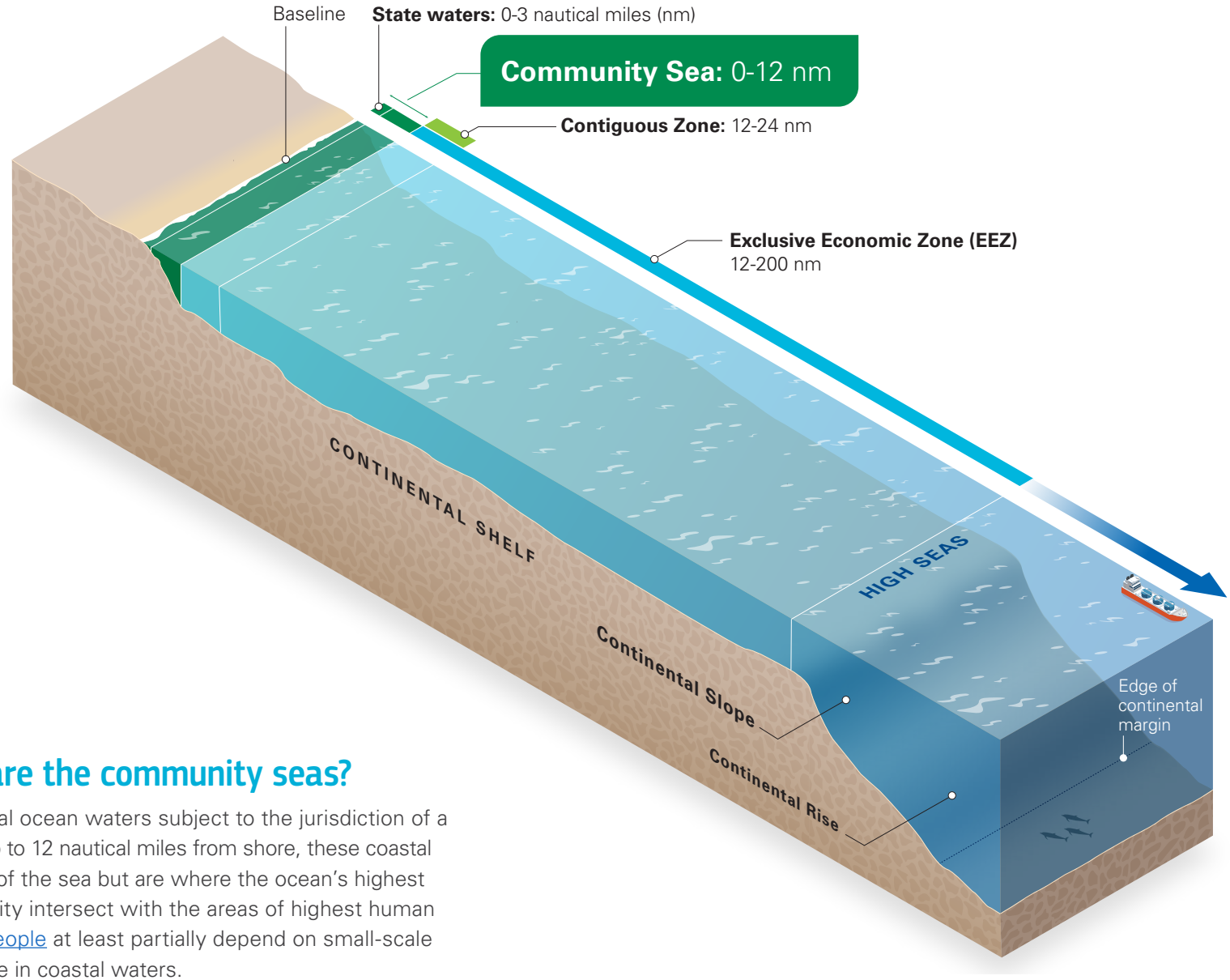
The Case for Protecting and Managing the World's Community Seas

What if we could equitably safeguard most of the ocean's natural treasures, and in the process, benefit 500 million of the planet's most climate-vulnerable people? And what if this transformative solution already existed?

Fish Forever is Rare's global, community-led solution to transforming how we protect and manage the world's community seas.

But what are the community seas? Where are they? And why are they so vital to protect?

The community seas are one of the most important areas of the ocean.



What and where are the community seas?

Community seas are coastal ocean waters subject to the jurisdiction of a coastal nation. Extending up to 12 nautical miles from shore, these coastal waters make up only ~6% of the sea but are where the ocean's highest concentrations of biodiversity intersect with the areas of highest human need. Nearly 500 million people at least partially depend on small-scale fisheries[1], most of which are in coastal waters.

Why do community seas matter?

Livelihoods

113 MILLION PEOPLE

WORLDWIDE ARE EITHER EMPLOYED IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES OR PARTICIPATE IN THEM FOR SUBSISTENCE.[2]

97% OF EMPLOYMENT FROM SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IS CONCENTRATED IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.[3]

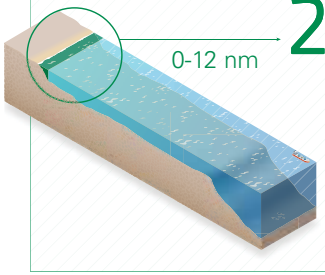
Fisheries Protection and Management

Only 1 million sq. kilometers

of tropical, community waters (out of 8 million) are protected.[4]

And only **40%** of small-scale fisheries catch is locally co-managed.[11, 12]

Biodiversity



22 million sq. kilometers of community waters worldwide are home to

70% of global marine biodiversity:

- 83% of the world's coral reefs
- 100% of mangroves
- 100% of seagrass[4]

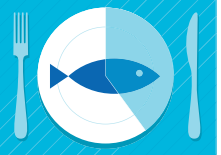
Climate Resilience

Coastal communities are among the most **vulnerable to the impacts of climate change**. Their population is expected to increase to

1.4 BILLION BY 2060[8]

Food Security and Nutrition

40% of the global fish catch comes from small-scale fisheries, and nearly all the catch from these fisheries is destined for local human consumption.[6]



Gender Equity

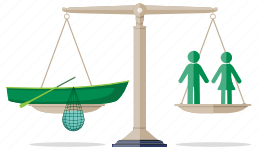
Out of the 113 million people who participate in the small-scale fishing sector, 45 million, or

40%

of people, are women working for pay or fishing for home consumption[5]

Social Justice, Equity and Inclusion

Many ocean-focused organizations **still** lack the foundational knowledge, mandate, capacity, and diversity to adequately account for and address **equity and justice** issues related to the small-scale fishing sector, including **rights, inclusion, human well-being, and local initiatives**.[9]



Economic Benefits

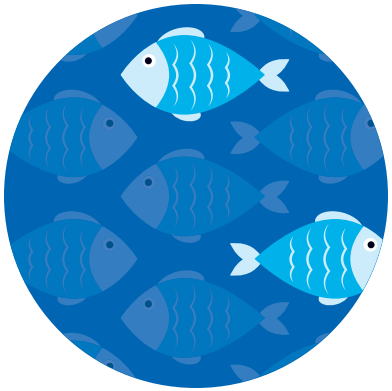
The estimated catch value from marine **small-scale fisheries** is

$58 billion per year[7]

Philanthropy

Only **4-12%** of total ocean philanthropy goes to **coastal habitat conservation and small-scale fishing issues**.[13]

But community seas and their coastal communities and habitats face mounting threats and deep-rooted challenges.



Tragedy of the commons

In most cases, coastal communities lack clear rights or secure tenure over their marine resources. This "open-access" system incentivizes a "race to catch the last fish." Other common problems include weak governance, encroachment from industrial fishing, lack of fisher participation in management, poor enforcement, and insufficient data. Because coastal habitats and fisheries are scattered and disaggregated, the conservation and development sectors have struggled to find replicable strategies for sustainable and equitable management. As a result, the catch per unit effort (i.e., the cost per fish caught) for coral reef-associated species has decreased by 60% since 1950.[14] Fishers now work harder, travel farther, and subject themselves to more danger only to catch fewer fish.

Lack of prioritization

Despite the clear importance of community waters, only 17% globally are protected. In the tropics, this ratio decreases to 13%. Combined, these areas safeguard only 13% to 15% of global marine biodiversity.[15] Marine protection efforts have favored offshore waters because protecting less populated waters poses significantly less political and social friction (see map on page 6). A 2019 study across 232 marine ecoregions found that MPAs were 6.3 times more likely to be established in low-threat ecoregions. Further, the likelihood of protection decreases as threats like fishing increase.[16] The more urgently a region needs protection, the less likely it is to have it.

Under accounting

Small-scale fishers are often considered among the world's poorest and most marginalized. These fisheries are mostly disaggregated, their supply chains are informal, and the fishers have little access to credit, insurance, best business practices and training, or political power. An informal economy dominates their lives. An estimated $10.6 billion of their catch[17] goes unrecorded every year, and, despite providing more than 70% of the fish humans consume,[18] small-scale coastal fisheries tend to be a developmental afterthought.

Lack of funding

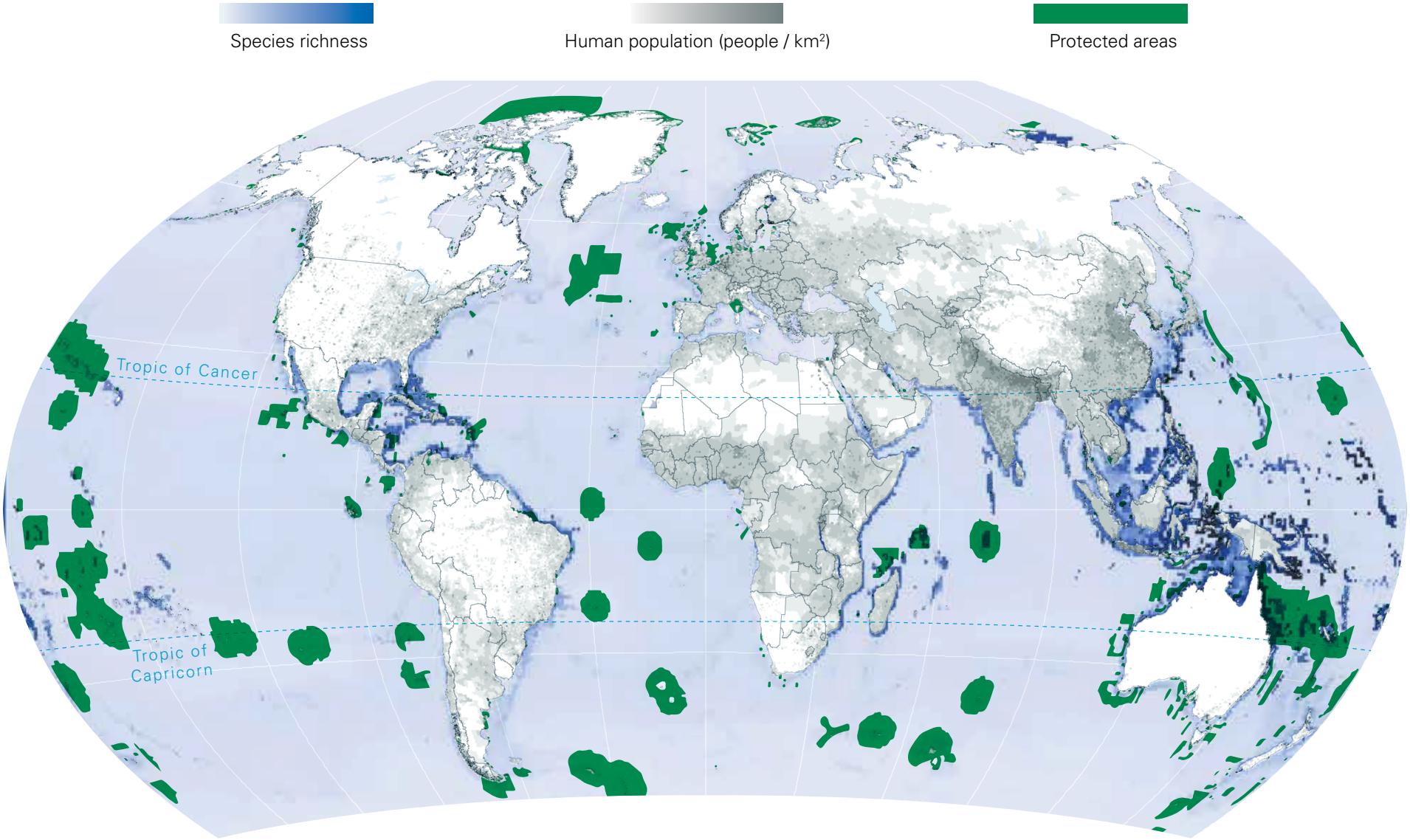
While philanthropic funding for ocean issues has doubled in the last decade, it still accounts for just one-hundredth of a percent of global philanthropy: In 2020, this sector received just $1.2 billion out of the $752 billion in global giving. Of this $1.2B, ~$268M went toward fisheries and protected areas (mainly to larger MPAs and industrial fisheries), with just $100M allocated to addressing the plight of coastal habitats and artisanal fishing. Roughly 4-12% of total ocean philanthropy is dedicated to coastal or small-scale fishing issues.[19]

Climate change

Coastal areas are among the most vulnerable to climate change's impacts,[20] and proximity to the coast increases threats of storm damage and sea-level rise. Degrading corals, seagrass beds, and mangroves exacerbate these threats. While coastal communities rely on these climate-vulnerable habitats, they face another major challenge, with fisheries predicted to decline by up to 40% in many tropical coastal waters by 2050 in response to climate change.[21]

Community seas need more protection.

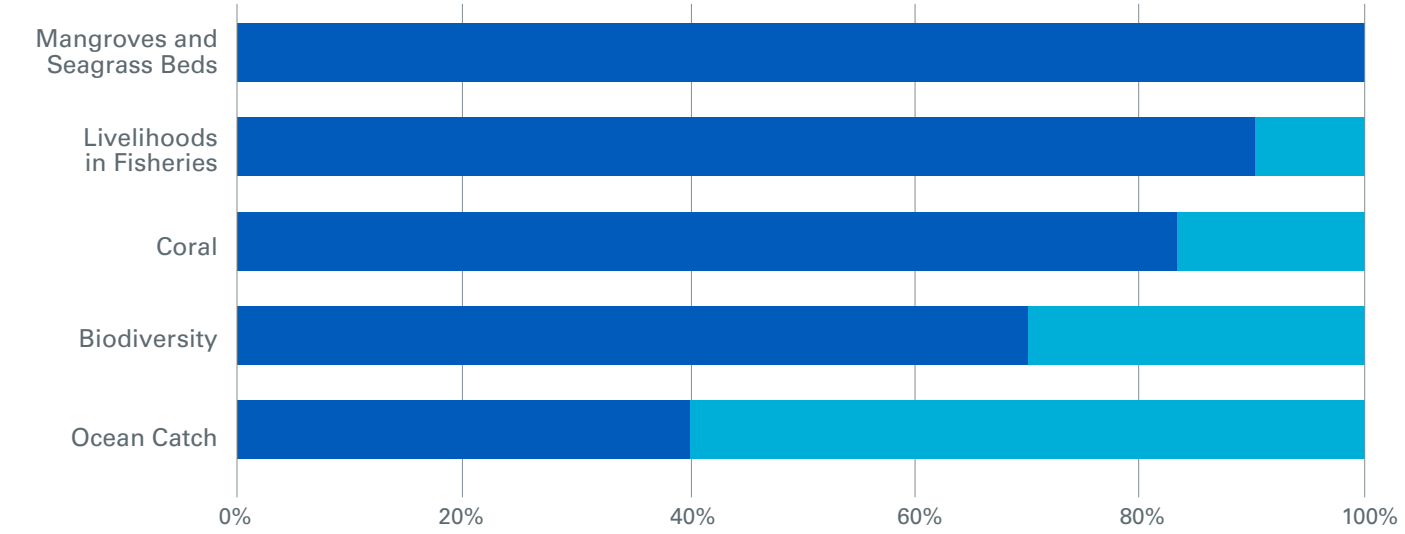
Only ~8% of the ocean is protected, with most large marine protected areas (MPAs) outside the developing tropics, far from shore, and the biodiversity-rich community seas upon which people rely.



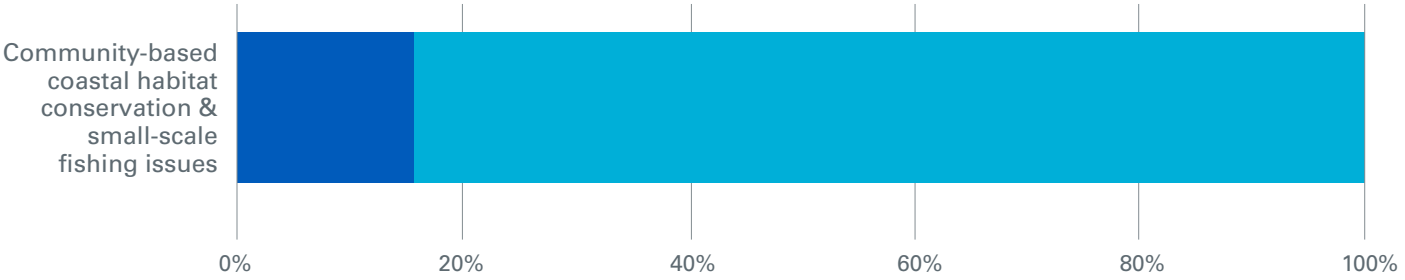
Community seas need more investment.

492 million people, about 7% of humanity, rely on coastal seas, but these critical habitats received 0.01% of global philanthropic funding in 2020. Global Philanthropy (2022)

Where is ocean value?



Where is ocean investment?



For every $1,000 of global philanthropy, small-scale fisheries get only 10 cents.

We must prioritize and systematically improve how we manage and protect coastal fisheries and habitats.

Rare is a global leader in managing and protecting our community seas.

Our Fish Forever program is a community-led solution to revitalize our oceans and the coastal communities that depend on them. We work with fishing communities—fishers, fish buyers and traders, community members, local leaders and their local governments—on four continents to build and strengthen community-based fisheries management of coastal waters.

Our growing network includes 1,300 coastal communities + 160,000 fishers + 150 mayors + 100 staff + 150 partners across eight countries working together to guarantee the future of our community seas and the coastal communities who depend on them.

Philippines

Palau

Federated States of Micronesia

Honduras

Guatemala

Brazil

Mozambique

Indonesia

Photo Credits: Jason Houston for Rare, Jesse Alpert for Rare, Rare.

“It’s not just about 30%. It’s about the right 30%.”

– Campaign for Nature

The UN Convention on Biodiversity set a global target of conserving 30 percent of land and ocean by 2030. National governments and international organizations are participating in the 30x30 campaign to achieve it. In the context of this global pledge (known as the “30x30 campaign”), protecting and managing coastal, community waters offers extraordinary value as an equitable strategy to safeguard biodiversity, ensure livelihoods and food security, and build climate resilience of hundreds of millions of people.

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2. FAO, Duke University, and WorldFis. Illuminating Hidden Harvests: A snapshot of key findings webinar – 2nd session. 2021. Unpublished data. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrUpMbVNixI&t=1389s
3. https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1447731
4. Cox, Courtney, Brian Free, and Stephen Box. 2022. Urgent Global Need for Protection Across Territorial Waters. Manuscript in preparation.
5. FAO, Duke University, and WorldFish. Illuminating Hidden Harvests. 2021. Unpublished data.
6. FAO (2020). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020: Sustainability in action. FAO, https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en
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8. Neumann, B., Vafeidis, A.T., Zimmermann, J. and Nicholls, R.J., 2015. Future coastal population growth and exposure to sea-level rise and coastal flooding-a global assessment. PloS one, 10(3), p.e0118571.
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12. d'Armengol, Laia, et al. "A systematic review of co-managed small-scale fisheries: social diversity and adaptive management improve outcomes." Global environmental change 52 (2018): 212-225.
13. California Environmental Associates, Coastal/Small-Scale Fisheries Funding Analysis prepared for Rare, January 2022.
14. Eddy, Tyler D., et al. "Global decline in capacity of coral reefs to provide ecosystem services." One Earth 4.9 (2021): 1278-1285.
15. Cox, Courtney, Brian Free, and Stephen Box. 2022. Urgent Global Need for Protection Across Territorial Waters. Manuscript in preparation.
16. Kuempel, C. D., Jones, K. R., Watson, J. E. M., & Possingham, H. P. (2019). Quantifying biases in marine-protected-area placement relative to abatable threats. Conservation Biology, 33(6), 1350–1359.
17. Calculated from catch reconstruction data on seaaroundus.org.
18. FAO (2020). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020: Sustainability in action. FAO, https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en
19. California Environmental Associates, Coastal/Small-Scale Fisheries Funding Analysis prepared for Rare, January 2022.
20. Cinner, Joshua E., et al. "Vulnerability of coastal communities to key impacts of climate change on coral reef fisheries." Global Environmental Change 22.1 (2012): 12-20.
21. Lam, Vicky WY, et al. "Climate change, tropical fisheries and prospects for sustainable development." Nature Reviews Earth & Environment 1.9 (2020): 440-454.

Rare inspires change so people and nature thrive.

Conservation ultimately comes down to people—their behaviors toward nature, their beliefs about its value, and their ability to protect it without sacrificing basic life needs. And so, conservationists must become as skilled in social change as in science; as committed to community-based solutions as national and international policymaking.

Rare is a global leader in catalyzing behavior change to achieve enduring results. For 50 years, inspiring change has been woven into the fabric of our work. This is what makes us Rare.

Learn more at rare.org and follow us at @Rare_org.

Charity Navigator FOUR-STAR