

# The Ocean Health Index Conceptual Guide

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Need for and Benefits of an Ocean Health Index</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Task Timeline</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Phase One: Learn about the Ocean Health Index</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	What is the Ocean Health Index? . . . . .	5
3.2	Food Provision . . . . .	5
3.2.0.1	Wild-Caught Fisheries . . . . .	6
3.2.0.2	Mariculture . . . . .	6
3.2.1	Artisanal Opportunities . . . . .	6
3.2.2	Natural Products . . . . .	7
3.2.2.1	What it does not include . . . . .	7
3.2.3	Carbon Storage . . . . .	7
3.2.4	Coastal Protection . . . . .	7
3.2.5	Coastal Livelihoods and Economies . . . . .	8
3.2.5.1	Livelihoods . . . . .	8
3.2.5.2	Economies . . . . .	8
3.2.6	Tourism and Recreation . . . . .	9
3.2.6.1	What it does not measure . . . . .	9
3.2.7	Sense of Place . . . . .	9
3.2.7.1	Iconic Species . . . . .	9
3.2.7.2	Lasting Special Places . . . . .	9
3.2.8	Clean Waters . . . . .	10
3.2.9	Biodiversity . . . . .	10
3.2.9.1	Species . . . . .	10
3.2.9.2	Habitats . . . . .	10
3.3	Why Ten Goals? . . . . .	11
3.3.1	Changing Goal Models . . . . .	11
3.4	How are the goals weighted? . . . . .	11
3.5	Reference points . . . . .	11
3.6	How is the Index calculated? . . . . .	12
3.7	Understanding Status . . . . .	13
3.8	Understanding Trend . . . . .	13

3.9	Understanding Pressures . . . . .	13
3.10	Understanding Resilience . . . . .	14
3.10.0.1	Ideal Approach . . . . .	14
3.11	Interactions: Pressures and Resilience . . . . .	14
3.11.1	Combining Categories . . . . .	14
3.12	Understand the Philosophy Behind the Framework . . . . .	16
3.13	Understand scales of assessment: Global & Independent (OHI+) . . . . .	16
3.13.1	Assessments can be carried out at different scales . . . . .	16
3.13.2	Comparing Scales of Assessment . . . . .	17
3.14	Determine the Need and Purpose of Conducting an OHI+ and How it Complements Ongoing Initiatives and Efforts . . . . .	17
4	Phase Two: Plan an OHI Assessment . . . . .	18
4.1	Understand the Requirements for Conducting an OHI Assessment . . . . .	18
4.1.1	Funding . . . . .	19
4.1.2	Data Requirements . . . . .	19
4.2	Planning and Partnering with Decision Makers . . . . .	19
4.2.1	Who Should Be Involved? . . . . .	20
4.2.2	Conducting a Stakeholder Analysis . . . . .	21
4.2.3	Introducing the OHI+ Concept to Key Stakeholders . . . . .	21
4.3	Considerations for Joint Planning . . . . .	22
4.3.1	Establishing the Vision . . . . .	22
4.3.2	Establish Your Objectives . . . . .	23
4.3.3	Determining the Spatial Scale . . . . .	23
4.3.4	Establishing Your Strategy . . . . .	23
4.3.5	Costs and Financial Planning . . . . .	24
4.3.6	Adaptive Management . . . . .	25
5	Phase Three: Conduct an OHI Assessment . . . . .	25
6	Phase Four: Communicate and Inform Decision Making . . . . .	25
6.1	Outreach and Communications . . . . .	25
6.1.1	Communications and Outreach Strategy . . . . .	26
6.2	Disseminating Findings . . . . .	26
6.3	Communicate Results with Partners and Others . . . . .	27
6.4	Develop and Implement Policies and Management Interventions that Respond to the Priorities . . . . .	27
6.5	Monitor and Re-evaluate to Determine Policy Effectiveness and Set New Priorities . . . . .	28

## 1 Need for and Benefits of an Ocean Health Index

Marine management mandates in the current financially constrained environments are increasingly requiring the establishment of comprehensive management objectives that maximize sustainable production while maintaining healthy oceans. This requires a cycle of measuring conditions, developing and enacting strategic responses, and continuous monitoring. The Ocean Health Index (OHI, or the ‘Index’) was developed to support this growing need by providing a framework that quantifies overall ecosystem health, which can be tailored to any spatial context, both political and ecological. The Index is the first assessment tool that provides a common platform for scientifically combining and comparing key elements from all dimensions of the oceans health — biological, physical, economic and social – to measure how sustainably people are using the ocean. The Index provides a tool to measure and track changes in several ocean and coastal dimensions through a repeatable, transparent, quantitative, and goal-driven approach. It was developed as a framework to assess coastal oceans in a formulaic manner, and was designed to be customizable to different spatial scales, data availability, and cultural priorities. As a management tool, the Index can help inform decision-making by helping stakeholders identify geographic and thematic priorities, which increases the cost-effectiveness of management interventions.

Overall Index scores are a combination of ten components, or ‘goals’, of ocean health. These scores are calculated using the best available data and indicators at the scale of the assessment. Scores reflect how well coastal regions optimize their potential ocean benefits and services in a sustainable way relative to a reference point (or target), on a scale of 0 to 100. By combining ocean and coastal benefits under a single framework, the Index allows for a comprehensive and integrated view of marine systems as well as a better understanding of potential trade-offs or synergies among these goals. This structured, but highly tailorable, framework provides a consistent platform from which to conduct assessments through time, and at any spatial scales desired.

While many indices have been created to track particular issues or trends in economics, social science or environmental quality, the Index is the first to define and track ocean health comprehensively. It recognizes that people are part of the ocean ecosystem, evaluates how well the ocean provides ten key benefits to people now, and how well we protect its ability to do so in the future. This index differs from typical indicator-based monitoring systems, be they small, such as managing a seafood farm, or large, such as the Millennium Development Goals. Those systems typically contain a list of indicators each of which assesses performance in a particular task or topic. Performing successfully in many or all categories undoubtedly improves overall performance, but does not provide information on the relationship between the different indicators and sectors evaluated.

As a composite index, the Index integrates the results for and relationships between all categories that it evaluates. By integrating information from many different disciplines and sectors, the Index represents a significant advance over conventional single-sector approaches to assessing ocean condition. Because the information from the Index can help inform decision-making in terms of identifying cost-effective management interventions to improve ocean health, it addresses the desire of increasing environmental performance in the face of tightening budgets for natural resource management and conservation.

## 2 Task Timeline

The Task Timeline provides the steps involved in conducting Ocean Health Index assessments. It also suggests the types of skills required while doing so. The process of calculating the Index is not necessarily linear: there is a lot of iteration and discussion among the team to make the best decisions. For example, gathering appropriate data for each status, pressure, and resilience layer requires thinking about how to calculate their reference points at the same time. It is possible that data sources will need to change during the process and goal models will have to be modified as well.

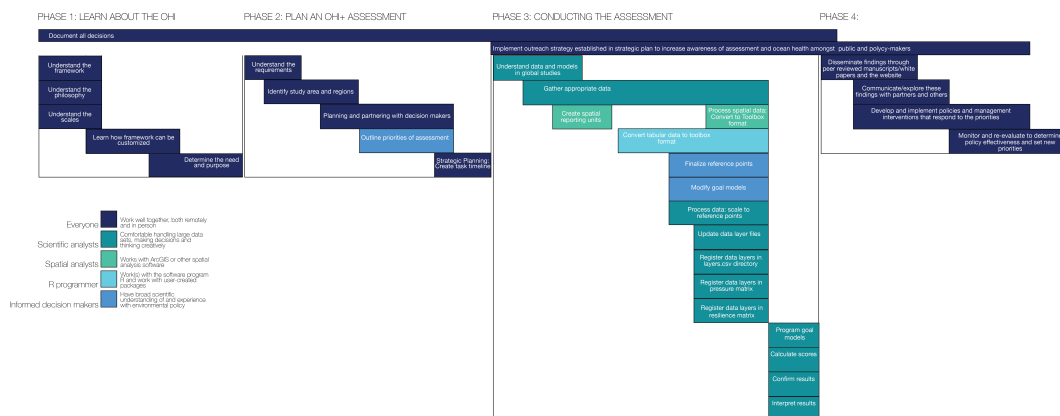


Figure 1: A timeline of the OHI+ assessment process.

The Task Timeline outlines four phases that occur through time. The time required will depend on the availability of data, the number of people working on the assessment, as well as challenges that may arise. Tasks are indicated by skill set but many decisions will also occur as a team.

The phases and tasks outlined in the Task Timeline are:

- **Phase 1:** Learn about the OHI
- **Phase 2:** Plan an OHI+ Assessment
- **Phase 3:** Conduct the Assessment
- **Phase 4:** Outreach and Communications

For more information, visit: <http://ohi-science.org> which is continually updated.

### 3 Phase One: Learn about the Ocean Health Index

There are four distinct and interconnected phases in the Ocean Health Index assessment process. This document describes Phase One.

In this section you will learn how to:

- Determine the need and purpose of your assessment as well as ways to leverage ongoing efforts
- Plan and partner with decision makers
- Who should be involved?
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis
- Introduce the OHI+ concept to key stakeholders

- Understand the requirements of running an Ocean Health Index assessment
  - Funding
  - Data Requirements
- 
- Understand the OHI philosophy
  - Methods
  - Resources
- 
- Design adaptive management strategies
- 
- Structure an outreach and communications strategy around the assessment

The recommended process and criteria presented in this section offer a systematic approach to leveraging existing efforts in to the Index. The way information is incorporated depends on what is most appropriate for the region conducting the assessment, which requires considering local conditions and capacities.

### 3.1 What is the Ocean Health Index?

The Ocean Health Index defines a healthy ocean as one that can sustainably deliver a range of benefits to people both now and in the future. A healthy ocean in this definition is not necessarily a pristine ocean, although the Index allows for pristine systems as well as sustainably used systems to score highly. The benefits provided by the ocean are captured by the following ten broadly held public goals:

- **Food provision** from sustainably harvested or cultured stocks
- **Artisanal opportunities** for local communities from sustainable practices
- **Natural products**, including pharmaceuticals and decorative materials, that are sustainably extracted
- **Carbon storage** in coastal habitats
- **Coastal protection** from inundation and erosion
- **Sense of place** from culturally valued iconic species, habitats, and landscapes
- **Livelihoods and economies** from coastal and ocean-dependent communities
- **Tourism and recreation** opportunities
- **Clean waters** and beaches for aesthetic and health values
- **Biodiversity** of species and habitats

### 3.2 Food Provision

The aim of this goal is to maximize the sustainable harvest of seafood in regional waters from **Wild-Caught Fisheries** and **Mariculture** (specifically, ocean-farmed seafood). Regions are rewarded for maximizing the amount of sustainable seafood provided and they are penalized for unsustainable practices or for under-harvest. Because fisheries and mariculture are separate industries with very different features, each is tracked separately as a unique sub-goal under **Food Provision**. They are then combined after each sub-goal is weighted by the proportion of the total yield it contributes to total food provision.

•

**3.2.0.1 Wild-Caught Fisheries** This sub-goal captures the amount and sustainability of wild-caught seafood harvested primarily for human consumption. It measures the ability to obtain maximal wild harvests without damaging the ocean’s ability to continue providing similar quantities of fish for people in the future.

Wild-caught fisheries harvests must remain below levels that would compromise the resource and its future harvest, but the amount of seafood harvested should be maximized within the bounds of sustainability. This is a departure from traditional conservation goals regarding wild-caught fisheries where under-harvesting is usually not penalized. This sub-goal can interact with other goals and sub-goals through, for example, destruction of surrounding habitats that can indirectly decrease the productivity of the fisheries.

Ideally, data for catch and effort of every commercially - and recreationally-fished species would be available, as well as the functional relationship between fish population size (biomass) and fisheries effort, so that maximum sustainable yield (MSY) could be calculated. Then, fisheries catch and effort information would be used to calculate the present state and MSY would be used to set the reference point. Current status would be calculated using the present state of every individual species and combining each species together, as the weighted proportion of total catch.

•

**3.2.0.2 Mariculture** This sub-goal measures the ability to obtain maximal seafood yield from farm-raised facilities without damaging the ocean’s ability to continue providing fish for people in the future.

Mariculture practices must not inhibit the future production of seafood in the area. This means mariculture practices must be sustainable and also maximize the amount of food production that is physically possible and desired by regional governments and those who buy, sell and eat that food.

Ideally, there would be information on the physical area available for mariculture - or the area allowed based on social expectations and priorities - and the sustainability of the mariculture practices. This would mean that data are available for the physical coastal and offshore habitat appropriate for each intended type of mariculture service (for instance, offshore habitats marked as appropriate for finfish and shallower habitats for filter-feeding invertebrates) and that the areas have been identified as socially appropriate. The social component is important in this case because mariculture competes for space with many other ocean uses, including fishing and tourism activities. This approach would not penalize regions that have less geographic area available for mariculture, though places with fewer sheltered bays or lower primary production could be at a disadvantage compared to places that have more favorable conditions. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available.

### 3.2.1 Artisanal Opportunities

This goal captures whether people with the desire to fish on small scales have the opportunity to do so. It is important to capture the degree to which a region permits or encourages artisanal fishing compared to the demand for such fishing opportunities, and if possible, the sustainability of artisanal fishing practices.

The artisanal fishing opportunities goal measures the opportunities for artisanal fishing rather than the amount of fish caught (covered in the **Food Provision** goal) or the household revenue earned (covered in the **Livelihoods and Economies** goal). Higher scores reflect high potential for the local population to access local ocean resources, regardless of whether or not those people actually do get access. This goal is about economic access (need and costs involved), as well as physical access (how possible it is for individuals to get to the resource), and access to the fish themselves (how robust fish populations are). The opportunity to fish artisanally interacts with other goals when damaging practices are used (for example, cyanide or dynamite fishing).

Ideally, this goal would include some measure of how easy or hard it is for people to access ocean resources when they need them and a quantified evaluation of the sustainability of harvest of all nearshore stocks used by artisanal fishermen. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available.

### 3.2.2 Natural Products

This goal captures how sustainably people harvest non-food products from the sea.

**Natural Products** uses the amount of ocean-derived goods that are traded, such as shells, sponges, corals, seaweeds, fish oil, and ornamental fishes to evaluate their levels of sustainability. Higher scores reflect sustainable extraction of non-food ocean resources with little to no impact on surrounding habitats, marine species, or human well-being.

Ideally, quantity, value, and the sustainability of the harvest method would be available for every marine and coastally-derived natural product within the regions of a study area. This would include a wide range of products, including corals, shells, seaweeds, aquarium fish, mangrove wood, or any non-food marine product that is harvested within a region. The ideal reference point would be derived from a functional relationship of the sustainability of the harvest for each product relative to the amount of product available in the ecosystem; without this information assumptions will need to be made to set the reference point.

**3.2.2.1 What it does not include** This goal does not include non-living items such as oil, gas, and mining products, because these practices are not considered to be sustainable, and they are done at such large scales that including them would essentially make an index for oil and mining. It also does not include bioprospecting (for medicines or genes), which has an unpredictable potential value in the future, rather than measurable value now. This goal can interact with other goals and sub-goals when unsustainable harvesting practices are used.

### 3.2.3 Carbon Storage

This goal focuses on the carbon stored in natural coastal ecosystems that absorb and sequester it in large amounts.

Coastal habitats play a significant role in the global storage of organic carbon because they have the highest per-area storage rates of any habitat. While the pelagic oceanic plays a large role in the sequestration of anthropogenic carbon, by acting as a large carbon sink, the mechanisms for open ocean carbon storage cannot be managed locally or regionally as there are no practical methods for intervention or manipulation. This goal instead focuses on the the status of coastal marine habitats with high carbon storage capacity. In addition to preventing storage of carbon in the future, the destruction of these marine habitats has been shown to release large quantities of carbon, damaging the overall health of coupled marine systems.

Ideally, to assess the amount of carbon stored in every coastal habitat, information would be available regarding coverage area and some measure of quality (for example, the density of mangrove coverage). Additionally, different weights would be assigned to the habitats based on their relative ability to store carbon (although exact values are poorly known, currently). The carbon storage model can incorporate such weights once they are available in a similar way to the methods developed for the coastal protection goal. The reference point for habitat-based goals will likely be temporal; this means that historic data are needed such that current habitat extent data can be compared to them.

### 3.2.4 Coastal Protection

This goal captures the condition and extent of habitats that protect the coasts against storm waves and flooding.

Many habitats, including coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses, salt marshes, and sea ice act, as natural buffers against incoming waves. By protecting against storm damage, flooding, and erosion, these living habitats keep people safe and can help mitigate economic loss of personal and public property, cultural landmarks, and natural resources. This goal assesses the amount of protection provided by marine and coastal habitats by measuring the area they cover now relative to the area they covered in the recent past.

Ideally, data for all habitats within regions of a study area would be available, as well as information on the value of the land and the vulnerability of inhabitants being protected by these habitats. This requires data for habitat type at high spatial resolution as well as a measure of the value of what is protected by the habitats. The reference point for habitat-based goals will likely be a temporal baseline; this means that historic data are needed such that current habitat and value data can be compared to them.

### 3.2.5 Coastal Livelihoods and Economies

This goal focuses on avoiding the loss of ocean-dependent livelihoods and productive coastal economies while maximizing livelihood quality. We measure the status of this goal through two sub-goals: **Livelihoods** (jobs and wages) and **Economies** (revenues). The two halves of this goal are tracked separately because the number and quality of jobs and the amount of revenue produced are both of considerable interest to stakeholders and governments, and could show very different patterns, such as the case when high revenue sectors do not necessarily provide large employment opportunities. The goal aims to maintain the number of coastal and ocean-dependent livelihoods (jobs) in a region, and maintain productive coastal economies (revenues), while also maximizing livelihood quality (represented by relative wages).

- 

**3.2.5.1 Livelihoods** This sub-goal includes two equally important sub-components, the number of jobs, which is a proxy for livelihood quantity, and the per capita average annual wages, which is a proxy for job quality.

This sub-goal evaluates the benefits people obtain from the oceans in the form of jobs and wages. Some relevant sectors include tourism, commercial fishing, marine mammal watching, and working at ports and harbors, among others. Jobs and wages produced from marine-related industries are clearly of huge value to many people, even those who do not directly participate in the industries but value community identity, tax revenue, and indirect economic and social impacts of a stable coastal economy.

Ideally, this goal would capture all marine sectors that supply jobs and wages to coastal communities, incorporating information on the sustainability of different sectors and also working conditions and job satisfaction/identity. The jobs and revenue produced from marine-related industries directly benefit those who are employed, but also those that gain substantial indirect value from community identity, tax revenue, and other related economic and social impacts of a stable coastal economy. Capturing the indirect as well as direct benefits from jobs, wages and revenue from coastal communities and beyond is best; where data do not exist, multipliers derived from the literature can be incorporated into jobs to attempt to capture this. The reference point in this sub-goal will likely be set as a moving window temporal approach or a spatial comparison.

- 

**3.2.5.2 Economies** This sub-goal captures the economic value associated with marine industries. This is done using revenue from marine sectors as a proxy.

The economies sub-goal evaluates the revenue generated from marine-based industries. Strong coastal economies are something that people value, and this can be reflected by the GDP generated by these coastal regions both directly and indirectly.

Ideally, economic data would be collected coastally, and traced from sectors both directly and indirectly related to marine industries. When these data are not available it is possible to use revenue data at a larger scale and adapt them to a coastal area based on population distribution. The reference point in this sub-goal will likely be set as a moving window temporal approach.



### 3.2.6 Tourism and Recreation

This goal captures the value people have for experiencing and taking pleasure in coastal areas.

Tourism, travel, and recreation in coastal and ocean areas are major components of thriving coastal communities and a measure of how much people value ocean systems.

Ideally, information would be available on how the ocean is used for enjoyment by both local residents and tourists, thereby capturing the full value of touristic and recreational activities. Models will vary greatly depending on data available; there are many ways to potentially measure the delivery of this goal. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available.

**3.2.6.1 What it does not measure** **Tourism and Recreation** does not include the revenue or livelihoods that are generated by tourism and recreation; that is captured in the **Livelihoods and Economies** goal.

### 3.2.7 Sense of Place

The sense of place goal aims to capture the level of protection for aspects of the coastal and marine system that contribute to a person's sense of cultural identity. This definition includes people living near the ocean and those who live far from it but still derive a sense of identity or value from knowing particular places or species exist. Since few groups, communities, or states have explicitly described the attributes of the coastal and ocean environments that have special cultural meaning, the Index assesses the conditions that reflect how well this goal is being delivered through two sub-goals, **Iconic Species** and **Lasting Special Places**. The overall **Sense of Place** goal is then the arithmetic mean of the two sub-goal scores.

•

**3.2.7.1 Iconic Species** This sub-goal describes the species that are important to a region: iconic species are defined as those that are relevant to local cultural identity through one or more of the following: 1) traditional activities such as fishing, hunting or commerce; 2) local ethnic or religious practices; 3) existence value; and 4) locally-recognized aesthetic value.

The intent of the iconic species sub-goal is to focus on those species widely perceived as iconic within a region, and iconic from a cultural or existence value. This is in contrast to an economic or extractive reason for valuing the species. Iconic species symbolize the cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic benefits that people hold for a region, often bringing intangible benefits to coastal communities and beyond.

Ideally, data would be available on all species that are important to coastal communities, and then a separate assessment would judge the condition of each of the populations. Because almost any species can be iconic to someone, defining which species are culturally iconic can be challenging; information can sometimes be found from local customs and experts, oral tradition, sociological or anthropological literature, journalism and regional assessments. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available.

•

**3.2.7.2 Lasting Special Places** This sub-goal captures the conservation status of geographic locations that hold significant aesthetic, spiritual, cultural, recreational, or existence value for people.

Well-maintained and protected lasting special places provide intangible but significant resources that help sustain and may also generate economic opportunities and help to sustain coastal communities, but those are captured in other goals.

Ideally, a list of all the places that people within a region consider special could be found or developed, along with an assessment of what percent of and how well those areas are protected. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available.

### 3.2.8 Clean Waters

This goal captures the degree to which waters are polluted by natural and human-made causes.

People enjoy the presence of unpolluted estuarine, coastal, and marine waters for their aesthetic value and because they help avoid detrimental health effects to people or the marine life on which they depend. Many things can be responsible for negatively affecting clean waters, including sewage pollution (fecal coliform, viruses, parasites), nutrient runoff (eutrophication, algal blooms), chemical pollution (oil spills), and marine debris (floating trash). Combining the scores for these pollutants with a geometric mean in the goal model ensures that just one of the pollutants can drive the score, with the philosophy that if one of the pollutants is greatly impacting the system, how the others are affecting the system is less critical because there is already great impact.

Ideally, data would be available and combined from many different categories of marine pollution to best capture the factors that can cause waters to become unsuitable for recreation or other purposes. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available; a functional relationship would be best for setting limits to uses.

### 3.2.9 Biodiversity

This goal captures the conservation status of marine species. Because the status of only a small portion of the world's species has been assessed, the condition of habitats is also calculated as proxy for the status of the many species that rely upon them. Thus, the condition of species and key habitats that support species richness and diversity is measured through two sub-goals: habitats and species. A simple average of these two sub-goal scores was used to obtain a single biodiversity goal score.

- 

**3.2.9.1 Species** This sub-goal is conceptually equal to iconic species, but it includes all species that are assessed. The second difference is it also includes the amount of area where each species is present. So species that inhabit a greater area have a greater weight in the calculations than those with a smaller range.

This sub-goal aims to estimate how successfully the richness and variety of marine life is being maintained. People value the species that comprise marine biodiversity for their existence value as well as their contributions to resilient ecosystem structure and function. Biodiversity can also play a supporting role in food provision and sustainability generally, and is therefore also included in resilience dimensions of other public goals.

Ideally, data would be available on the number of species in each region of a study area, their habitat ranges, and assessments of their population or conservation status. The type of reference point used will depend on the data available.

- 

**3.2.9.2 Habitats** This sub-goal measures the condition of habitats that are important for supporting a wide array of species diversity.

Because not all species have been assessed, this sub-goal measures some of the habitats that are particularly important in supporting large numbers of marine species. This sub-goal is conceptually similar to the carbon storage goal but includes all habitats with sufficient data, not just those that sequester carbon.

Ideally, information on the extent and condition of every single habitat type would be available. The reference point for habitat-based goals will likely be temporal; this means that historic data are needed such that current habitat and value data can be compared to historic data.

### 3.3 Why Ten Goals?

The Index did not set out to have ten goals. The process of reviewing literature and assessing management objectives resulted in ten goals, several with sub-goals that are each assessed separately. Regions in which some goals are not relevant can (and should) be assessed based only on the remaining goals. The Index is flexible to the inclusion of different or additional goals, something we have not yet encountered but is certainly possible.

#### 3.3.1 Changing Goal Models

Although the Index framework provides guidelines on how to adapt underlying models to available regional data, using simpler models or different proxies when necessary, it cannot prescribe which available regional data sets are preferred, or dictate the most appropriate models to use or choices of reference points, proxy data or goal weights. These decisions require involving local experts within the region to provide opinions and direction towards an outcome most representative of ocean health in the study area.

The Index can also accommodate additional goals if they better reflect what local communities value, although we feel that the ten goals currently defined within the Index are sufficiently broad to capture a vast majority of values. No indicator is exempt from such subjective decisions. The Index’s framework, however, requires one to document and track such assumptions explicitly and thus, contrary to many other existing indices, allows for careful assessment of the sensitivity of results to such decisions.

### 3.4 How are the goals weighted?

The goals are currently weighted equally in OHI calculations. However, in your OHI+ assessment the weighting can be changed depending on your local context. Stakeholders may have differing priorities, but when presented with the portfolio of goals used in the Ocean Health Index, these differences can become less pronounced, as was found in a study by Halpern *et al.* (2013) in *Marine Policy*. This would require good data, of course, such as the information collected through a representatively sample survey.

### 3.5 Reference points

To assess how well a goal is being delivered, it is necessary to identify the target to which it will be compared. This target is called the reference point. In an Ocean Health Index framework, setting the reference point enables the numeric values relevant for each goal to be scaled between zero and one hundred (where one hundred means that the current status is equal to the target reference point, and zero means that it is as far from the target reference point as is possible). Sharing a common range for scores makes all goal scores comparable. The reference point may be a target value at some time in the past, a comparison with some other location (such as the best performing region), a target established by a treaty or other agreement, or—best of all—a target determined by a scientifically-informed input-output relationship (an equation called a **production function**).

It can be advantageous to translate a management goal to a maximization or minimization problem with an objective function so that it is clear exactly how an indicator should be developed to track progress. Indeed, these choices significantly influence the evaluation of a goal’s status. For instance, a sustainable seafood management goal could be measured in terms of yields if the goal is focused on maximizing food provision or in number of jobs if the goal is focused on maximizing social and economic welfare. These two goal framings would lead to the development of different targets in terms of both yields and level of employment. Where necessary, our conceptual framework encourages the reframing of management goals to ensure that the corresponding indicators, and the units in which they are reported, accurately portray the intent of the goal as it is stated.

It is important to understand that setting a reference point is a conscious choice. This choice can be informed by the literature and by expert advice, and can be discussed in terms of costs and benefits. However,

ultimately there is no optimum and certainly not only one solution, and this can be very uncomfortable. This makes setting a reference point difficult, but even more important to define explicitly.

### 3.6 How is the Index calculated?

For each goal, models are developed to best represent the philosophy of that goal using the best available data at the scale of study. The present status that is calculated individually for each goal forms half of that goal's score. The other half, called likely future status, is based on three things:

- the **Trend**, which is the average rate of change for status during the most recent five years
- the total **Pressures** that will harm future benefits
- the total **Resilience** actions that can reduce pressures and maintain or raise future benefits (for example treaties, laws, enforcement, habitat protection)

Present Status (50% of goal score)	Probable Future State (50% of goal score)		
Is the goal's present value (represented by a goal model which uses the most recent data available) compared to a goal-specific reference point (target)	<b>Future Trend (33%)</b> is the average percentage change in Status shown by the most recent five years of data	<b>Pressure (8.5%)</b> is the sum of the ecological and social pressures likely to depress near-future scores for a goal	<b>Resilience (8.5%)</b> is the sum of ecological factors and social initiatives (policies, laws etc.) enacted that can reduce pressures and therefore increase near-future scores for a goal

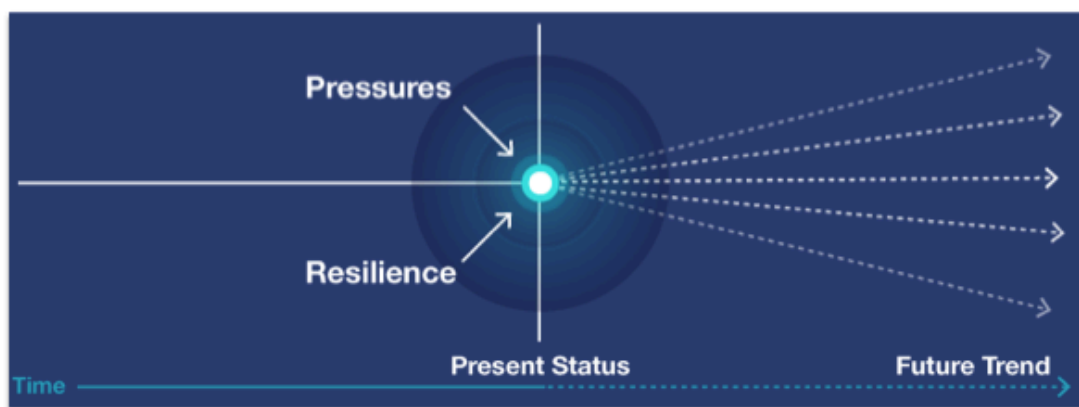


Figure 2:

The current status of each goal is determined by comparing the most recent measure of the goal with a goal-specific sustainable **Reference Point**.

The trend is calculated as the slope of the change in status based on recent data. As such, the trend calculation is not trying to predict the future but only to indicate likely condition (sustainability) based on a linear relationship. Pressures and resilience are ultimately important for scores, but they have a smaller contribution to the overall scores because we can only approximate their effects. Individual pressures are ranked for their importance to different goals based on published studies and expert opinion. Resilience actions are the best way to improve a score, because they can reduce pressures, protect ocean habitats and species, improve status, and optimize benefits to people. Status, trend, likely future status, pressures, and resilience are called 'dimensions' within the Ocean Health Index framework.

In the figure below, likely future state (in yellow) is the result of the current status modified by trend, minus the negative effect of pressures (grey), plus the positive effect of resilience (salmon pink).

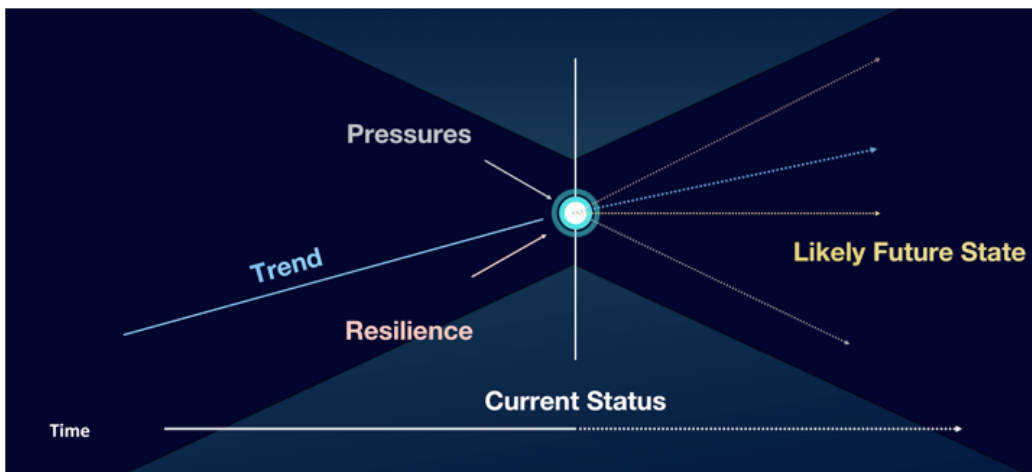


Figure 3: In the figure, likely future state (in yellow) is the result of the trend, minus the negative effect of pressures (grey), plus the positive effect of resilience (salmon pink)

### 3.7 Understanding Status

The status component of each goal is captured through a model that represents the philosophy of the goal in a way that produces findings that are most useful to inform decision-making at the scale of your assessment.

The current status of each goal is determined by comparing the most recent measure of the goal with a goal-specific sustainable reference point. For each goal, as well as for many individual data layers, values are rescaled to reference points, or targets, which serve as benchmarks based on SMART principles: Specific (to the management goal), Measurable, Ambition, Realistic, and Time-bound (Samhouri *et al.* 2012; Perrings *et al.* 2010; 2011).

### 3.8 Understanding Trend

The trend is calculated as the slope of the change in status based on recent data. As such, the trend calculation is not trying to predict the future but only to indicate the likely condition based on a linear relationship.

### 3.9 Understanding Pressures

A pressure is any kind of stressor on the social or ecological system that is harmful for ocean health.

Pressures can change how goals interact with each other. For example, raising fish in the **Mariculture** sub-goal can cause genetic escapes, which are a pressure on the **Wild-Caught Fisheries** and **Species** sub-goals. The genetic escapes do not affect mariculture itself, however, and have no effect on that particular sub-goal score while they do have a negative effect on the other sub-goal scores.

Pressures are calculated as the sum of the ecological and social pressures that negatively affect goal scores. The Index framework calculates pressures by first grouping them into five ecological categories (pollution,

habitat destruction, fishing pressure, species pollution, and climate change) and one social category. The reason there are categories is to minimize sampling bias, so that no one kind disproportionately influences the score. They are weighted equally in the global assessment, but in your local assessment they can be changed if there is enough information on how to do so.

### 3.10 Understanding Resilience

A resilience measure can be a law, policy, or a given performance evaluation that speaks to the effectiveness of actions to improve ocean health.

*Ultimately, it is resilience that will help determine the future of ocean health.* Resilience actions are the best way to improve a score for a country, because they can reduce pressures, protect ocean habitats and species, improve status, and optimize benefits to people.

Resilience is calculated as the sum of the ecological factors and social initiatives (policies, laws, indicators of good governance, etc.) that can positively affect goal scores by reducing or eliminating pressures. This is because resilience in the Index framework acts to reduce pressures in each region. Therefore, resilience measures must not only be directly or indirectly relevant to ocean health, but must be in response to a pressure layer affecting a goal.

**3.10.0.1 Ideal Approach** Ideally, assessments of social resilience would include national-level and as well as local rules and other relevant institutional mechanisms that are meant to safeguard ocean health. The global focus has been on international treaties and indices, so your region should have more localized information. There would also be information as to their effectiveness and enforcement. of more. Information on social norms and community (and other local-scale) institutions (such as tenure or use rights) that influence resource use and management would be useful too.

### 3.11 Interactions: Pressures and Resilience

Ecological and social resilience are similarly assessed separately and then combined with equal weighting, which could also be changed based on expert opinions. Any new resilience measure must be associated with a pressures layer.

**The figure below** shows stressors by category, and the resilience measures meant to ‘balance’ (or counteract) them for the global assessment. Note that resilience layers are only available for some categories and goals in the Global case, highlighting the importance of data availability for these layers. Also, some resilience measures are goal-specific; that is, they act on certain goals without counteracting pressures. When you have regulations to improve the practices captured in the status specific goals (e.g., sustainable tourism, lower bycatch, etc.), you can include them as resilience measures.

Pressures and resilience are ultimately important for scores, but they have a smaller contribution to the overall scores because we can only approximate their effects. Individual pressures are ranked for their importance to different goals based on published studies and expert opinion. Resilience actions are the best way to improve a score, because they can reduce pressures, protect ocean habitats and species, improve status, and optimize benefits to people.

#### 3.11.1 Combining Categories

The software of the **OHI Toolbox** calculates pressures in five ecological pressure categories (pollution, habitat destruction, fishing pressure, species pollution, and climate change) and one social pressure category. The reason behind the ecological categories is to avoid hidden weighting (e.g. overrepresentation of pressures for which there is more data). For example, in the global assessment there were many pollution datasets available, but few distinct habitat destruction datasets. If we simply averaged the scores of each individual

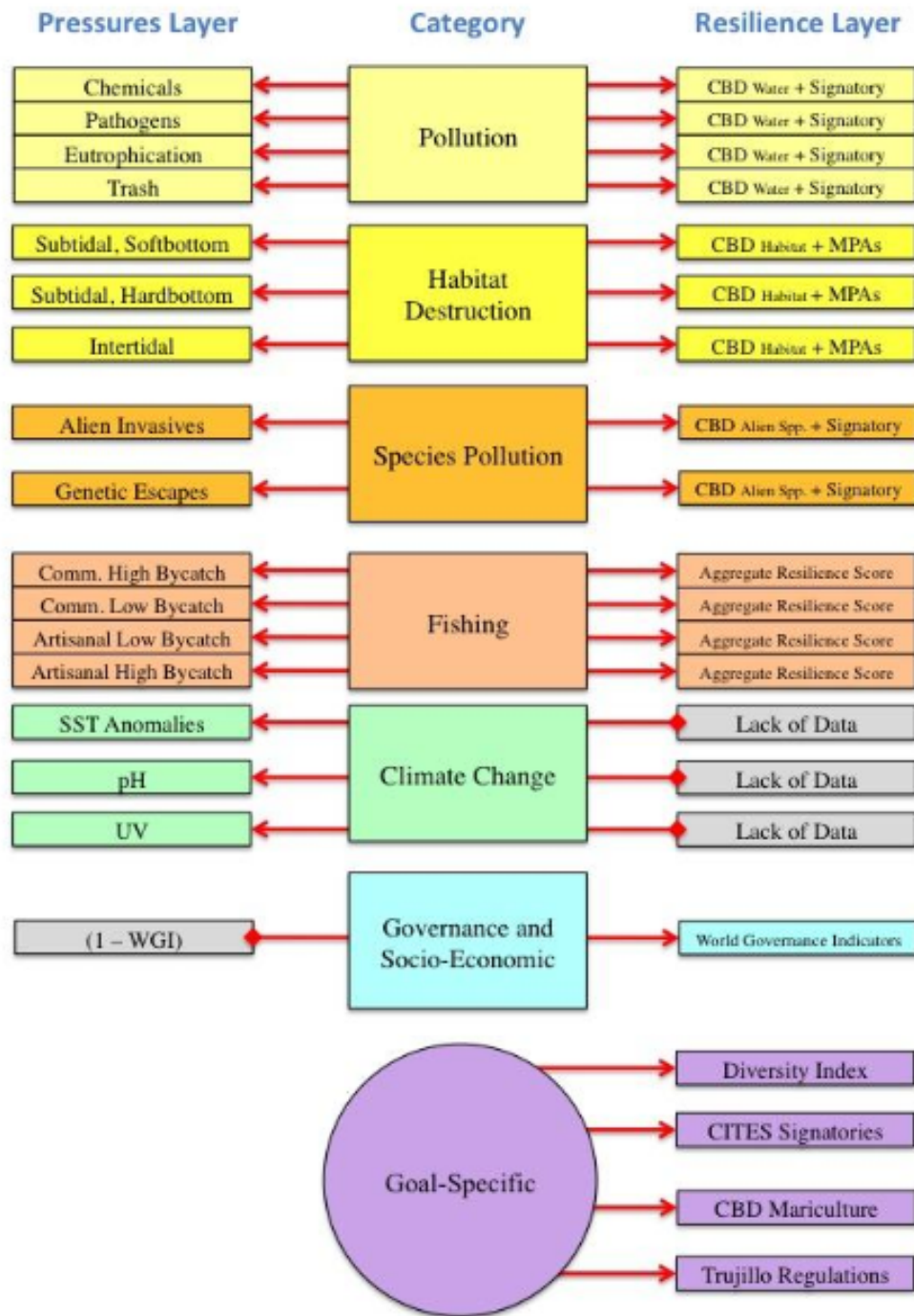


Figure 4: Each resilience data layer should have a corresponding pressures layer, and vice versa. Note that a pressure layer becomes (1-resilience) in cases where only resilience data are available, due to data limitations.

stressor, pollution scores would have a greater influence on the results (stronger weight) due to the relative higher availability of measurements of various pollutants. Instead, aggregating by pressure categories ensures that different stressor types influence the score based on ranks. Nonetheless, the scores are combined in a cumulative way within each category to account for the fact that multiple stressors within a category have a cumulative impact that is greater than if only one of the stressors were present. The resulting scores for the five ecological categories are averaged to produce a single ecological pressures score. This score is then averaged with the social pressures score to produce the final overall pressure score.

A similar combination method occurs for the resilience layers in the OHI Toolbox.

### 3.12 Understand the Philosophy Behind the Framework

Before conducting your own assessment it is important that you understand the philosophy behind the Index. In order to do so, one must carefully read through the methods, a copy of which can be found [at the Ocean Health Index website](#). We have also created a conceptual guide and training manual which can be found [at OHI-Science.org](#).

Below are several documents and materials that we have also created to support this important step.

- Ocean Health Index Assessment Fact sheet
- A Guide to Planning Assessments and Informing Decision Making
- Prologue to the Assessment Documents
- The Ocean Health Index Conceptual Guide & Highlights
- The Ocean Health Index Toolbox Application Manual

All guides can be found at [www.ohi-science.org](http://www.ohi-science.org)

### 3.13 Understand scales of assessment: Global & Independent (OHI+)

Index scores by goal are calculated at the scale of the reporting unit, which is called a ‘region’ and then combined using a weighted average to produce the score for the overall area assessed, called a ‘study area’. In the global assessments the study area is the world and the regions assessed are coastal countries or territories (two hundred twenty one exclusive economic zones), Antarctica, and the high seas (fifteen sub divisions). Global assessments are conducted by a multidisciplinary team of scientists led by the U.S. National Center for Ecological Assessment and Synthesis (NCEAS), Conservation International, and the Seas Around Us Project. These studies are published annually and use models developed using the best existing data available at the global scale to capture each goal philosophy. At the global level, we apply the same methods and reference points to all regions assessed equally, which ensures scientific objectivity and allows for comparison of performance across countries. The methods are improved every year by increasing goal model robustness, integrating new data, and recalculating the scores with the improved methods both for the current year and, retroactively, for previous years to allow for year to year comparisons.

#### 3.13.1 Assessments can be carried out at different scales

Studies at smaller scales are called Ocean Health Index+ (OHI+) assessments and are conducted by independent groups that use the Index approach to measure ocean health in their regions, countries, states, and communities. These assessments can be used by managers to incorporate local information and priorities at the spatial scale where policy and management decisions are made.

*Your assessment will be an example of an OHI+ assessment.*



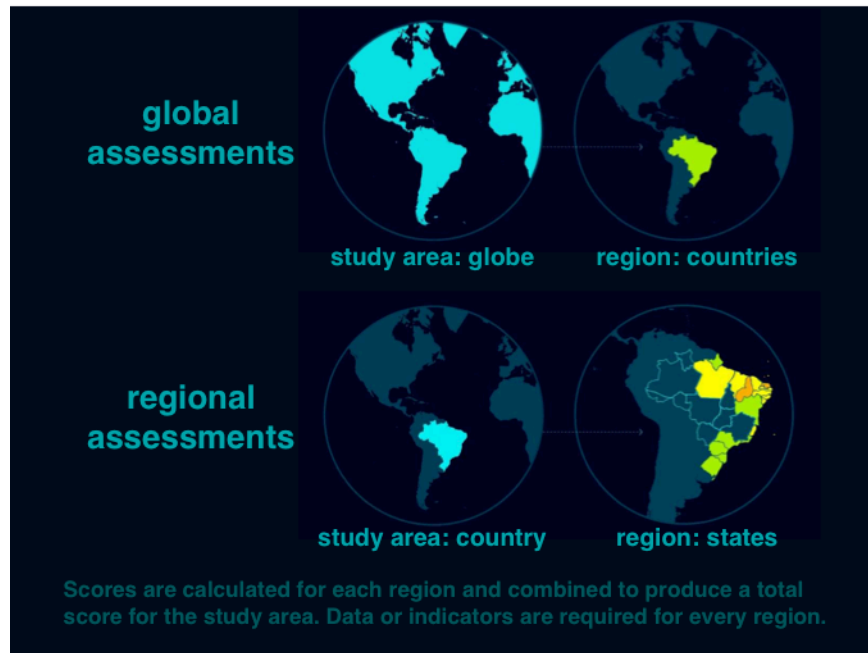


Figure 5:

### 3.13.2 Comparing Scales of Assessment

It is important to note that regional assessments can't be compared directly to the global ones because the models and data are different. This should allow you to be creative as you develop your OHI+ assessment.

## 3.14 Determine the Need and Purpose of Conducting an OHI+ and How it Complements Ongoing Initiatives and Efforts

One of your first tasks when thinking about developing an OHI+ assessment should be defining the purpose(s) of the study. Producing the Index is not the end goal: it is merely a process toward the true end-goal - *achieving improved ocean health*.

OHI+ falls under the realm of applied research, aiming at solving practical problems related to ocean and coastal resource management. Hence, the assessments should be conducted with a clear end-goal in mind: what problem(s) do you want to solve? Defining the end goal of the study will largely determine how goal models, data gathering, and reference points are developed to maximize the utility of the findings to inform decision-making to address the problem(s). You should consider why you need or want to conduct an OHI+ assessment and what you are going to do with the information. Some rationale for your assessment might include the need or desire to:

- Provide clear and objective measurements of ocean health to improve multi-stakeholder engagement. This can ensure that future stakeholder engagement activities are as effective as possible.
- Define management initiatives and policies to improve ocean and coastal health.
- Establish suitable management targets (reference points) for all elements of the ocean.
- Inform geographic and thematic priority setting.
- Improve resource allocation by identifying cost-effectiveness.
- Maximize sustainable ocean production.

- Establish a forum for stakeholder discussions about targets, potential conflicts of interests, and management preferences and priorities.
- Identify potential private-public partnerships for sustainable development and growth, mitigation, restoration, and management.
- Enhance international collaboration and partnerships with neighboring countries.
- Increase public awareness through campaigns.
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Some combination of the above.

As you define the purpose of the assessment, it is important to keep in mind the scale at which the study is conducted and the various scales of decision-making. As you define your goals for the assessment, you should consider who the audience for the assessment is and what kind of information do they require. In most OHI+ studies there are several different stakeholder groups, all of which have different information needs and requirements. Therefore, you should consider the perspectives of groups such as government agencies, private sector members, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups, and scientific and academic institutions.

Effective assessments are carefully planned and require adequate project leadership and vision. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the Index, assessments often count with participation of various stakeholder groups. Nevertheless, we recommend a key agency or group assumes the leadership of the assessment to ensure proper planning, development, and engagement throughout the assessment.

## 4 Phase Two: Plan an OHI Assessment

This document contains the steps of the second of four phases in conducting an assessment. In this section you will be guided through how to:

Understand the Requirements of Conducting an Assessment - Funding - Data Availability

Planning and Partnering with Decision Makers - Who Should Be Involved? - Conducting a Stakeholder Analysis - Introducing the OHI+ Concept to Key Stakeholders

Strategic Planning - Considerations for Joint Planning - Vision - Objectives - Spatial Scale - Strategy - Task Timeline - Costs and Financial Planning - Adaptive Management

### 4.1 Understand the Requirements for Conducting an OHI Assessment

Before you begin actually running your assessment, it is crucial to have a full understanding of what will be required to complete a successful assessment. Running an assessment is a labor intensive process that requires collaboration, communication, funding, dedication and, perhaps most importantly, data.

It is imperative to ensure that you have all of these components before starting your assessment.

Completing a stakeholder analysis as well as a leading Working Group will greatly enhance your opportunities for and abilities to collaborate and communicate. It will also give you access to a larger pool of resources.

Procuring funding and creating a budget that is informed by the task timeline will also aid in smart spending and decrease the likelihood that funding will run out before the process is completed. For more information on procuring funding and to see how assessments have been funded in the past, click [here](#)

The availability of local data is perhaps the single most important requirement for conducting an OHI+ assessment.

Index scores are a reflection of data quality, and thus, accessing the best data available is of the highest importance. Data from existing environmental, social, and economic indicators may be used. All data will be rescaled to specific reference points (targets) before being combined therefore setting these reference points at the appropriate scale is a fundamental component of any assessment. This requires the interpretation of the philosophy of each Index goal and sub-goal using the best available data and indicators. Click [here](#) to see a list of data required to conduct an assessment.

#### 4.1.1 Funding

Generally funding comes from the public sector, but other assessments have developed proposals that have been funded by the private sector.

In some other cases foundations, research labs and academic institutions provide the funding. More specifics on funding will be included under the [Strategic Planning](#) section.

#### 4.1.2 Data Requirements

Time-series data are needed for the four components of each goal: Status, future trend, pressures, and resilience.

Data required for status and trend: - Fisheries mariculture harvest - Natural products harvest - Need and ability for small-scale fishing - Coastal habitats extend and condition - Employment, wages, and revenue of coastal industries - Species extinction risks and protection of special places - Tourism and recreation information - Water pollutants

Data required for pressures: - Ecological pressures - Pollution - Habitat destruction - Species threats - Fishing impacts - Climate change - Social pressures - Governance indicators

Data required for resilience - Ecological resilience - Regulatory framework - Ecological integrity - Social resilience - Social integrity - Governance indicators

## 4.2 Planning and Partnering with Decision Makers

“The Index offers a tool to engage stakeholders and decision-makers in difficult but necessary discussions, while also helping agencies fulfill their mandates” (Halpern *et al.* 2014)

For your assessment, appropriate conditions and resources will include scientific capacity, government actions (policies, barriers to action, regulatory frameworks and transparency), and civil engagement, all of which create an environment conducive to effectively conducting the assessment.

Although the Index assessments can be produced without the input of non-scientific groups (policy, civil society, etc.), *multi-stakeholder collaborative planning and decision-making are more likely to yield integrated management efforts* focusing on coordinating multi-sector activities, assessing cumulative impacts and trade-offs, and maximizing sustainable productivity. Therefore, the steps we present here propose establishing a strong multi-disciplinary management and leadership framework, and focus on developing a strong strategic plan that can guide the entire process.

Achieving healthy oceans (i.e., reaching the targets established) will require using information produced from the assessment to adopt management actions and enact policies that gradually improve ocean conditions across multiple ocean goals.

Successful assessments require leadership to help set targets and get buy-ins from various interested parties. The assessment should be an element of a larger strategy to improve ocean health and in no case should it be the sole strategy for improving ocean health.

#### **4.2.1 Who Should Be Involved?**

The assessment process will require a dedicated and interested group of individuals to lead the initiative. This core team, tasked with detailing the process, may include managers, government officials, community members, nongovernmental representatives, and others.

Stakeholder participation may vary greatly depending on the purpose of the assessment and the unique characteristics of the regions chosen for the study. Prior initiatives demonstrate that enduring success is more likely when stakeholders and communities are actively involved throughout the planning process.

The process of implementing the tool will require scientists and leaders to make politically sensitive decisions across multiple social, political and economic dimensions. We recommend creating a Working Group of individuals who are able to commit important time to the processes, and have the authority necessary to represent their organizations. A Technical Working Group can support the calculation of the goal scores and establish a scientific nature to ensure validity.

Ensuring continuous transparency and participatory opportunities is essential to guaranteeing that the findings will be widely accepted and validated. Although a participatory process is highly encouraged, there should be a balance between stakeholder participation and keeping the process moving along a pre-established timeline. It is very important to create clear guidelines for participation, and assign specific roles and responsibilities to the team members directly involved in the process.

Participant stakeholders could include, but are not limited to, the following:

##### **Scientific/Academic institutions**

- University research centers
- Government statistics departments

##### **Government**

- Ministry/Department of:
- Environment
- Production
- Planning
- Fisheries/aquaculture
- Tourism
- Agencies:
- Ocean commission -Water

##### **Non-Governmental Organizations/Civil Society**

- Coastal community leaders/associations
- Fishing associations
- Tourism associations
- Conservation non-profits

### 4.2.2 Conducting a Stakeholder Analysis

A *stakeholder analysis* can help identify who to involve in the process and how. It is important to recognize that stakeholder support and buy-in is typically stronger when there is transparency and inclusivity from the very early phases of development.

*“The Index was explicitly designed to help inform decision making by providing a comprehensive, comparable, and quantitative assessment of the range of components that drive overall ocean health”* (Halpern *et al.* 2014). Because of this, it is imperative that you [understand the local decision-making process](#) and include key influencers in your stakeholder analysis.

Below are choices of resources you may wish to use to help you conduct your stakeholder analysis:

- [Mind Tools](#)
- [Stakeholder Map](#)
- [Overseas Development Institute](#)

Once you have conducted your stakeholder analysis, it might be useful to use a [stakeholder management](#) tool to help you prioritize your stakeholders as well as keep track of your communications with them.

### 4.2.3 Introducing the OHI+ Concept to Key Stakeholders

Once you have identified your key stakeholders, it is important to introduce the OHI+ framework through a lens that will promote buy-in. By referring back to your stakeholder analysis, you can create a strategy for approaching each stakeholder by finding which aspects of the benefits of running an assessment line up with each potential stakeholder’s current efforts or motivations.

Below are examples of language and messaging that can be used to describe the index to various stakeholders.

OHI+ assessments use the same framework as the global assessments, but allow for exploration of variables influencing ocean health at the smaller scales where policy and management decisions are made. Goal models and targets are created using higher resolution data, indicators, and priorities which produce scores better reflecting local realities. This enables scientists, managers, policy makers, and the public to better and more holistically understand, track, and communicate the status of local marine ecosystems, and to design strategic management actions to improve overall ocean health.

OHI+ is open-access and free. Results of OHI+ assessments are entirely maintained by the independent groups. Our team supports OHI+ assessments by providing a suite of tools to understand the OHI, and to plan the assessment and carry it out, communicate its results, and help make the study as useful as possible for decision makers.

This approach has been tested at several spatial scales and can be tailored to accommodate different contexts, management priorities, and data quality. The process of conducting an assessment with the Index can be as valuable as the final calculated scores, since it provides local stakeholders with a consistent framework to combine knowledge, management priorities, and cultural preferences from many different perspectives and disciplines.

OHI+ case studies (previously known as ‘regional assessments’) were completed in Brazil (Elfes *et al.* two thousand fourteen), the U.S. West Coast (Halpern *et al.* two thousand fourteen) and Fiji (Selig *et al.* in press). These first three assessments tested the scalability of the index framework, and were done in a largely academic manner, without large engagement from local managers, and stakeholder. However, managing oceans and coasts holistically requires strong stakeholder involvement in order to achieve desired outcomes and improve ocean health. Currently, our efforts have evolved from conducting OHI+ assessments in an academic fashion to supporting independent in-country groups (such as government agencies and research institutions) as they adapt the Index framework to their own contexts, with a focus on using the findings to help inform management decision-making and track performance through time.

Goal scores are calculated individually for each region in the assessment’s study area. The ten goals are averaged together (equally by default) to form complete Index scores for each region, and then combined by offshore-area-weighted average to produce a single score for ocean health for the entire study area. Goal models and pressures and resilience components are the same for each region; only the underlying input data differ between regions.

In global assessments (Halpern et al. two thousand twelve; in revision), scores are calculated for the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of each coastal nation and territory (two hundred twenty one regions), and then combined by offshore-area-weighted average to produce scores for all EEZs globally (study area). The Index framework has also been adapted for regional assessments at smaller scales, where data and priorities can be at finer resolution and more in line with local management needs and policy priorities.

### **4.3 Considerations for Joint Planning**

Collaborative assessment planning is an effective approach to ensuring that the assessment will be useful for decision-making. Strengthening scientist-decision maker partnerships creates opportunities for applying research findings to improve ocean health.

- Create a work plan that has research and management objectives
- Align research with policy issues to ensure all parties are pursuing the same objectives
- Share timeline of the study – availability of results, critical decision-making dates (budgets, planning, etc.) – releasing findings strategically can increase impact
- Identify sources of high quality information and data
- Plan communications to make the information accessible to stakeholders and various decision-makers
- Funding strategy should include short and long term planning for science, communication, and action
- Fundraise with decision-makers: Align research with policy issues to ensure both parties are pursuing the same objectives
- Articulate the agreed plans in writing (scientists also share a research plan)
- Create a budget that includes a communications component to cover costs of nationally disseminating findings: providing briefings about findings and applications of if the Index to agencies, decision-makers, and managers who will use the Index
- Allocate ~fifteen% of the budget to science outreach and communications; travel, time, meeting costs, planning, production of materials

#### **4.3.1 Establishing the Vision**

Producing the Index is not the end goal: It is merely a process toward the true end goal – achieving improved ocean health.

Index findings can be used by decision-makers to establish ocean health outcomes and management actions that have measurable impacts. Establishing a common vision and determining early in the process how the findings will be used and by whom, makes the final goal clear to the greater community (as well as to stakeholders and participants). Social, political, ecological, economic, and governance criteria should be considered when determining the goal for an assessment.

Establishing a vision is the first step, and will help identify outstanding important issues that may need to be addressed later on. Here, it is important to think about why is there interest in completing an Index assessment. For example:

- What are the existing stakeholder problems, needs, and interests that need to be addressed?

- Is the objective to use the findings to reform policies and/or practices?
- Are there any specific management priorities established through government mandates, private sector initiatives, and/or international treaty obligations that would especially benefit from an Index assessment?
- Are there any special management needs?
- Is there a need for stronger multi sectorial collaboration for effective management?

#### **4.3.2 Establish Your Objectives**

First, establish concrete objectives for the assessment itself: creating models, collecting and synthesizing data, analyzing spatial information, and writing programming code. Second, create short and long-term objectives highlighting intentions for the findings and iterative activities for future assessments.

Objectives refer to specific measurable results for your assessment's broad goals. The assessment objectives describe how much of what will be accomplished by when.

The objectives should describe the future conditions after the problem has been addressed (think of the reference points), following a logical hierarchy, and illustrating their relationships with the final goal.

In defining the objectives, the team should also describe the intended strategies (the how) to reach the desired objectives. These strategies can range from the broad (stakeholder analysis) to the very specific (institutionalization of the Index).

#### **4.3.3 Determining the Spatial Scale**

It is important to remember that the scale of your assessment should match the scale of decision-making.

Most assessments focus on political boundaries, since most agencies and organizations gather and report data at this spatial scale.

Index goal scores are calculated at the scale of the reporting unit, which is called a 'region' and then combined using a weighted average to produce the score for the overall area assessed, called a 'study area'.

When deciding the spatial scale of the assessments, the Working Group should consider the following:

- At what spatial scale are most data collected?
- What are the existing governance or political boundaries that would be relevant? (governance/decision-making boundaries are needed if the Index will be useful for management)
- If managers and/or policy makers are interested, what needs to be measured and why? At what scale do they work?

These questions are important to keep the Index assessment relevant but ultimately data availability will be the most important factor when defining boundaries for the Index.

There is no single criterion for identifying the scale of the study area since the Index can potentially be used at all scales using data, parameters, interests, and goals at the scale of the study.

#### **4.3.4 Establishing Your Strategy**

Your strategy should be a results-based planning document that details the results and objectives that will be achieved through the assessment and the specific activities, human resources, and funding needed to achieve them.

Having an assessment strategy ensures that financial and human resources are used systematically and logically to accomplish the intended objectives.

Those involved in developing the assessment should use a planning approach that is familiar and comfortable to them. All strategies should at a minimum answer these key questions regardless of the exact approach or timeline:

- What do we want to achieve by developing an Index assessment?
- Who will use the strategy, and for what purposes?
- Who will be involved?
- When will the assessment be completed?
- What funding and support are available?

The assessment planning approach should be appropriate to the local context. It is important to carefully consider the physical, social, political, economic and environmental characteristics of the study area to develop a realistic and achievable plan. The process we recommend in this guide can be followed step by step, but it is better if it is adapted to local needs.

It is important to create a detailed planning timeline, detailing specific deadlines and milestones to help organize and coordinate production.

Tools to help you develop these planning documents can be found at the following sites:

- [Mind Tools](#)
- [Kepner Tregoe](#)
- [Project Smart](#)

#### **4.3.5 Costs and Financial Planning**

Funds are needed for human resources, workshops and travel, research, data gathering, spatial and statistical analysis, model programming, communications, and (including publications), and outreach.

As the budget is developed, consideration should be given to the source of financing for the assessment. The budget should provide a detailed estimate of all the costs to complete objectives and activities. It might be helpful to separate the budget into the three Phases of the Index process. The budget should allow the satisfactory completion of all the activities to accomplish the objectives. Given the scientific nature of the Index, engaging qualified human resources may be the highest cost involved in developing an assessment.

It may take up to eighteen months to complete an assessment, therefore, creating a financing plan is recommended to determine how the expenses in the budget will be covered over time.

It is important to understand tasks and commitments made under contract, including the disbursement time frame, financial reporting schedule, and possible renewal options. Also consider future finances for long-term objectives.

When identifying funding sources, make sure the team understands the tasks needed to secure and maintain any contracts and/or grants awarded. As part of identifying roles and responsibilities in the step above, it will be important to choose a person or group who will be responsible for tracking and monitoring the finance plan (the Working Group could be in charge of this step).

Depending on the local context fundraising can be an important challenge to overcome. Foundations, NGOs, research institutions, and/or the private sector could serve as donors. It might be beneficial to design the financing plan in a “modular” way, so that key pieces can be pulled out from the plan to respond to specific funding opportunities.



#### 4.3.6 Adaptive Management

“If the Index were adopted as a management tool, recalculating scores regularly could reveal whether management actions had the intended effect on both overall ocean health and particular goals” (Halpern *et al.* 2014).

Findings will help inform decision-makers about management actions and policies. However, understanding the effect of management actions requires iterative studies. Repeated assessments are also necessary to continuously adapt management strategies.

A repeatable process of Index assessments will need to establish to determine how well the management interventions are accomplishing the established targets.

Management plans must include a thorough mechanism to track any changes related to the regional assessments activities.

Through this process, the design, management, and monitoring of the project should be used to continually gather information on the effectiveness of its decision-making process. As information is gathered and assessed, it is possible to recommend policy and management reforms as needed, providing a flexible decision-making process that constantly improves.

This will provide key information to decision-makers so they can adapt their management strategies over time, in a way that increasingly moves closer to the target.

Continuous monitoring of the strategy will also help improve resource allocation, so the strategies remain cost-effective.

## 5 Phase Three: Conduct an OHI Assessment

In this section you will be guided through how to run the actual assessment.

## 6 Phase Four: Communicate and Inform Decision Making

This section will guide you on :

Outreach and Communications - Outreach Strategy

Disseminating Findings

Communicate Results with Partners and Others

Develop and Implement Policies and Management Interventions that Respond to the Priorities

Monitor and Re-evaluate to Determine Policy Effectiveness and Set New Priorities

### 6.1 Outreach and Communications

It is important to have a clear communications strategy for how you will communicate the results of your assessment to your various audiences. You will want to tailor your message and platform to your various audiences, choosing the tools that will best suit your objective or call to action for each group. In order to do this, it is helpful to revisit your stakeholders analysis and identify key messages and recommendations that are relevant to relevant to each group.

In terms of influencing policy change, in addition to highlighting key findings of specific geographies and goals, it is important to provide recommendations to decision-makers and managers about interventions and policies that can help improve goal scores.

Keeping this in mind, you must then develop your communications and outreach strategy.

### 6.1.1 Communications and Outreach Strategy

Your strategy will consist of both the creation of materials to communicate the findings of the assessment as well as an outreach plan that details how you will position yourself with your various audiences to gain leverage.

#### Communications Strategy

The following materials will be needed to influence decision making:

- Summary of findings: present paper findings to wider audience, press, managers, and various decision-makers
- Policy paper/report/memos: provide recommendations to key decision-makers
- Website: in local language(s) and English (optional)
- Fact-sheets & printed materials

#### Outreach Strategy

Examples of how to increase your presence include:

- Stakeholder workshops and/or town hall meetings: present findings, develop a strategic plan of next steps, evaluate different management scenarios.
- Work with network of decision-makers who were part of the planning team to organize public meetings, hearing, inter-agency meetings
- Consider perspective of the decision-maker: clarify issue and why of interest, highlight action to take and the relevant science to support the action
- Maintain engagement in the decision-making process: councils, partnerships with stakeholders, periodic meetings with technical working groups and government agencies
- Provide clear recommendations and courses of actions that create the conditions to sustainable maximize ocean productivity
- Clearly articulate geographic priorities and sectorial problems affecting local oceans
- Be available to support ocean and coastal resource management planning and/or policy development processes

## 6.2 Disseminating Findings

Once assessments have been completed it is critical to spend just as much time and energy planning how you will communicate the findings of your assessment to your multiple audiences.

Since one of the main purposes of running an assessment is to inform decision-making, it is imperative that the results be properly communicated in reports or scientific publications. To do this, first consider how these decisions are made and the people that make them. In order to effectively convey your findings to this demographic, you must package it in a way that is compatible with an ecosystem-based management approach.

An ecosystem-based management approach outlines a series of principles to guide management towards long-term sustainability of, in this case, marine and coastal ecosystems. This information seeks to assist decision makers in taking steps toward sustainably managing their coastal resources. For more information on how to set up and implement an ecosystem-based management approach, consult this [guide](#) created by the United Nations Environment Program.

When disseminating the results of your assessment to policy makers, focus on the main threats for each goal as well as proposed actions to increase resilience scores. Remember, your audience may not have a solid background on the subject you are discussing so you will have to create reports that are quickly and clearly state the issues and solutions you have identified.

When identifying ways to increase resilience scores, it can be helpful to run a few scenarios that would illustrate how scores might react to various policy changes. An example of this can be found in the [U.S. West coast case study](#) in which two policy scenarios were run.

It is crucial to the success of these assessments to consistently re-assess your study region on an annual basis to see how it is responding to management decisions. It is only through continued monitoring of these resources that you will better understand how effective your management strategy and policies are and it is only through effective communication that informed decisions can be made.

### 6.3 Communicate Results with Partners and Others

It is important to begin your communications with a strategy. The first thing you'll want to do is go back to your [stakeholder analysis](#), breaking your stakeholders up into different groups. A good way to group your stakeholders is by their objectives. Think about the different needs of each group of your stakeholders. What information does each group need from you to meet their objectives or to perform your desired action/outcome? These groups should include decision makers, funders, the general public/news outlets, as well as other stakeholders that are important to your assessment. The quickest way to create these groups is to look back at your [stakeholder management sheet](#).

Once you have identified your different groups and clarified the objectives for each, begin brainstorming different channels you can use for your communications and sorting them by which would be most appropriate for each group. For example, stakeholders involved in decision making and planning that you would like to help engage in informed management actions would be more receptive to a well-laid out report rather than a newsletter, article or social media post.

After selecting the proper communication tool for each group, begin planning the messages for each group. Here it might be helpful to start with the broadest group and end with the most specific. For each group, aim to answer questions such as: What are the main facts that the audience needs to know? How much background does your audience already have on this topic? When will these facts need to be communicated? What is the best channel to reach the audience?

Make sure that each message is tailored to specifically cover the needs of your audience. For example, what are the absolutely necessary facts that a policy maker will need to know from your assessment to help them better manage your marine resources? How can you convey this information in the most direct, easily accessible way? This message will vastly differ from the one sent to the general public, whose main aim will be to increase awareness of ocean health and resource management. For examples, a past Ocean Health Index Global Assessment press release can be found [here](#) and the report for policy makers from our West coast case study can be found [here](#).

It is important to remember that you may also want to include some of your stakeholders in this process. Partnering with some of your stakeholders might give you access to a broader demographic to help you amplify your message. You may also reach out to the Ocean Health Index team to collaborate on ways that they can help you amplify your message.

For more information on how to identify and communicate with various stakeholders, use planning and strategy tools such as the ones listed under “[Communications Skills](#)” on the site [Mind Tools](#).

### 6.4 Develop and Implement Policies and Management Interventions that Respond to the Priorities

A well-designed and executed Ocean Health Index assessment should provide important information to stakeholders and decision-makers. In most cases the assessment findings can be used to identify geographic

priorities among the regions assessed and sectorial priorities, both within the regions and for the entire study area. The technical team who conducted the assessment should work in collaboration with decision-makers to assess several management scenarios to determine how the Index can be used to identify cost-effective interventions, and to understand the tradeoffs among goals and the consequences for overall ocean health.

Lessons learned from U.S. West Coast Assessment:

The intent of these analyses is not to model precise changes but rather to illustrate expected types and relative magnitudes of change across goals. Rather than being prescriptive, these scenarios provide a powerful decision-support tool that can be used to explore the consequences of management decisions. Realistic implementation of these decisions requires engagement with decision-makers, normative decisions about management goals, fine-tuning of assumptions, and model-based simulations of future conditions. Scenarios intended to inform decision-making at various spatial scales would benefit from vetting model assumptions through a planning process, and require that the Index be applied at the relevant spatial scale. The scenarios demonstrate several key aspects of the Index relevant to decision makers: one) it responds quickly to management actions, giving initial ‘credit’ for those actions, and then further responds over time as the system (social, economic, and ecological) changes; two) tradeoffs inherent in many decisions are captured by the Index (either explicitly as they are built into the Index or implicitly as they would emerge after management actions); and three) the Index allows one to compare very different management actions in a transparent and quantitative way across different reporting regions, thus supporting strategic decision-making. The magnitude of expected change in the Index will necessarily be related to the scale of management action relative to the scale of assessment.

Such scenario analyses are also a key way that the Index can be used to explore potential implications of climate change on ocean health. Because the Index does not model the future, it cannot predict future ocean health. Instead, dynamic process models can be used to simulate ecological and social conditions, and then these results can be fed in as input parameters for calculating an alternate Index score. In this case, the Index can be used to indicate the likely overall ocean health in the future under status quo conditions and a changing climate. Scenario analyses also illustrate how the Index can be used to identify and understand tradeoffs among goals. Some of these known tradeoffs are built into the architecture of the Index, for example in how increased (sustainable) fishing produces higher scores for food provision but lowers other goals due to its negative pressure on them.

As you consider courses of management and policy action, it might be also beneficial to consider the cost-effectiveness of each intervention – that is, what actions will yield the greatest benefits for the fewest amount of resources. Your scenario analysis will provide you with valuable information on the actions that will influence your scores the most, for example: reducing land-based runoff, improving area and condition of mangroves, increasing protection of species and special places, etc. Once you have identified these actions, you should order rank them based on both the effectiveness and their cost. This exercise will allow you to identify the most cost-effective management actions, which increases the utility of your conservation funds.

## **6.5 Monitor and Re-evaluate to Determine Policy Effectiveness and Set New Priorities**

If the Index were adopted as a management tool, recalculating scores regularly could reveal whether management actions had the intended effect on both overall ocean health and particular goals. This objective demonstrates the power (and necessity) of having a quantitative, repeatable, transparent and comprehensive method for assessment. We also highlight the importance of ongoing and future monitoring that will provide robust data relevant to ocean health assessment.

Other more complex, emergent tradeoffs become visible only when the Index is measured over time and one can track how goal scores change in similar or opposite directions. Because of the complexity of ecosystem responses, full attribution of a change in one goal causing a change in another goal is difficult, but such patterns can provide insight on where to direct further exploration of such possible tradeoffs. The ability to calculate past status scores, and then correlate changes in the Index with past management actions, illustrates a key way it can be used to assess management effectiveness. If the Index were adopted as a management

tool, recalculating scores regularly could reveal whether management actions had the intended effect on both overall ocean health and particular goals. This objective demonstrates the power (and necessity) of having a quantitative, repeatable, transparent and comprehensive method for assessment. Therefore, you should plan to conduct Ocean Health Index assessments on regular intervals (every year, two years, five years, etc.) This will allow you to determine the effectiveness of your ocean health interventions and will help inform [adaptive management](#) strategies: an iterative management process where your actions are constantly adapting to the changing environment.

## 7 Glossary

Given the complexity and hierarchical nature of the Index, we have defined a number of terms with precise meanings to help with communication and clarity. Terms are listed in hierarchical order from broad to specific; terms not listed here are presumed to carry their expected and typical meaning.

---

### **Data Layer**

Actual data used as input. Layers used for calculation of goal dimensions can be either direct from the original source (raw), transformed and/or combined (derived).

### **Dimension**

A dimension is an aspect of a goal that contributes to its current status or likelihood of being able to sustainably deliver that goal in the future. The four dimensions used are status, trend, pressures and resilience. We compute each dimension based on various components and data layers that are common across regions. Each dimension has a single unitless score per goal per region that ranges in value from 0-1.

### **Functional Relationship**

This type of target is derived from a known relationship (an equation) between the ocean indicator and a natural or human pressure. If an empirical or theoretical functional relationship is available, it can be used to determine a reference point for the amount of a benefit that can be expected from the system. This process is simplified because functional relationships are often associated with thresholds and reflection points.

### **Geometric Mean**

A geometric mean is a type of average calculated by taking the square root a set of products. It is used to aggregate the scores for pollution pressures, for example, to ensure that each category of pollution is accounted for in the calculation.

### **Goal**

One of ten public goals that are widely recognized for their important benefits for supporting human well-being and sustainable ocean ecosystems. We compute scores for each goal using four dimensions. Each goal has a single unitless score per region representing the current status and its likely future trajectory.

### **Health**

A healthy ocean sustainably delivers a range of benefits to people now and in the future.

### **Mariculture**

Ocean-farmed seafood, as distinct from other forms of aquaculture.

### **Pressures**

Anthropogenic stressors that negatively affect the ability of a goal to be delivered to people. Pressures can affect either ecological or social (i.e., human) systems. See section 2C of the Supplementary Online Material

for details. Resilience: Social, institutional, and ecological factors that positively affect the ability of a goal to be delivered to people. See section 2D of the Supplementary Online Material for details.

**Region**

Region is a general term to connote the reporting scale for an Index score and can be global, a group of neighboring nations or territories, or region- specific.

**Status**

The current value of a goal or sub-goal relative to its reference point. Trend: The recent change in the value of the Status. See section 2B of the Supplementary Online Material for full details.

**Study Area**

The study area is the entire geographical boundary included in the assessment.

**Sub-goal**

Several goals have sub-goals for which data on all four dimensions exist, allowing calculation of a complete sub-goal score. In most cases the goal score is simply the arithmetic average of these sub-goal scores, but the score for the food provision goal is the yield-weighted average of the two sub-goal scores.