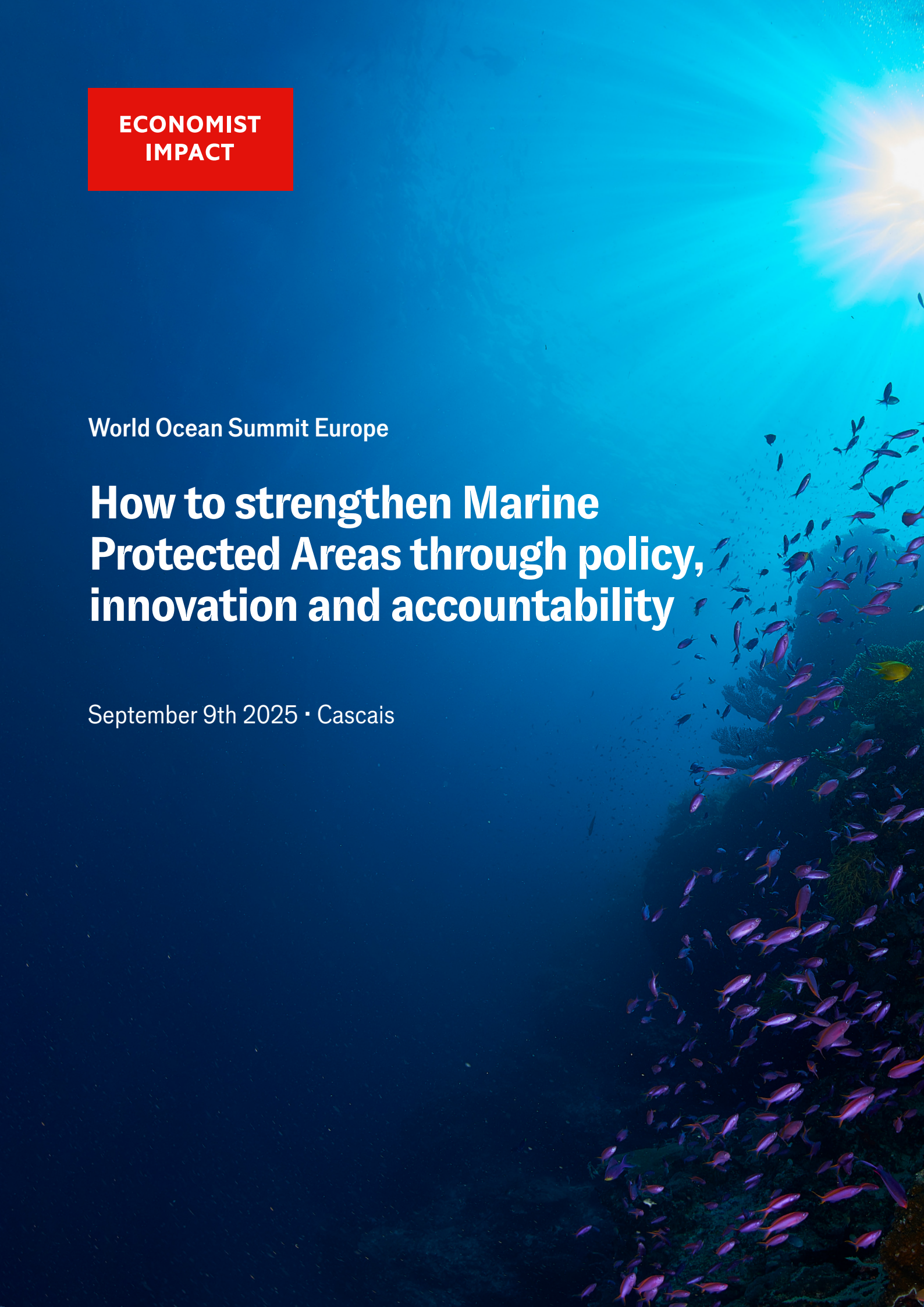


**ECONOMIST
IMPACT**

World Ocean Summit Europe

How to strengthen Marine Protected Areas through policy, innovation and accountability

September 9th 2025 · Cascais

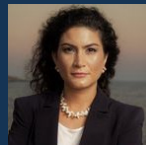




Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are critical to safeguarding biodiversity and sustaining ocean-dependent communities. Yet many exist only on paper, with weak enforcement, poor community buy-in and fragmented governance.

Participants discussed how to strengthen MPAs through more effective policy frameworks, co-management, innovative monitoring and stronger accountability. The conversation focused on engaging industries and local communities, bridging legislative gaps, developing education and incentives, and building shared responsibility for long-term success.

Moderator



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Speakers



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Takeaways

- 1. Community-led initiatives build trust.**

Locally managed MPAs, such as Cascais in Portugal, demonstrate how bottom-up approaches involving fishers and students can create acceptance where top-down policies struggle to achieve this. Blue Marine Foundation highlighted how locally driven initiatives can open the door for co-management and can build resilience.
- 2. Legislation exists but is insufficient.**

Frameworks like the EU Habitats Directive provide principles, but remain too high-level and terrestrial-focused. By-laws and site-specific regulations are essential to address marine realities. Oceana shared how gaps in legislation allow destructive fishing activities to slip through the cracks, stressing the urgency of closing loopholes.
- 3. Political will and enforcement remain weak.**

Many MPAs are “paper parks”. Without committed enforcement, accountability, and political backing, ecological benefits remain minimal. Alopias Earth noted that enforcement failures are often linked to fragmented governance and the absence of accountability mechanisms at local level.
- 4. Economic incentives align livelihoods with conservation.**

Schemes such as those which enable fishers to take on roles in monitoring or eco-tourism, or which offer preferential access to resources, increase buy-in and long-term engagement.
- 5. Education and communication reduce resistance.**

Local mistrust often stems from poor communication of the benefits of MPAs. Transparent messaging, participatory science and ongoing education can shift perceptions. ARTEMIS and MEDSEA showcased how sharing knowledge about the value of well-preserved habitats—and the risks of losing them—can help communities see MPAs as opportunities rather than restrictions.
- 6. Technology enhances monitoring and compliance.**

Tools like satellite data, ecological indicators and high-resolution tracking of small-scale fisheries provide inclusive ways to monitor activity and improve transparency.
- 7. Shared governance improves resilience.**

Clear mapping of “who decides and who delivers”, along with co-management councils, ensures representation of fishers, residents, NGOs and policymakers alike. This accelerates implementation and builds legitimacy.
- 8. Regional and cross-sector collaboration is vital.**

Regional management bodies, multi-ministerial involvement and cross-country knowledge exchange are needed to reduce fragmentation and scale successful strategies.

Recommendations

For policymakers

- Strengthen secondary legislation and by-laws to make directives enforceable at site level.
- Ensure multi-ministerial involvement (finance, defence, education, health) in implementing MPAs.
- Establish formal co-management councils with shared authority and budgets.

For industry

- Engage proactively in co-management and compliance initiatives.
- Support alternative livelihood schemes (e.g., eco-tourism concessions, monitoring contracts).
- Provide financial or in-kind resources for restoration and education efforts that benefit both ecosystems and local economies.

For researchers

- Develop practical ecological indicators and share findings in accessible formats for communities and decision-makers.
- Expand citizen science and participatory monitoring to build ownership and trust.
- Document and share best practices from successful co-managed MPAs (e.g., Louisiana, Cascais) to support replication.

For local communities

- Take leadership in co-management structures and monitoring activities.
- Build alliances between fishers, residents and tourism operators to present unified representation.
- Participate in education and outreach to increase understanding of long-term ecosystem value.

For regional and international governance bodies

- Strengthen regional co-ordination to harmonise standards and reduce fragmentation.
- Fund restoration and monitoring strategies that deliver both ecological and financial returns.
- Facilitate cross-country knowledge-sharing platforms to scale proven approaches.

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