

UNESCO and IUCN issue report calling for the creation of oceanic World Heritage Sites

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The United National Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Centre and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are calling for the creation of the first oceanic World Heritage Sites.

In a joint report titled, *World Heritage in the High Seas: An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, the agencies reason that oceanic sites fit the World Heritage Convention, which defines the natural and cultural places that can be included as a World Heritage sites.

The report presents five diverse sites that could be recognized as having “outstanding universal value,” a key principle of the World Heritage Convention. The proposed sites include the Costa Rica Thermal Dome in the Pacific Ocean, a spawning and feeding site for many endangered and commercially valuable species; the White Shark Café, the only known gathering point for white sharks in the north Pacific; the Sargasso Sea in the Atlantic Ocean, known for its “golden floating rainforest” of *Sargassum* algae; the Lost City Hydrothermal Field in the Atlantic Ocean, an 800 meter-deep area dominated by carbonate monoliths; and the Atlantis Bank, a sunken fossil island in the subtropical Indian Ocean.

The desire to classify these locations officially as World Heritage Sites is largely inspired by the opportunity to protect them.

“These areas are exposed to threats such as pollution and overfishing, it is therefore critical to mobilize the international community to ensure their long-term conservation,” argued Dan Laffoley, Principal Advisor on Marine Science and Conservation for IUCN.

However, these oceanic sites are located far offshore, outside any national jurisdiction. Currently, only countries can propose sites for inscription, meaning that current nominating and approval processes must be amended before any high-seas location can officially be given heritage status.

Sources: ClimateWire, IUCN, UNESCO, Yale Environment 360

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