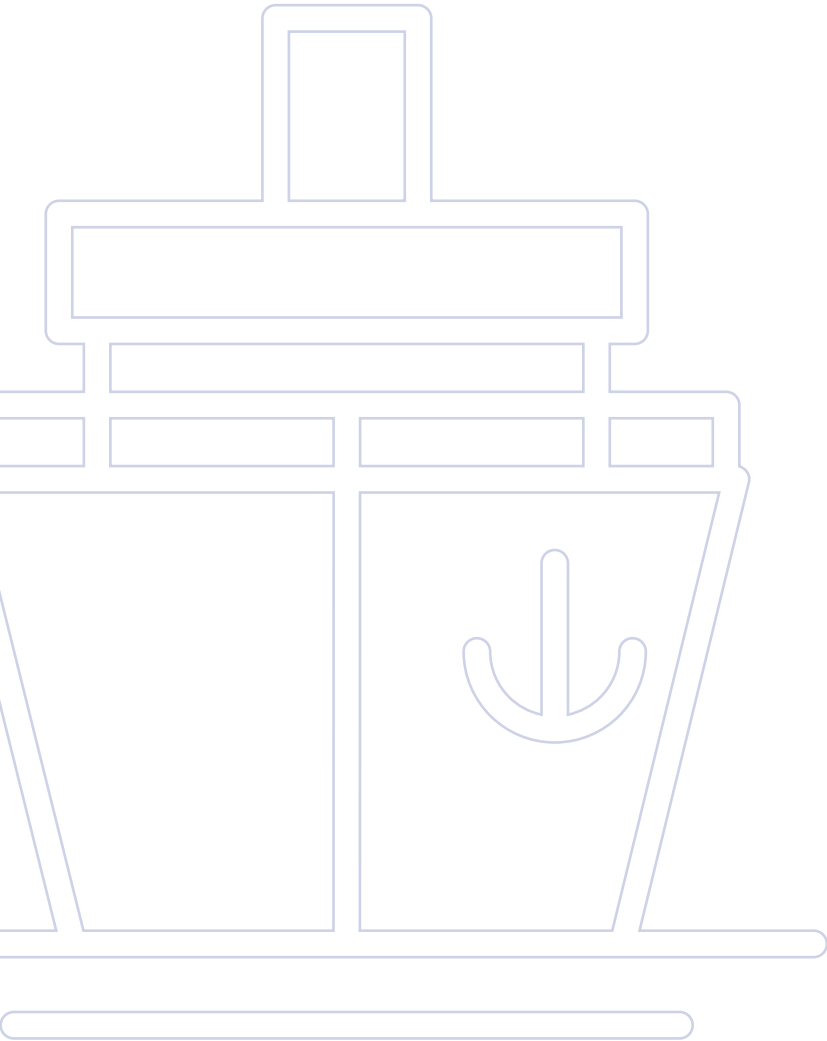


# CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES



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**Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources**

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## Context and Background

The ocean's temperatures, chemistry, currents, and sea life drive global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind. The management of these resources is vital for humanity as a whole and to negate the negative effects of climate change.

Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods, however, today we are witnessing overexploitation by up to 30 percent of the world's fish stocks, dramatically below the levels that are needed to maintain future sustainable yields.

Oceans absorb about 30 percent of the carbon dioxide produced by humans; however, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, we have noted a 26 percent increase in the ocean's acidification. Marine pollution, largely due to land-based sources, is reaching alarming levels with an average of 13,000 pieces of plastic litter found on every square kilometer of the ocean.

In 1999, the Federal Law No.23 was issued concerning the exploitation, protection, and development of the living aquatic resources in the waters of UAE.

## Need

Hammour, Shaari, Farsh, Kanaad, UAE's most popular fish, are about to disappear from the sea as well as other sea creatures. Less than 10 percent of these fish are still surviving in the UAE waters, an amount considered "critically endangered" by officials and fishermen alike in the country.

"These species are fished three times more their sustainable limit. The situation is critical, and change needs to happen now," stressed Dr. Shaikha Al Dhaheri, executive director of the Terrestrial and Marine Biodiversity sector at the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD).

Also, dumping waste in the sea raises environmental concerns and threatens the marine ecosystem in the region.

## Idea

Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, in 2016, launched the UAE Sustainable Fisheries program to ensure sustainable fishing. Under this program, advanced research and monitoring of UAE fisheries have been undertaken, new legislation developed and implemented, and gathering of information and knowledge on traditional fishing methods as a means of making the informed decision making.

Besides, in 2016, the ministry issued Ministerial Decree No.471 on regulating surface fishing using beach seines. The resolution reflects the ministry's aim to regulate professional fishing as a means of preserving, developing, and ensuring the sustainability of fish stocks, enhancing food security by protecting the depletion of fish stocks.

The decree standardized the specifications of the seines that could be used during the fishing season, which opens from the 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> June, thus ensuring a good stock of fish.

## Projects

In 2007 Marwah Reserve was declared open, built on an area of 4255 sq. in Abu Dhabi, previously in 2005 Yasat Reserve was declared open. Other reserves in the UAE are Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary and Jebel Ali Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, in collaboration with its partners in the public and private sectors, continues to work based on the principles of the integrated management of the marine and coastal environment in protecting marine and the coastal environment. The UAE has enacted laws banning throwing waste and oil waste into the water by tankers operating in the region.

The UAE Federal Law No. 24 of 1999 on the Protection and Development of the Environment prohibits the following:

- Any intentional disposal of pollutants or wastes from ships, aircraft or any other means into the marine environment
- Any deliberate dumping from ships or industrial installations or other means into the

marine environment.

Also, Federal Law No. 23 of 1999 and its Ministerial Decree No. 302 of 2001, were issued to address exploitation, conservation, and development of living aquatic resources in the UAE.

## Story

### UAE'S PLAN

UAE has introduced several programs to protect marine life, inclusive of different rehabilitation programs such as mangroves and coral reef planting to expanding the reach of marine-protected areas with important biological biodiversity and critical habitats.

Currently, based on the Convention on Biological Dive, the UAE has established 60 protected areas: 38 terrestrial, 21 marine, and one coastal. Of these, 20 are publicly declared, and 9 are marine-protected areas spread across Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Fujairah.

Dugongs or sea cows, for example, thrive in marine-protected areas in the Gulf, mainly on the Abu Dhabi coast with some 7,000 of them; it is the world's second largest population of dugongs next to Australia. Juvenile whale sharks have also been spotted on the Abu Dhabi coast and the Arabian Gulf. The area is believed to be the nursing ground for this gentle giant during summer months as they feed on phytoplankton and prefer warmer water.

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment launched a plan to protect the turtles that inhabit the UAE's seas. The three-year National Plan of Action for the Conservation of Marine Turtles in the UAE aims to expedite local laws to protect turtles and stymie the direct and indirect causes of their deaths. Causes such as abandoned fishing nets, plastic debris and the destruction of turtle habitats through coastal developments, desalination and climate change. Increased research, monitoring, and information exchange are also outlined in the scheme.

## SIR BU NUAIR ISLAND

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2000, SIR BU NUAIR ISLAND was announced as a nature reserve. Stretching over an area of 13 square kilometers, the uninhabited pearl-shaped Island is located 65 km away from the coast of the UAE on the Arabian Gulf. A trip to the Island takes between 2-3 hours by sea, and 40 minutes by air from Sharjah. SIR BU NUAIR certainly deserves its recognition as a wetland of international importance because of its important environmental features' geological layers, natural plants, seabirds, and beautiful scenery.

Progress has been made on listing SIR BU NUAIR ISLAND as a global heritage site by UNESCO, for more than 2,000 years Island has constituted a natural refuge for turtles and is known for its vibrant marine environment. Studies of marine surveys, made on the Island, revealed that there are approximately twenty different types of coral reefs, including Brain corals, the Bee Hive, the Dendritic, Deer Horns, and others. 58 reef fish species have been recorded during surveys conducted in northern and western reefs areas.

It is worth noting that the development of the SIR BU NUAIR project is considered one of the most important and largest "Shurooq" initiatives. The Island will feature a spa, a five-star hotel, villas and hotel apartments, along with several shops, restaurants, and other leisure facilities. SIR BU NUAIR ISLAND promotes a modern lifestyle, that combines the beauty of the region and its cultural heritage through the unique architectural design of the island facilities and the hospitality to visitors.

Scheduled to be completed in 2017, SIR BU NUAIR project offers a village for camping, theater, museum, mosque, education center, and airport. The Island also seeks to follow the vital social and commercial life offered in cities and small ports around the world.

## Khor Kalba Nature Reserve

Stretching over 1230 hectares, Khor Kalba nature reserve is one of the oldest and largest green natural sites on the East Coast of the UAE. It is a shelter for many endangered birds such as Egret and Halcyon. This beautiful and quiet area filled with green plants and trees constitutes a great backdrop for large rocks and cliffs of the Al Hajar (stone) mountains.

### **Wadi Al Helow Protected Area**

Located on the road from Sharjah to Kalba, it was declared as a nature reserve in 2007. It aims to protect the valleys and mountain environment and the preservation of the physical and biological resources such as birds, reptiles, rodents, and freshwater fish

### **Wasit Nature Reserve**

Located in the Al Ramtha area, it was declared as a nature reserve in 2007, what makes this nature reserve unique is the environmental diversity of coastal dunes, salt, and debris linking ponds and large open lake with the Island. It has 198 different species of birds, besides the great diversity in the species of small mammals, reptiles and insects, discovered for the first time in the UAE.

### **Al Doulaimah Nature Reserve**

Located on the road from Sharjah to Al Dhaid, and specifically to the east of the intersection no. 12, the name Al Doulaimah is referring to the darkness of this place even in the day time, due to the lush of trees which were covering the entire area. Tigers, antelopes, wolves, rabbits, deer, foxes, birds, some reptiles and locusts are living there.

In 2017, on the directions of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, it was declared a nature reserve. This was done as a means of protecting and rescuing the various species from drought and hunting. The area has been fenced off; several wild animals have been released, a large group of trees has been planted, wells have been set up to provide an appropriate atmosphere for plants and animals; making it into one of the most important nature reserves in Sharjah.

### **ABAL AL FAYAH RESERVE**

The geographical location of this nature reserve, is in a prominent archaeological site in Sharjah, making it one of the well-protected areas. It was declared a nature reserve in 2007 in order to protect the geological structures, the archaeological areas, and the physical resources.



## AL WATHBA WETLAND RESERVE

In 1998, established by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Al Wathba, the Al Wathba Wetland Reserve is a complex of surface water bodies, both natural and man-made, around 40km southeast of central Abu Dhabi, just past Mussfah. It was the first place in the Emirate to be designated for protection by law and was declared a Ramsar site in 2013. This means that the site has been recognized by the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and joins a list of over 2,000 other internationally recognized wetlands around the world. In 2018, the Al Wathba Wetland Reserve was placed on the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas; it is the first site in the UAE region to receive this recognition.

UAE is careful when it comes to underwater life; it has taken a really big step to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources.

## Purpose of Conserve and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources

People need air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, new medicines, a climate we can live in, beauty, inspiration, and recreation.

The ocean is the largest ecosystem on Earth; it is the planet's life support system. Oceans generate half of the oxygen we breathe and, at any given moment, they contain more than 97% of the world's water. Oceans provide at least a sixth of the animal protein people eat. Living oceans absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and reduce climate change impacts. The diversity and productivity of the world's oceans is a vital interest in humankind. Our security, our economy, our very survival all require healthy oceans.

## Impact

In 2014, the UAE ranked first in the marine reserves index, compared to 33<sup>rd</sup> in 2012, reflecting UAE's efforts in the preservation of ecosystems. It continues to be among the leaders today.

By 2020, the UAE's most important marine habitats and species will be protected, major threats are addressed, and we will ensure that healthy marine ecosystems are at the heart of planning and development policies. Better marine planning and management will mean ecosystems can continue to function and remain resilient in the long term while meeting socio-economic development goals.

Within UAE promote a coherent network of marine protected areas (MPAs) as a fundamental component of the UAE's marine conservation agenda. Functional MPAs are critical for preserving the most important habitats, conserving biodiversity, and enabling healthy ecosystems. Developed a plan for minimizing negative impacts on the wider marine environment.

Endangered, iconic species like marine turtles and whales provide a focus for conservation and attract a wide range of supporters. As long-living animals that cross distances, they need long-term, large-scale conservation strategies that span national boundaries. This can benefit other species and habitats: by protecting them, UAE can contribute to larger sustainable impacts.

The private sector has a crucial role to play in marine conservation, in particular, the fast-growing tourism sector, which itself is dependent upon healthy marine ecosystems and species. We will work with the tourism industry to develop good practices and support businesses to become stewards of the UAE's marine resources. Our strategy aims to establish the foundations to engage with stakeholders from other industries in the long term in order to explore and demonstrate environmental best practices by the private sector.

## Conclusion

Everyone on earth depends on the sea, whether it is for food, jobs, energy, leisure, or simply a habitable climate. The sea provides oxygen, nourishment, transport, and habitats for humans and millions of species. Meanwhile, marine habitats provide vital protection against coastal erosion and flooding.

The UAE has a particularly close relationship with the Arabian Sea; it grew up on pearl diving and seaborne trade. Today, a huge part of our economy and day-to-day lives still rely on the latter – from trade to fishing, leisure, and tourism. In recent years it has become even more significant, supplying most of our water through desalination. Therefore, keeping the coastal and territorial waters clean, safe, and sustainable is the duty of all Emiratis.

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