A Biography of the Ocean Health Index

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*2017 marks five years since the OHI first launched and we wanted to reflect on its acheivements with this short biography.*

The Ocean Health Index (OHI) is a scientific method and tool for channeling the best scientific information into marine policy. Since 2012 it has evolved from a publication in the scientific journal *Nature* to use in governmental-management-academic collaborations around the world. Keys to its success thus far include its inclusiveness - bringing people, teams, and data together - and its flexibility and transparency. Our team is a unique academic-nonprofit collaboration between the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) and Conservation International that continues to push boundaries in collaborative management and scientific contexts.

The ultimate success of the OHI is yet to be seen: it is for all oceans to sustainably provide benefits to people now and in the future. Still, there have been important steps towards that success through political support and scientific achievement, including having global assessments [endorsed by the World Economic Forum](http://www.oceanhealthindex.org/news/World_Economic_Forum_Endorses_Ocean_Health_Index), [praised by the Prince of Wales](http://www.oceanhealthindex.org/news/Colobian_Leadership_on_Oceans), and expected to be an indicator for parts of Target 14 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. There have also been successes at national and sub-national scales: OHI has been included in United States policy to evaluate ecosystem health as part of the nation's [first Ocean Plan in the Northeast Region](https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/12/07/nations-first-ocean-plans), and independently-led assessments are ongoing [in over twenty areas](http://ohi-science.org/projects), including Canada, the Baltic Sea, Ecuador, Israel, China, Colombia, Hawaii, and New Caledonia.

The OHI is a useful method for policy in many geographic scales because it has a standard structure that is familiar across assessments but also flexibility as to what is included in any assessment area. This flexibility enables OHI to reflect important social and ecological characteristics and priorities of the area assessed. Independent groups are able to lead assessments within their own waters, deciding what is important to measure and which data to use. For example, how well the coastline is protected from storm damage is measured with mangroves in Ecuador, sand dunes in Israel, and not at all in Sweden.

The OHI has [pledged a commitment at the Our Ocean Conference](http://ourocean2016.org/commitments/#commitments-main) to provide the technical tools and assistance needed by governments and coastal resource managers to help measure and manage ocean health within their jurisdictions. We are doing this by sharing all our instruction and methods (including data and code) openly online here at [ohi-science.org](http://ohi-science.org), using the same tools that software developers in Silicon Valley use. Environmental science demands transparency and repeatability to increase scientific rigor, strengthen public trust, and enhance how science can serve policy, and we continue to be visible leaders in working openly and collaboratively.

In 2017 we will continue to work for healthy oceans, and continue to push boundaries for collaborative science and policy.

*The Ocean Health Index was developed from 2009-2012 by an interdisciplinary team of marine and social scientists and economists to fill the need for a quantifiable and easily communicated method to define, measure, and evaluate ‘ocean health’. The 2012 publication presented both the scientific framework and the first assessment at the global scale. This was quickly followed by assessments at smaller scales with differing data availability and spatial scales in Fiji and the US West Coast.* [*2016 marks the fifth year of annual global assessments*](http://ohi-science.org/ohi-global)*, with scores representing ocean health for 220 coastal nations and territories using the best available data each year.*

**See also**: [Ongoing and completed OHI assessments](http://ohi-science.org/projects)  
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