



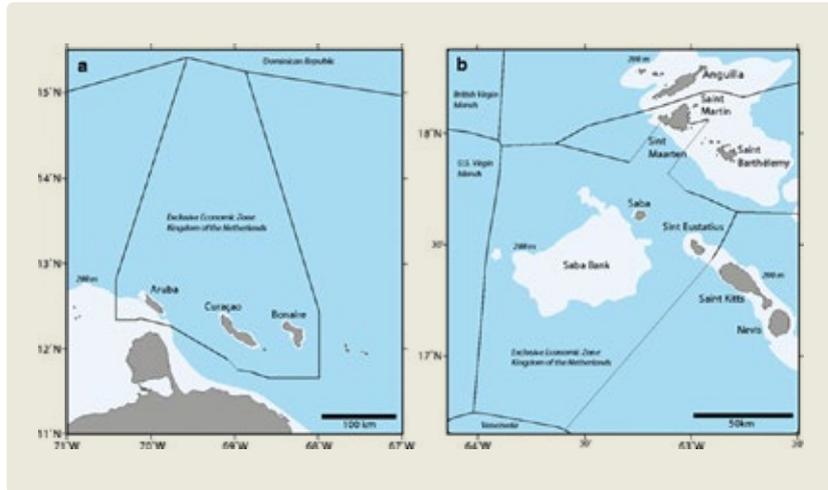
# WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE THE NETHERLANDS (WWF-NL) DUTCH CARIBBEAN MARINE STRATEGY

Program for the five-year period of July 2022 till June 2027

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This WWF-NL Dutch Caribbean program focuses on the conservation and recovery of the coral reefs and flagship species (sharks, rays, whales, dolphins and sea turtles) in the context of the broader marine seascape. The Dutch Caribbean coral reefs are extremely important for the islands' local economies and livelihoods. Even though they are still some of the most pristine in the region, the coral reefs of the Dutch Caribbean are rapidly declining due to both local and global stressors. Coral reefs experience many local stressors, including pollution, overfishing, destruction due to coastal development, anchoring and boating traffic. These local stressors make the coral reefs exceptionally prone to regional and global threats, such as diseases, extreme weather and rise in temperatures due to climate change.

Similarly, the population of sharks, rays, whales, dolphins and sea turtles has declined immensely over the years, leading to many species being or becoming (critically) endangered. Although active fishing (or poaching) of these flagship species is decreasing in the waters of the Dutch Caribbean, there is still a lot of work to be done to protect them. Nevertheless, the Dutch Caribbean waters are starting to function as a safe haven for these species. This function has grown since the establishment of the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary in 2015, which includes the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the BES islands (Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba).

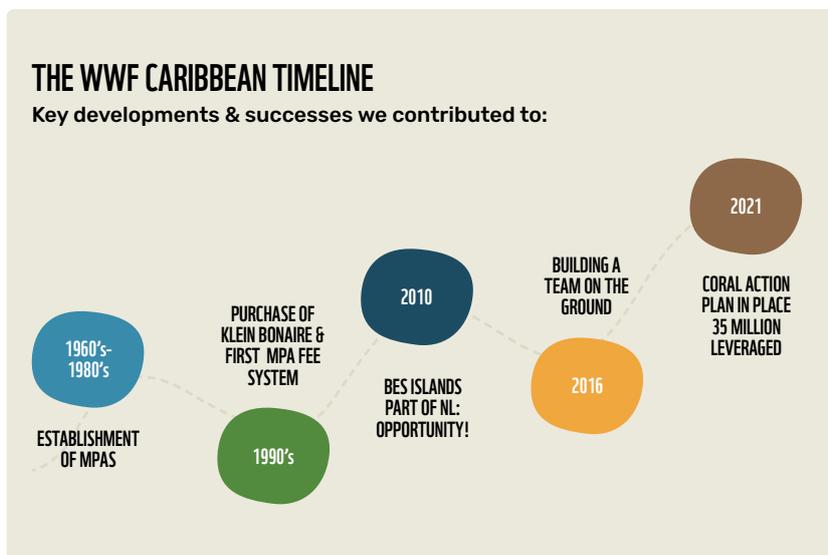


**Geographic range of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Dutch Caribbean.**  
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However, while many species are now legally protected, the actual implementation and enforcement of the management plans and measures are still lacking. Also, these species, and especially sharks, are often caught as bycatch. Moreover, as these are migratory species, only safeguarding them in the waters of the Dutch Caribbean is insufficient. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to the development, implementation, and enforcement of more regional measures to secure future populations.

## WWF-NL INVOLVEMENT IN THE DUTCH CARIBBEAN

WWF-NL has supported the Dutch Caribbean since the 1960s, and since the disintegration of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, has gradually been scaling up commitment to the islands as the urgency for coral reef protection increased.



**MPA stands for Marine Protected Area**  
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Due to limited local capacity and a lack of nature organizations with a broad, island- and regionwide mandate, WWF-NL is transforming from a funder to a locally embedded implementor to fill that gap and maximize our impact. Although there are many NGOs providing excellent conservation work at a local scale (island per island), the region lacks an NGO working on multiple issues on a broader (regional) scale, not limited by restrictive mandates. As one of the few NGOs with a regional view and focus on coral reef and flagship species, the WWF-DC team is thus willing and able to connect and set up collaborations in the region, in order to scale up programs, projects and impact at a multi-country level. It is now time to scale up.

As the impact of climate change increases in the form of ocean acidification, increased storms, drought, sea level rise, rising sea temperatures and more, our goal is to link the global drive towards reduced CO2 emissions to building resilient coral reefs locally and healthy flagship species populations that can withstand these global pressures. Our end goal is to create climate proof and resilient coral reefs and healthy populations of flagship species.

## PROGRAM SCOPE

The scope of this program covers the marine and coastal areas in the Dutch Caribbean, i.e., Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba and the Saba Bank, Curaçao, Aruba and St. Maarten. During the first year of the program, a more regional strategy will be developed, where more countries could be added to the program relating to different topics.



**Position of the six Dutch Caribbean islands.**

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The Dutch Caribbean program forms an integral part of the Caribbean Landscape as defined by WWF-NL, which currently also incorporates WWF-NL supported coral protection in Cuba and the Guianas marine program. During the project period, the team will further embed the Dutch Caribbean program into the regional landscape approach by taking a leading role in bringing together parties across the Caribbean to achieve regional impact where necessary (e.g., regarding migratory corridors, coral connectivity, etc.).

This is because within the Dutch Caribbean program, we cannot protect 'our' coral reefs and migratory species without addressing regional threats. E.g., well-protected turtles on Bonaire get fished in Nicaragua. Cetaceans protected on the Saba Bank get entangled in fishing gear in Canada or ship strikes in the eastern Caribbean. Larvae restocking Dutch Caribbean coral reefs originate from reefs along the Venezuelan coast which are under threat. Furthermore, marine litter on our beaches originates from elsewhere, and rather than just cleaning it up locally, we need regional solutions. That's why regional expansion of the program is important in order to coordinate regional collaboration.



**\*NMPB stands for 'Natuur & Milieu Beleidsplan' (Nature & Environmental Policy Plan)**  
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## DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

This WWF Dutch Caribbean program was developed through an extensive stakeholder process involving local nature and fisheries stakeholders, where the WWF specific goals and role were discussed and agreed upon. Park Authorities from all six islands requested WWF-NL to expand their role to all 6 islands rather than focus solely on the BES islands, which aligns with our vision to broaden our scope and expand our impact. Therefore, the current program builds on our previous work to expand our scope accordingly, knowing that several of the most biodiverse coral reefs occur around the CAS islands (Curaçao, Aruba and St. Maarten).

## PROGRAM VISION AND GOALS

Our vision for the future is that due to effective protection and sustainable use by local communities, the Dutch Caribbean will be a safe haven for keystone marine species with resilient coral reefs that are healthy and will survive climate change impacts. Therefore, during the five-year scope of this program, the two main long-term conservation goals for the Dutch Caribbean are:

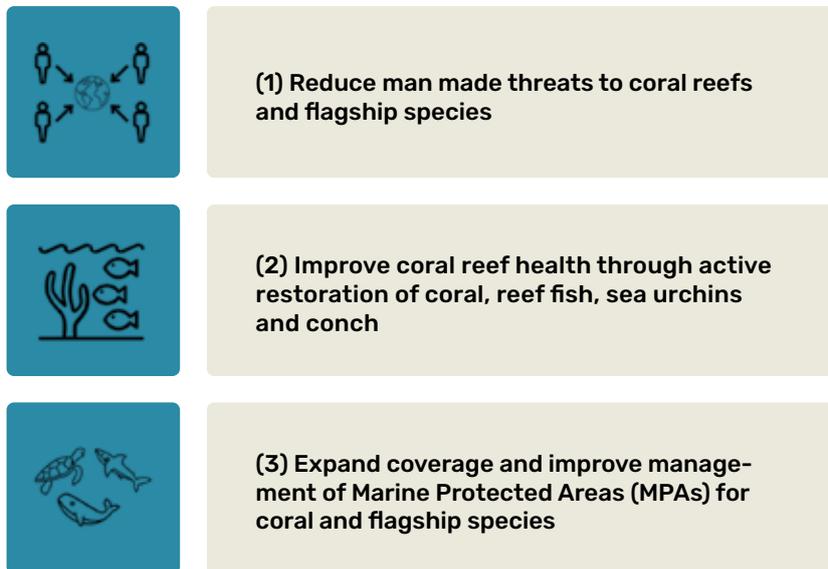
**Goal 1: To improve health, biodiversity and resilience of coral reefs and associated habitats & species by 2030.**

**Goal 2: To create a safe haven for flagship species (sea turtles, whales and sharks) from the Dutch Caribbean by protecting them across their geographic range.**



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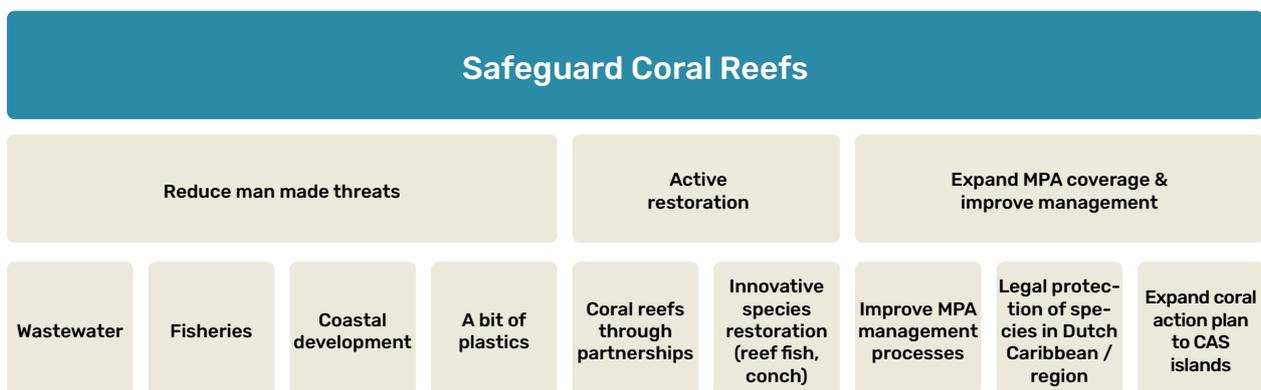
These goals will be reached by focusing on the main drivers for change, which we have defined in the following three spearpoints:



## GOAL REALIZATION

To realize the two main conservation goals of this program, we will focus on some specific actions as part of the spearpoints that have been identified.

With regards to the first goal, which is **to safeguard coral reefs by improving their health, biodiversity, and resilience by 2030**, we will concentrate on the following activities:



## REDUCE MAN-MADE THREATS

WWF-NL aims to reduce pressure on the coral reefs in the Dutch Caribbean by working with local stakeholders. Reducing local pressures on the coral reefs is the basis of our strategy in this region. Although the threats are many, we will focus on improving water quality. This is because increased nutrients in the water and sedimentation from land-based run-off are the most destructive local pressures for coral reefs. Wastewater treatment and structural water quality monitoring are important aspects in this case. Besides focusing on wastewater, we also aim to reduce threats of coastal development on the BES islands and reduce the pressure of fishing activities where necessary.

Where possible, WWF will implement and facilitate practical (grassroots) projects like helping fishermen to improve sustainability of fishery practices and supporting local government with implementation of nature-based solutions. Within our limited capacity, our aim is to facilitate the upscaling of projects currently executed in Bonaire (e.g., the Water Circles project), to the other two BES islands, as well as to Curaçao, Aruba, and St. Maarten (the CAS islands). WWF-DC furthermore aims to ensure development of long-term visions and strategies from national and local governments regarding wastewater, fisheries and spatial (coastal) development.

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## **IMPROVE CORAL REEF HEALTH THROUGH ACTIVE RESTORATION OF CORAL, REEF FISH, SEA URCHINS AND CONCH**

We will initiate and continue to promote innovative projects by supporting, funding and executing active coral restoration projects as well as projects on associated coral reef species. Coral restoration is a tool that could safeguard coral (species) for the long term. Furthermore, we will explore the possibilities to collect and restore grazers (e.g., surgeon fishes, queen conch and sea urchins), as they play a vital role in keeping the coral reefs healthy by grazing algae of these reefs.

## **EXPAND COVERAGE AND IMPROVE MANAGEMENT OF MPAS FOR CORAL REEFS**

WWF wants to improve knowledge of critical coral reefs and the connectivity between them on the Dutch Caribbean islands to make the case for better protection of critical coral reef systems. We aim to expand coverage of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) where deemed necessary and improve management of these areas by supporting park authorities, thereby making management of marine parks stronger and more effective.

We will do this by tapping into new revenue streams, providing practical training and facilitating strategic priority setting based on the needs of the park management authorities. This way we seek to make optimal use of the currently available resources provided by the Ministry of LNV (Agriculture, Nature and Food quality) for nature protection on the BES islands.

With the expansion of our focus to include the CAS islands and at a later stage maybe more regional cooperation (e.g., with WWF Colombia), the goal is to improve MPA coverage and thus ensure more effective protection of coral reefs than currently is the case.

## WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?



Regarding the second goal of this program, which is **to create a safe haven for flagship species of the Dutch Caribbean by protecting them across their geographic range**, we will focus on the following activities:

### REDUCE MAN-MADE THREATS TO FLAGSHIP SPECIES

Most flagship species (sea turtles, whales, and sharks), are highly migratory and move between their feeding and breeding grounds year-round. To safeguard the survival of these species, it is important to protect them during this migration as well. While the general threats are known (e.g., we are working to reduce the amount of marine litter across the Caribbean), specific threats and where they occur are largely unknown. There are still big gaps in knowledge about how these species move around the region and where the threats overlap with these movements, which makes it difficult to reduce these threats effectively. Our objective is to improve knowledge, identify gaps, and support and set up regional programs to tackle threats at a regional level, thereby making the Caribbean a safer place for these flagship species.

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## EXPAND COVERAGE AND IMPROVE MANAGEMENT OF MPAS FOR FLAGSHIP SPECIES

We want to improve knowledge on the population size and migration patterns of different flagship species, like whales, sea turtles, and sharks. This asks for stronger cooperation in the region, led by species specific organizations, such as the Caribbean Cetacean Society and Sea Turtle Conservation Bonaire, and improved collaboration with already existing platforms (e.g., WIDECAST for sea turtles). There is limited data for certain species, so our goal is to help improve data collection in the region and identify gaps in protection. In collaboration with our key partners, WWF-NL aims for better protection of key areas by establishing and connecting Marine Protected Areas in the region, such as connecting the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary with the Agoa Marine Mammal Sanctuary.

### PROGRAM APPROACH

WWF's objective with this program is to kickstart, facilitate and support local initiatives, next to developing new projects in cooperation with local organizations. Therefore, WWF is searching for synergies with other NGOs, governments, foundations, scientific, financial, and international institutions, as well as industries.

As much as possible, we will involve local communities, incorporate their views and wishes, and raise awareness of the need to support the natural environment and the threats it faces. This way we will safeguard a sustainable future for people and their natural environment at the local level. We will do this by supporting and executing education programs in general and at schools, create events with and for local communities and ensure participation of local stakeholders in decision making processes.



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This should lead to increased knowledge, increased support from local organizations and increased benefit for these communities. WWF-NL's worldwide network enables us to give support and direction to improve local organizations' governance, help (co-) develop MPA and fishery management plans and provide a broader overall picture of what can be achieved. This includes helping to set up innovative projects, provide funding and help seek funding where necessary.

## INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Throughout our work, we pay attention to how the WWF goals can be matched to local needs, concerns, and more societal and economic issues. This is important to create and enhance a sense of urgency, ownership, support and more importantly, the crucial collaboration needed to achieve our goals.

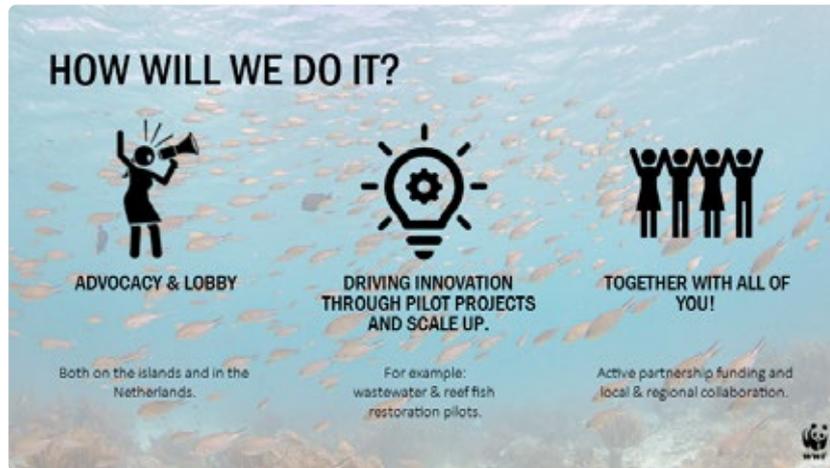
**This approach adheres to WWF's vision on inclusive conservation and requires:**

- Co-development of programs and projects
- Out-of-the-box and long-term thinking
- Open and constant communication and investments in relationship building.

## HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

We will work through two strategic approaches to achieve our goals. One course of action is active advocacy from WWF together with partners from the local community towards decision makers. This strategy will be strengthened by implementing showcase projects to show evidence of success. Utilizing both strategies simultaneously, we aim to change short term economic driven decision making into long term sustainable ocean governance.

Throughout all our projects, education and creating awareness is another important component of our work. To generate change, awareness and understanding is essential. That is why we focus on informing our stakeholders and the general public together with our local partners, and creating educational programs and awareness campaigns that match the needs of the residents in the Caribbean region.



## STRATEGY

WWF Dutch Caribbean will utilize two strategic approaches to achieve our objectives. These strategies are integrated throughout our program and complement each other in different ways for different topics.

**Strategy 1:** Advocate for policy, funding, education, capacity, and enforcement.

The spearpoints discussed in the program and their underlying objectives all hold to some extent a desire for change within the existing 'system' of legislation, policy programs or political positioning. In many cases, the trigger for change therefore lies with (political) decision makers. Within this program we make use of both lobbying and advocacy to influence 'the system' and hence contribute to the objectives and reach the goals.

Decision makers are often politicians or government officials, but not exclusively. Also, decision makers are often influenced by forces outside their office. This is the space where lobbying and advocacy meet, but also where the DC-team will need to work closely together. The advocacy strategy will focus both on the national government in The Hague and the local island governments. The potential success of influencing strategies is highly dependent on the close cooperation between the different team members (and our partners).

**Strategy 2:** Driving innovation through pilot projects and scale up.

Providing concrete evidence for nature-based solutions through international best practice and concrete pilot projects will generate expertise and capacity within the local community. This will provide decision makers with the tools and confidence to favor nature positive propositions over regular development options.

*This document provides a summary of the main components of the WWF-NL Dutch Caribbean marine program for the next five years. The full program and work plan are available upon request and when deemed beneficial to reach the goals described therein.*



**Be one with nature.**

Voor ons staat de natuur niet tegenover de mens, maar zijn we er onlosmakelijk deel van. We houden van die allesomvattende natuur. Van planten, dieren en mensen in hun grootst mogelijke diversiteit. Wij zijn natuur!

[wwf.nl](http://wwf.nl)