



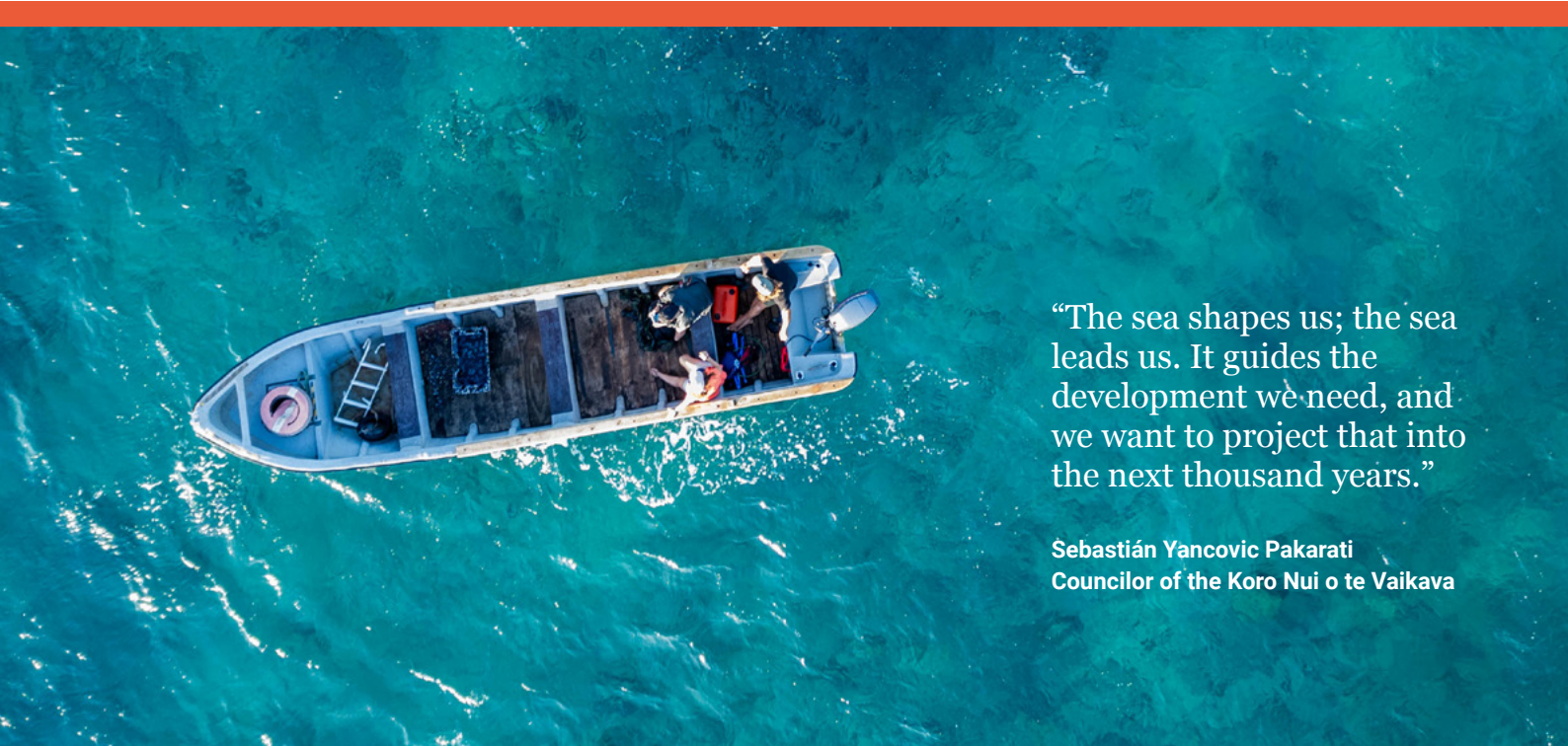
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Rapa Nui: Strengthening Indigenous Ocean Stewardship Through Marine Manager

On this remote island, the ocean is identity and heritage — and now, through satellite technology, the foundation for a resilient future

The island of Rapa Nui has long occupied a larger-than-myth place in popular imagination. Located more than 3,200 kilometers from the Chilean mainland in the southeastern Pacific Ocean, its towering mo'ai, a collection of some 1,000 statues carved from volcanic rock, dot the island's rugged landscape — a tribute to the storied ancestors of the Rapa Nui people and a testament to the enduring connection between the community and their home.

For generations, the Rapa Nui people have lived in symbiosis with the sea, protecting its biodiversity and ensuring the continued survival of their way of life. According to Sebastián Yancovic Pakarati, a councilor with the Rapa Nui Council of the Sea, known locally as the [Koro Nui o te Vaikava](#), the ocean surrounding Rapa Nui is not only the cornerstone of their heritage but also the foundation of their future.



“The sea shapes us; the sea leads us. It guides the development we need, and we want to project that into the next thousand years.”

Sebastián Yancovic Pakarati
Councilor of the Koro Nui o te Vaikava

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But today, as marine ecosystems strain under the twin pressures of climate change and overfishing, the Rapa Nui’s environment and their livelihoods face growing threats. In response, they are taking action, uniting ancestral knowledge with modern technology. By harnessing the power of Global Fishing Watch’s [Marine Manager](#), co-founded by Dona Bertarelli, the Rapa Nui are strengthening their ability to monitor human activity at sea and manage the vast protected waters surrounding their island.

A community-led vision for ocean protection

In 2018, the Rapa Nui took ambitious strides toward ensuring their ocean conservation efforts translated into tangible measures. Following extensive consultations between the Government of Chile and Rapa Nui’s indigenous community, Chilean authorities established the [Rapa Nui Multiple-Use Marine and Coastal Protected Area](#) in an effort to safeguard the island’s waters for posterity. Spanning roughly 270,000 square miles (700,000 square kilometers), the protected area reflects a shared vision: to protect marine biodiversity while preserving traditional artisanal fishing practices that sustain the island’s cultural and economic life.

Today, fishing around Rapa Nui remains entirely artisanal, with fishers continuing ancient and

ancestral practices. Industrial fishing, for its part, is prohibited to preserve ecological balance and the livelihoods of the local community, which continue to focus their fishing activity on high value species like yellowfin tuna, Pacific chub and swordfish.



“Here, fishing is a system — an economic system that allows us to subsist, and also a social system that gives people a place within the Rapa Nui community.”

Ludovic Burns Tuki
Coordinator of Koro Nui o te Vaikava

Yet protecting such a vast ocean territory presents significant challenges for the Rapa Nui. While their ocean management efforts rely on local knowledge and ancestral know-how with great success, the sheer scale of the protected area makes it difficult to monitor activity beyond coastal waters without additional resources or technological support.

Rapa Nui Marine Protected Area



Established: 2018



Size: ~270,000 square miles



Governance:
Indigenous co-management



Fishing allowed:
Artisanal only



Biodiversity:

Protects 140+ endemic species, including the Easter Island butterflyfish and the Nazca bigeye.



Ecological function:

Critical breeding and spawning ground for large pelagic fish — yellowfin tuna, sharks, swordfish and marlin — and home to healthy coral reef systems.



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Seeing beyond the horizon

Protecting an ocean territory that is larger than many countries requires more than patrol boats and human observation. To support effective implementation of the marine protected area, or MPA, Rapa Nui authorities have turned to Marine Manager, which helps them reveal patterns of human activity at sea through satellite-based vessel tracking data.

By integrating data from [automatic identification systems \(AIS\)](#) and [vessel monitoring systems \(VMS\)](#) with oceanographic datasets, Marine Manager provides near-real-time insights into vessel movements and activity patterns. This information enables protected area managers to understand exactly what is happening across their waters and along the boundaries of its exclusive economic zone.

The platform facilitates vital collaboration between the Council of the Sea and [Chile's National Fisheries and Aquaculture Service \(SERNAPESCA\)](#) local office. It also enables artisanal fishing organizations and community members to participate in monitoring efforts, strengthening co-management and transparency. Members of the Koro Nui o Te Vaikava, including local fishers representing different associations, are now playing a more active role in overseeing activity within the MPA. Using the Global Fishing Watch map, the community can verify the identity and track the history of vessels entering protected waters, particularly industrial vessels that may request temporary access for reasons such as refueling or medical emergencies. The platform provides the local community with a critical tool to assess whether these vessels are complying with regulations, helping build trust and accountability in an area where concerns over unauthorized activity have persisted.

Through Marine Manager, Rapa Nui authorities are able to:



Monitor industrial fishing fleets operating near the boundaries of the protected area.



Support science-based decision making and long-term management planning.



Identify patterns in fishing, transit and maritime traffic.



Build technical capacity among community stakeholders.



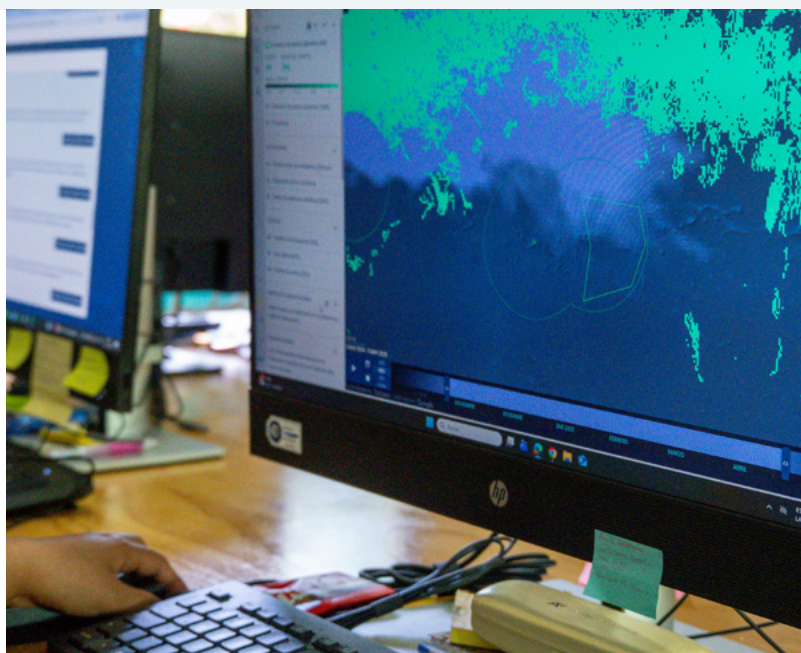
Strengthen compliance with local and national regulations.

A tool to revolutionize ocean monitoring

Marine Manager is an open-access, online portal that leverages satellite data and Google Earth Engine to help authorities monitor and protect the ocean. Specifically designed to strengthen MPAs and other effective area-based conservation measures, the platform consolidates diverse datasets into a single, user-friendly tool.

By overlaying vessel activity with oceanographic, habitat and biological data — such as sea surface temperature and salinity or seamounts — users can accomplish in hours what previously took months.

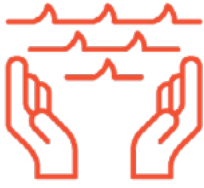
The portal empowers managers to integrate their own custom data layers, enabling them to compare real-time vessel trends against their own proprietary research or jurisdictional boundaries. This comprehensive view allows users to track commercial fishing as well as shipping and tourism globally, providing the scientific insights necessary for effective ocean stewardship. To facilitate collaboration, the portal also enables managers to generate and analyze shared reports while maintaining seamless access to saved areas of interest.



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“Global Fishing Watch’s platform helps reduce the sense of uncertainty in the Rapa Nui community — the fear that there isn’t enough oversight. That’s the concern: people feel monitoring is lacking. But these tools give us the ability to track and monitor, via satellite, the entire industrial fleet operating beyond the island — especially foreign-flagged vessels.”

Faturangi Tepano
Head of office in Rapa Nui, SERNAPESCA



**Less than
8% of the
ocean
is currently
protected**

The global applications for this monitoring tool are multifold — and growing.

These include:

- **Planning:** Scoping potential conservation sites by analyzing historical vessel traffic against sensitive ecosystems.
- **Management and compliance:** Monitoring and enforcement of MPAs to eliminate illegal fishing or prohibited activities.
- **Climate adaptation:** Mapping environmental changes to anticipate shifts in marine life.
- **Coastal protection:** Tracking changes in vital ecosystems like mangroves and seagrasses.

With less than 8 percent of the ocean currently protected, the lack of open, timely data remains a major barrier to conservation. Marine Manager addresses this gap by visualizing near-real-time human activity and its environmental impacts. By providing a comprehensive understanding of global vessel patterns, the tool empowers policymakers and researchers to combat overfishing, pollution and climate change through informed, data-driven enforcement.

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“We are a seafaring people — an ocean people — unlike many Indigenous communities on the continent. From a very young age, we grow up connected to the sea. Our lives are shaped by it, and lived through it.”

Marcela Hey
Councilor of the Koro Nui o te Vaikava

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Technology to support tradition

Establishing a marine protected area is only the first step toward conservation. The greater challenge lies in ensuring that protection measures are effectively implemented and enforced. Marine Manager helps transform monitoring from a limited local capability into a shared, data-driven governance model.

“Marine Manager helps us with satellite control and monitoring of the entire industrial fleet outside the island,” notes Faturangi Tepano, the head of SERNAPESCA’s office in Rapa Nui. “It strengthens our team’s capacities, but Global Fishing Watch has also created opportunities for artisanal fishing organizations and the community to participate in this process and learn to use the platform.”

By making ocean activity visible, Global Fishing Watch’s platform reduces uncertainty regarding industrial fleets operating around the island and strengthens local capacity to safeguard marine ecosystems. Rapa Nui demonstrates how indigenous knowledge, community leadership and transparent data can work in concert to strengthen marine conservation and better ocean governance. By combining centuries-old stewardship traditions with modern monitoring tools, the island is advancing a co-management model that empowers local communities while supporting science-based decision making. Global Fishing Watch is honored to collaborate with the Rapa Nui community and Chilean authorities to expand access to data and tools that support effective marine protection.

“The management plan for this marine protected area has been built in coordination with the community. It wasn’t something handed down by the central government or Chile’s Ministry of Environment — it was a process shaped by the people.”

Ludovic Burns Tuki
Coordinator of Koro Nui o te Vaikava



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Global Fishing Watch is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency of human activity at sea. By creating and publicly sharing map visualizations, data and analysis tools, we aim to enable scientific research and transform the way our ocean is managed. We believe human activity at sea should be public knowledge in order to safeguard the global ocean for the common good of all.



Global Fishing Watch