PRESS RELEASE

Under embargo until June 7 23:59 CEST

The Starfishbarometer.org website will go live on June 7 at 23:59 CEST

Starfish Barometer 2026: accelerating ocean change is outpacing global response

Paris – Toulouse - 8 June 2026 – The Starfish Barometer 2026, the second annual global ocean health bulletin, is published today in the journal *State of the Planet*. Drawing on the latest peer-reviewed science and international assessments, it charts the evolving relationship between the Ocean and Humanity.

The diagnosis is clear: ocean degradation is continuing and accelerating across several key indicators, while political, financial and conservation responses remain insufficient in both scale and speed. Important governance milestones are nonetheless emerging, reflecting growing global commitment to ocean and biodiversity protection. This year's edition also introduces a new warning: the weakening of ocean observation systems, the very infrastructure that makes all other findings possible.

First launched at the third United Nations Ocean Conference in 2025 with the support of Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, France's Ambassador for the Ocean and the Poles, the Barometer has grown into a global, multidisciplinary effort bringing together 29 experts from 14 countries, spanning oceanography, climate science, ecology, economics and social sciences. Its aim: to translate complex science into accessible insights for decision-makers and the wider public.

A deteriorating Ocean, with early signs of acceleration

The Barometer documents a continued deterioration in ocean health, driven by multiple climate stressors increasingly acting at once. A quarter of the upper 1,000 metres of the Ocean is now exposed to several overlapping pressures simultaneously, amplifying risks for marine ecosystems.

Sea-level rise reached 4.2 mm per year over 2012–2025 - nearly double the rate of previous decades. Severe marine heatwaves affected 20% of the global Ocean in June 2025. Some 84.4% of coral reefs experienced bleaching-level heat stress, the highest ever recorded, while global sea ice extent hit its second lowest maximum since 1982, at 32.1 million km^2. The number of threatened marine species now stands at 1,685 worldwide.

Human pressures structurally unchanged

Despite growing awareness and international commitments, the root drivers of ocean degradation remain largely intact. Global CO_2 emissions hit a record 38.1 billion tonnes in 2025, and progress toward decarbonising shipping remained limited. Plastic waste continued to rise, reaching 130 million tonnes, with millions of tonnes entering the Ocean each year.

Governance gaps remain significant: 67% of industrial fishing vessels operating in marine protected areas are not publicly tracked, and the 31 active deep-sea mining exploration contracts raise mounting concerns about long-term ecosystem impacts.

Rising human and economic costs

The report shows that ocean change is increasingly translating into direct economic and societal consequences, exacerbating inequality, vulnerability and instability.

Storms and floods caused $212 billion in damages in 2024, nearly double the level recorded in 2023. Damages affecting fisheries, mariculture, mangroves, coral reefs and ports are now estimated to rival the broader social costs of carbon. Marine insurance premiums are also rising sharply under the combined effects of climate and geopolitical risks, while 8,260 lives were lost at sea in 2025.

Together, these indicators point to a widening gap between the pace of ocean change and the scale of current responses.

Progress is real, but still insufficient

The 2026 edition also records meaningful advances. Two major international agreements entered into force, including the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ). Marine protected areas exceeded 10% of the global Ocean for the first time, and new protections for sharks and rays were adopted under international trade rules. Ocean investment continues to grow, with more than 40 dedicated funds and over 2,000 startups active in ocean innovation.

The Barometer tempers this progress: only 3.2% of the Ocean is currently considered as highly of fully protected, and declining observation systems are eroding global ocean science, monitoring capacity and international cooperation.

A new alert: the observation systems are shrinking

The 2026 edition raises a warning that cuts across all other findings: the systems we rely on to monitor the Ocean are weakening. In-situ ocean observations stand at 120,000 per day in 2025, but major networks (moored buoys and ship-based observations) have been shrinking since the pandemic, driven by budget constraints, reduced ship time and a declining pool of experienced personnel.

Every signal documented in this report - from sea-level rise to coral bleaching - depends on this infrastructure. Ocean observing systems, from the ocean and from space, are critical for climate resilience, disaster risk reduction and international scientific cooperation. Their erosion does not just limit our knowledge of the Ocean: it undermines our ability to act on it.

A systemic view on Ocean-Humanity relationship

The Starfish Barometer offers a new integrated reading of the Ocean–Humanity system, structured around five dimensions: Ocean state – Human pressures – Societal harms – Protection efforts – Opportunities for humanity. This approach highlights how deeply interconnected these systems are, and how fragmented current decision-making remains.

"*We often observe ocean signals separately - warming, pollution, biodiversity loss - but rarely as a connected system. The Starfish Barometer brings these dimensions together, helping us understand not just what is happening, but how it all links,*" says **Dr. Marina Lévy,** CNRS, Chair of the Scientific Committee.

"*In a rapidly changing ocean, the imperative is to translate knowledge into action. The Starfish Barometer provides that bridge between science, policy and society,*" adds **Karina von Schuckmann**, Senior advisor at Mercator Ocean International, Co-Chair of the Scientific Committee.

"*By connecting ocean observations, science and societal impacts, the Barometer helps identify blind spots, guide research and investment priorities, and support more coherent action at system level.*" says **Pierre Bahurel**, Director General of Mercator Ocean International.

"*Born on the occasion of the Third United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, the Starfish Barometer is today establishing itself as the international reference for Ocean health.*" concludes **Olivier Poivre d'Arvor**.

Resources

- **Visual resources and scientific article** are **available here**
- Full findings will be available at **www.starfishbarometer.org.** on June 7 at 23:59 CEST
- The Starfish Barometer will be highlighted at the **Neptune Forum on June 8** in Paris

About the Starfish Barometer

The Starfish Barometer is an annual science-based initiative published on World Ocean Day. Its findings are integrated into the annual Ocean State Report of the Copernicus Marine Service. The 2026 Scientific Committee brings together 29 authors from 14 countries. It operates under a dual governance model: Marina Lévy (CNRS) and Karina von Schuckmann (Mercator Ocean International) co-chair the Scientific Committee; Pierre Bahurel, Director General of Mercator Ocean International, oversees implementation.

About Mercator Ocean International

Mercator Ocean International is a European organisation dedicated to ocean science and services. It operates the Copernicus Marine Service and the Digital Twin of the Ocean on behalf of the European Union and coordinates the Starfish Barometer in partnership with the international scientific community. www.mercator-ocean.eu.

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