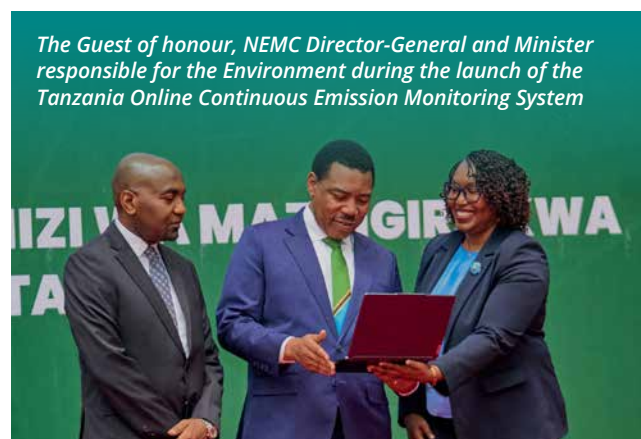
**Four decades of environmental stewardship, digital transformation and renewed national commitment**

**The National Environment Management Council (NEMC) marked its 40th anniversary with a national commemoration held from 28–29 May 2026 at the Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre in Dar es Salaam, under the theme “Protect the environment, safeguard the nation.”** The event brought together government leaders, environmental authorities, development partners, academia, private sector actors, civil society, former and current NEMC leaders, staff and the wider environmental community to reflect on four decades of institutional service and chart a forward-looking pathway for environmental governance in Tanzania.

Since becoming operational in 1986, NEMC has grown from an advisory and coordinating institution into a national environmental regulator with a broad mandate covering environmental and social impact assessment, compliance and enforcement, pollution control, environmental research, climate resilience, public awareness and stakeholder coordination.

A key highlight of the first day was the launch of the Tanzania Online Continuous Emission Monitoring System (TOCEMS), a milestone that signals NEMC's transition towards more data-driven and technology-enabled environmental

regulation. The system is expected to strengthen real-time monitoring of emissions, improve compliance tracking and support timely regulatory decisions.



*The Guest of honour, NEMC Director-General and Minister responsible for the Environment during the launch of the Tanzania Online Continuous Emission Monitoring System*

The two-day programme featured strategic discussions on emerging environmental and development challenges. Technical sessions examined the need to accelerate environmental governance in response to evolving development demands; the nexus between climate change and national security; circular economy and transboundary movement of goods; and the strategic role of environmental authorities in regional and global environmental governance.

## Public-awareness, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities

In the days leading to the commemoration, NEMC implemented a series of public-awareness, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities across the country. NEMC coordinated a nationwide tree-planting campaign with approximately 40 000 trees planted as a symbol of the Council's 40 years of service. Other activities ranged from documentation of institutional history through interviews and field footage for the NEMC@40 documentary and environmental education in schools, to engagement with plastic-waste collectors and stakeholder meetings with recyclers and industries.

The commemoration also provided a platform to honour individuals and institutions that have contributed to Tanzania's environmental-management journey. Awards acknowledged leadership, partnership, innovation and long-standing service to environmental protection.

NEMC also launched the NEMC@40 Impact Booklet titled "Four decades of environmental stewardship, service and impact: 1986–2026". The booklet documents the Council's evolution, milestones, achievements and more. It also highlights the importance of environmental assessment and audit as national safeguards, compliance and enforcement as tools for accountability, and research and public awareness as a bridge between policy evolution, environmental law, citizens and behavioural change.

As environmental risks become more complex and interconnected, NEMC's future direction places emphasis on digital transformation, stronger compliance systems, improved environmental data, climate resilience, circular economy approaches, inclusive stakeholder engagement and enhanced service delivery.



A group photo of NEMC staff and dignitaries at Julius Nyerere Convention Centre.

## OCEAN BRIDGEWAY MARKS WORLD OCEAN DAY 2026 IN ZANZIBAR



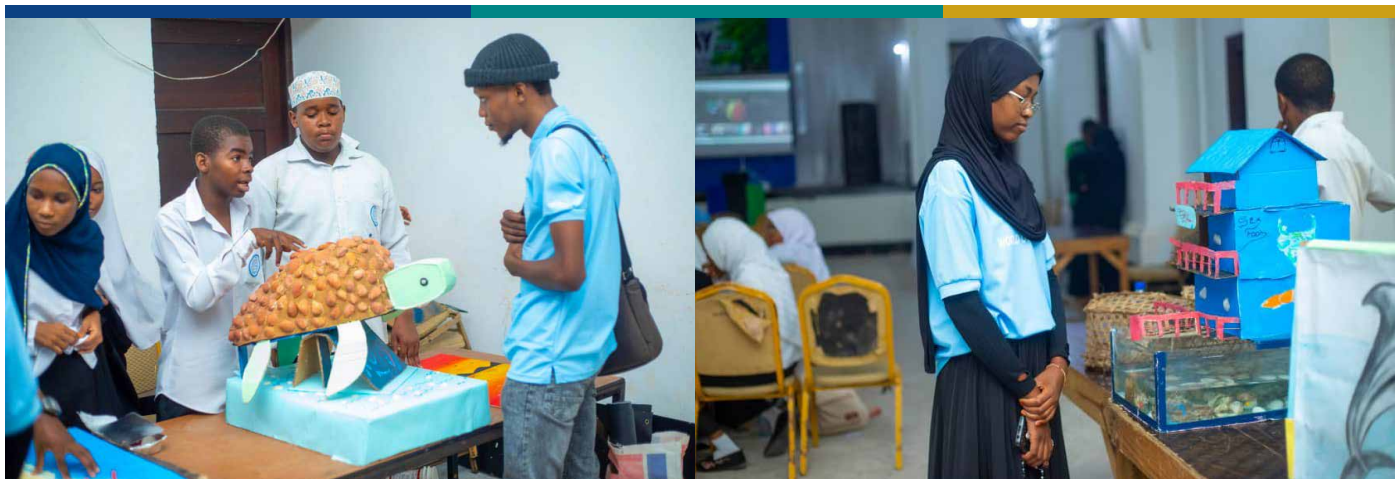
Learning, creativity and dialogue centred on the health of Zanzibar's marine ecosystems

The ZBC Music Studio in Raha Leo, Zanzibar, came alive with colour, conversation and a shared commitment to the ocean as the Ocean Bridgeway organization hosted its World Ocean Day 2026 celebration on 14 June 2026, under the theme “Strong marine protected areas for our blue planet”

More than 100 young people gathered for a full day of learning, creativity and dialogue centred on the health of Zanzibar's marine ecosystems (coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass meadows). Participants came from Tumekuja Secondary School, Dr. Ali Mohammed Shein Secondary School, the Institute of Marine Sciences-University of Dar es Salaam and The State University of Zanzibar, bringing

together secondary school students and university youth in a shared celebration of the ocean.

A highlight of the day was the Fine Arts Exhibition, where secondary school students transformed their understanding of marine conservation into vivid paintings, drawings and mixed-media pieces – from coral reefs and dolphins to mangrove forests and ocean-themed murals. The energy continued with vibrant performance art where students delivered heartfelt speeches, recited *utenzi* and *ushairi* and performed an original song. The strongest entries across art and performance were celebrated through the Ocean Talents Awards.



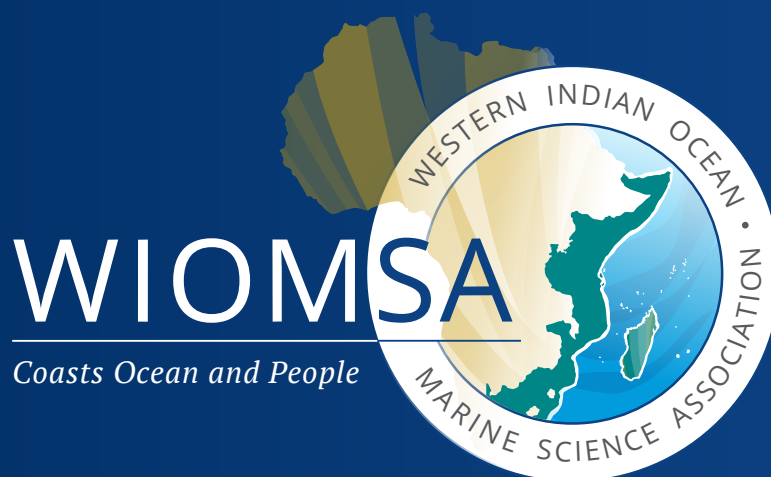
Equally central to the day was an open youth discussion on “Our ocean, our responsibility: the role of youths in marine protection” in which participants questioned, debated and reflected on what effective, community-supported conservation looks like for Zanzibar’s coastline.

Ocean Bridgeway extends heartfelt appreciation to its distinguished speakers. Dr. Narriman Jidawi shared decades of hands-on experience in marine science, offering participants a grounded, long-term view of how Zanzibar’s marine ecosystems have changed and what sustained protection requires. Farhiya Elmy shared her journey as a young woman building a career in marine science, inspiring attendees with a story that showed how personal passion can grow into meaningful ocean leadership.

The event would not have been possible without the generous support of partners and sponsors: WIOMSA, Wildlife Conservation Society, Mwambao Coastal Community Network and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, whose continued investment in youth-centred ocean conservation made this celebration of knowledge, art, and dialogue a reality.

**Ocean Bridgeway recognizes the dedication of the organizing team whose planning brought World Ocean Day 2026 to life:** Beatrice Elikana, Rufaidha Naufal, Yohana Zalabana, Mathna Abdulrahman, Ramadhan Khamis, Joyce Bahati and Tumaini Kahale. **Their commitment ensured that over 80 young people were informed and inspired to champion strong marine protected areas.**





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