

Conserving Marine Resources

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Overview

Oceans cover 70% of our planet. Humans rely on the oceans and seas for food and water. Healthy oceans and seas are essential to survival and existence of humans.

[Goal 14 of the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) focuses on conservation of life below water. The SDG aims for the world to:

- Reduce marine pollution
- Protect and restore ecosystems
- Reduce ocean acidification
- Create sustainable fishing practices
- Conserve coastal and marine areas
- End subsidies contributing to overfishing
- Increase the economic benefits from sustainable use of marine resources
- Increase scientific knowledge, research and technology for ocean health
- Support small scale fisheries
- Implement and enforce international sea law.

UAE is a country that has historically been dependent on pearl diving and seaborne trading for the development of its economy. The [Ministry of Climate Change and Environment](#) (MOCCAEE) actively creates initiatives that help sustain and conserve marine resources. Laws and regulations that promote sustainable fisheries, protect the ocean from pollution and regulate marine environment activities are given huge importance.

Issues

The Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi conducted the Fisheries Resources Assessment Survey (FRAS) in the UAE's waters. Results of the [survey announced in January 2019](#) indicated that:

- 85% of fish species stocks are considered overexploited when compared to sustainability standards
- Severe fishing pressures exist due to which, key species like Hamour, Shaari and Farsh (most exploited species) are being fished between three and five times the sustainable limits for these species
- Loss of mangroves and seagrass to coastal development severely impacts fisheries resources.

Initiatives

Fisheries

In UAE, fishing is an integral part of the cultural heritage. For coastal communities, it was a source of employment too. UAE focuses on the recovery plan for the long-term survival of fisheries.

The [UAE National Framework Statement for Sustainable Fisheries](#) (2019-2030) aims to pursue sustainable fisheries by:

- Implementing management measures that commensurate with the existing state of fisheries
- Rehabilitation of fisheries habitats.

[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.

Rehabilitation of Coastal and Marine Habitat in UAE

The UAE government has active initiatives to conserve and ensure a balance is maintained in the marine biodiversity. MOCCA works on:

- Rehabilitation of degraded coastal areas
- Restoration of coral reefs
- Maintenance of a multi-dimension community structure for marine organisms
- Cultivation of mangroves which provide nursery and feeding ground for many living organisms
- Deployment of artificial reefs to support the marine environment.

The goals are to:

- Enhance marine habitat areas in the UAE
- Promote biodiversity (species & habitat) in UAE marine and coastal areas
- Enhance sustainability of the marine ecosystem.

The Mangroves Cultivation Project has planted 273,210 mangrove seedlings in an area of 283,068 square meters. This will play an effective role in:

- Reducing carbon emissions
- Protect coastal areas
- Minimizing the impacts of marine natural disasters and erosion

- Serving as a nursery and feeding ground for organisms and as a natural incubator for living aquatic resources
- Helping to maintain the ecological balance
- Protecting species from the risk of extinction
- Promoting ecotourism.

Read more about [the Mangroves Cultivation Project](#).

Marine Protected Areas

Creating protected areas will ensure that the critical habitats and species are preserved for future generations. [Sheikh Zayed Protected Areas Network](#) is the world's largest network in terms of number of protected areas. There are several marine protected areas in UAE. Some of the important ones are mentioned below:

[Abu Dhabi](#)

- Al Saadiyat Marine National Park: Home to the critically endangered Hawksbill Turtle
- Al Yasat Marine Protected Area: Surrounded by coral reefs, which act as important marine sanctuaries to many species
- Mangrove National Park: Home to millions of mangrove trees that help absorb the carbon dioxide emitted from our urban lives
- Marawah Marine Biosphere Reserve: Rich in biodiversity supported by marine and coastal environments and is home to the second largest community of dugong in the world
- Bul Syayeeef Marine Protected Areas: Home to the Greater Flamingo and other resident and migratory bird species.
- Ras Ghanada Protected Areas: Home to intrinsic coral communities

[Dubai](#)

- Ras Al Khor Protected Area

[Sharjah](#)

- Jazirat Sir Bo Naair - high density of turtle nests as well as resident and migratory birds.

Marine Pollution

Overgrowing population and a steady increase in waste production has simultaneously increased the dumping of wastes in the oceans and seas leading to marine pollution.

UAE has accepted various protocols to ensure protection of marine resources such as:

- [Protocol on the Control of Marine Transboundary Movements and Disposal of Hazardous Wastes and Other Wastes](#) - this covers the transboundary movements of wastes, the dumping of wastes at sea, the ballast water of oil tankers and the wastes of commercial ships.
- [Protocol for the Protection of the Marine Environment Against Pollution from Land-Based Sources](#) - this stipulates that all appropriate measures will be ensured to prevent, abate and combat pollution by discharges from land reaching a Sea Area whether water-borne, air-borne or directly from the coast, including outfalls and pipelines
- [Protocol Concerning Marine Pollution Resulting from Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf](#) - this coordinates regional activities towards protection of the marine environment against pollution from exploration and exploitation of oil and gas in the continental shelf.

Impact

The [UAE Sustainable Fisheries Programme](#) saw substantial outcomes that led to:

- Completion of one of the most comprehensive Fisheries Resources Assessment Survey of the UAE's Arabian Gulf Waters
- Developed new fisheries laws and policy. The Executive by-law of Federal Law No. 23 of 1999 was updated.
- Specific legislations for spawning season bans for Shaari and Safi type of fish
- Fishing boat licensing
- Decrees for dhagwa and hadhra types of fish were issued
- The development of a national framework policy for fisheries and a national guideline for Aquaculture setting the future policy direction.

[UAE ranked the first in the world in Marine Protected Areas for 2018.](#) This shows the commitment of the country and its leaders to preserve the marine resources.

Read more about UAE's initiatives for preserving marine life [here](#).

Conclusion

With consistent efforts and various initiatives mentioned above, the UAE government is ensuring effective preservation and conservation of marine resources to maintain a good environmental balance.