



Anisa Kamadoli Costa [♥ Become a fan](#)
Chairman and President of The Tiffany & Co. Foundation



It's Time To Save The Oceans. Here's How We're Doing It

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In 2009, the ocean explorer Sylvia Earle titled her book *The World Is Blue* to make a point: Without our oceans, there is no life. "No blue, no green," she has said.

Indeed, the ocean provides us with the air we breathe, much of the food we eat, and the inspiration for many of the pleasures we experience in life -- from travel to art to music to fine jewelry.

And yet today, our blue planet faces dire threats. Consider some of the more worrying trends: While oceans serve as the world's largest carbon sink -- absorbing up to a quarter of the climate-warming carbon-dioxide that humans pump into the atmosphere -- that sink is now nearly overflowing. This is exacerbating global warming and contributing to ocean acidification, which threatens marine ecosystems, food chains and habitats.

Our oceans are also at risk due to overfishing, development, pollution, and lack of protection for critical marine areas. According to a September WWF report, the population of marine vertebrate dropped by almost 50 percent in just 40 years, the fish humans rely on most have also declined by half, and more than 5 trillion pieces of plastic -- weighing more than 250,000 tons -- have made their way into the sea.

All of this is happening to a resource that generates economic benefits worth at least \$2.5 trillion per year. According to one estimate, increasing marine protected areas to 30 percent -- from its current 3.4 percent -- could generate up to \$920 billion and create more than 180,000 jobs between 2015 and 2050 due to increased food security, employment in related industries like tourism and sustainable fishing, and the protection of ocean communities.

The good news is that more people are starting to understand these threats, and they are raising their voices and committing to action to protect the ocean. For the first time, the G7 has put the ocean on its agenda, and last month, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, which

includes a commitment on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources. It's time for more to join this effort -- to make this our ocean moment.

For the past 15 years, The Tiffany & Co. Foundation has invested more than \$10 million in organizations like Ms. Earle's Mission Blue, the Pew Environment Group's Global Ocean Legacy, and the collaborative group Oceans 5 in order to protect and restore this precious resource through research and educational outreach.

When we made our first grant in 2000, Tiffany & Co. was an unusual partner in ocean conservation. I remember conversations with people who wondered if the inspiration behind our work was our brand color, "Tiffany blue," which recalls the beauty of the sea. But in fact we are driven by something much bigger: The ocean is a critical resource for all of the world's people, and yet many are still unaware of its plight.

Earlier this week, global attention turned to the marine world when the second annual Our Ocean Conference convened in Valparaiso, Chile. The more than 400 leaders from government, academia, and civil society agreed to some lofty goals: to identify solutions to deal with illegal fishing, plastic pollution, and ocean acidification, and to encourage the creation of more marine protected areas.

The challenge in identifying solutions to these problems can feel paralyzing. What kind of action will be meaningful? And who is ultimately responsible for a resource that covers 140 million square miles -- nearly three-quarters of the Earth?

The answers are straightforward: A lot of actions are meaningful -- from individuals choosing to forgo plastic to governments creating new marine protected areas -- and every one of us is responsible for taking these actions.

Our foundation has carved out a niche focused on the protection and conservation of coral, a slow-growing and precious animal that still, surprisingly, gets mistaken for a beautiful rock that can be used in home décor or jewelry. Yet coral reefs may disappear by 2050 if ocean temperatures continue to warm. Tiffany & Co. made the simple business decision years ago to eliminate coral from our jewelry, and we have since focused our investments on organizations that are working through research, preservation, and management to protect our coral reefs, which provide critical habitat for more than a quarter of all marine species.

The investments we and others have made are paying off. The Global Ocean Legacy project is working with local communities, governments, and scientists to help create the world's first generation of "great parks" in the sea. These parks, like America's system of land-based national parks, will become fully protected marine ecosystems. Global Ocean Legacy has already established seven of these parks and plans to create 15 by 2022.

Other organizations, including another Foundation grantee, Oceana, have also been working on developing these parks. Just this week, the Chilean government announced the creation of the 114,872-square-mile Nazca-Desventuradas Marine Park, thanks to a proposal put forward by

Oceana and National Geographic to protect this area. Once implemented, this new park will bring the percentage of waters protected off the coast of Chile from 4 percent to 12 percent.

This work with government leaders to protect marine areas is critical, and so are the efforts by others to raise awareness about these places. On October 10, Ms. Earle's Mission Blue, in conjunction with the organization TED, will embark on its second expedition to help educate people about these marine areas, which Ms. Earle calls "hope spots"--special places that are critical to the health of the ocean.

In order to make a difference in ocean conservation, it is not necessary to, like Ms. Earle, log 7,000 hours underwater. We all have a role to play in protecting our blue planet. As individuals, we can reduce our use of plastics and waste, be mindful of our carbon footprint, and make careful choices about the types of fish we eat. Businesses can evaluate their own impacts on the ocean through their direct operations, supply chains, and use of natural resources. Governments can increase their commitments to protect more marine areas. And we can all work together on these endeavors.

The marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols developed a simple game of passing a blue marble to someone as a token of gratitude. "The blue marble reminds us that we all live on this little blue planet together," Nichols says. "It's the only one we have. And we need to take care of it.

At Tiffany & Co., we believe our blue marble is the most precious gem of all. It's time we make this our oceans moment and protect it.