

# BLUE AZORES

*Protecting, promoting and valuing  
the blue natural capital of the Azores*





An underwater scene with various fish swimming in clear blue water. The fish are silhouetted against the light, creating a serene and naturalistic background for the text.

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UNIQUE,  
RICH,  
FRAGILE,  
**THE AZORES**





Unique, rich and teeming with fragile ocean life, the Azorean Sea has formed the cultural identity of the Azorean people and sustained their way of life for generations.

**Protecting these critical marine ecosystems is essential to ensure a healthy ocean for Azorean society now and for future generations to come.**

# THE SEA OF THE AZORES IS

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**56% of Portugal's maritime territory (EEZ)**, with Portugal having one of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones in Europe

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Approximately **1 million km<sup>2</sup>**

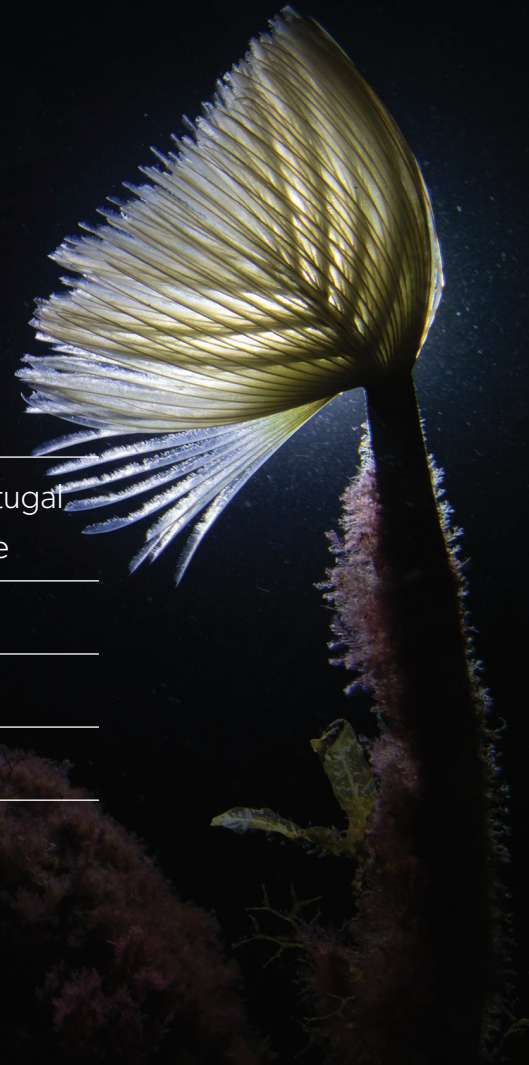
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An average depth of **3000m**

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Only **5% with some type of protection**

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Hydrothermal vents

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**28** species of marine mammals

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**6** species of sea turtles

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**560** species of fish

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**10** species of breeding seabirds

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**> 400** species of algae

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**> 1000** of species of invertebrates

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# BLUE AZORES

**Focused on the conservation and sustainable use of the Azorean Sea, the Blue Azores Program is contributing to protecting, promoting and valuing the rich marine resources of the archipelago.**

The program works alongside its #1 stakeholders, the Azorean people, through active, ongoing input and community engagement.



# THREE PARTNERS, ONE VISION

Blue Azores is the result of a partnership between the Regional Government of the Azores, the Oceano Azul Foundation and the Waitt Institute, uniting in a single vision of a **healthy Azorean Sea and a thriving ocean economy**.

Blue Azores aims to create new avenues for the sustainable economic development of the archipelago, in direct cooperation with the program's stakeholders.



# BLUE AZORES PROGRAM GOALS





## Blue Azores is based on the following main goals:

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Protect **30% of the Azorean Sea through Marine Protected Areas** (MPAs), with at least 15% as new, fully protected MPAs where no extraction can take place

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**Implement management plans** for all marine protected areas, those that will be designated and those that already exist

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Legally implement a **marine spatial plan**


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Improve **fisheries management**

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# MARINE PROTECTED AREAS





**The waters around the Azores contain some of the most important island, open-water, and deep-sea environments in the Atlantic. These fragile and irreplaceable marine ecosystems are under threat and need to be protected.**

A Marine Protected Area (MPA) is a clearly defined geographical area where a government has placed limits on human activity to achieve long-term conservation of nature. MPAs are essential for safeguarding biodiversity and the health of marine ecosystems. They provide sanctuary for species to mature, reproduce, and help restore healthy populations within and beyond their borders. Marine protected areas also build resilience against threats such as climate change and pollution by maintaining vital natural processes, storing carbon, and protecting coastlines. Fully protected MPAs are places where no extraction, like fishing or mining, can take place and have been proven to be an effective tool to conserve ecosystems and recover marine populations.

**By safeguarding these unique underwater ecosystems through fully protected marine reserves, the Azores can build a thriving sustainable blue economy and offer more opportunities to the communities of the archipelago that depend on a healthy ocean.**

### **Benefits of MPAs**

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Bigger, more abundant fish

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Improved fishing & tourism livelihoods

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Improved ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change & pollution

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More jobs & opportunities for future generations of Azoreans

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# SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION

**To kick off the Blue Azores program, two scientific expeditions were carried out in the Azores. The first took place in 2016 and evaluated the state of the marine ecosystems in the eastern group of islands. The second, in 2018, provided an overview of coastal, open ocean and deep-sea ecosystems in the central and western areas of the archipelago.**

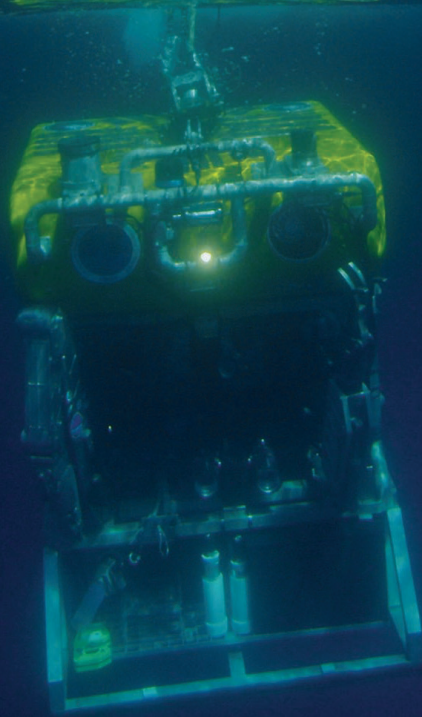
Together with other ongoing scientific efforts done over the last decades by the Azores scientists, the scientific reports on the health status of these marine ecosystems from these two expeditions are providing an important scientific basis to support the process of defining and establishing these new Azorean marine protected areas.





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# SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS



## Blue Azores Expeditions

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**45** different researchers

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**26** participants

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**> 950 dives** and **> 950** diving hours

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**1 481 km** covered

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**182** sampling spots

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**21 469 km<sup>2</sup>** of seabed mapped

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**60 hours** of sea exploration with the ROV "Luso" in **13 dives**

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**737 students** enrolled in the Open Explorer Classroom from **8 countries**

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Discovery of a **new hydrothermal field "Luso"**

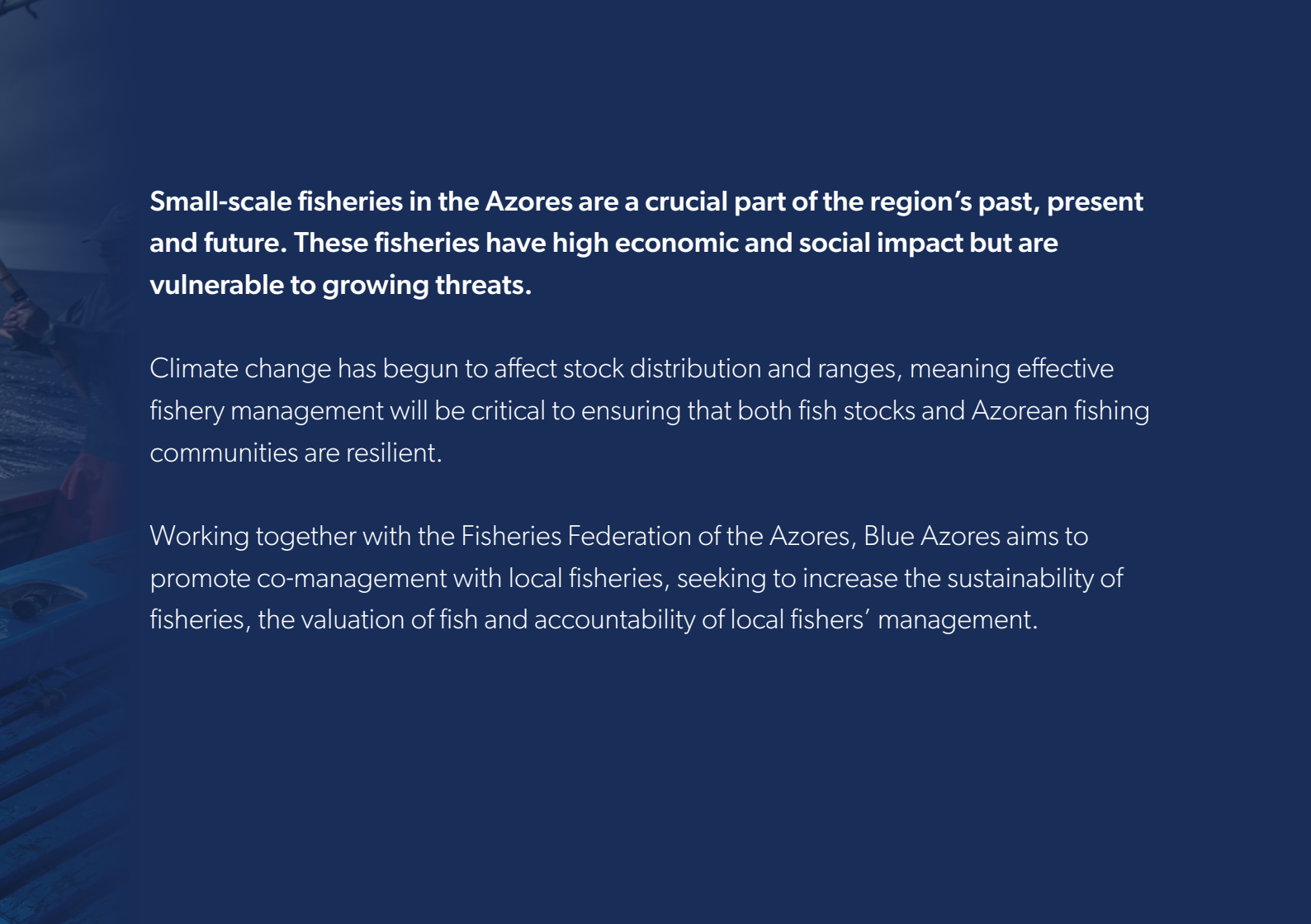
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Partners **Regional Government of the Azores, Oceano Azul Foundation, Waitt Institute, University of the Azores, IMAR, Okeanos, National Geographic Pristine Seas, EMEPC, Marinha Portuguesa, Santa Maria Manuela**

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# SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES



A person is visible on the left side of the image, leaning over the side of a boat. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky. The overall scene is a maritime setting.

**Small-scale fisheries in the Azores are a crucial part of the region's past, present and future. These fisheries have high economic and social impact but are vulnerable to growing threats.**

Climate change has begun to affect stock distribution and ranges, meaning effective fishery management will be critical to ensuring that both fish stocks and Azorean fishing communities are resilient.

Working together with the Fisheries Federation of the Azores, Blue Azores aims to promote co-management with local fisheries, seeking to increase the sustainability of fisheries, the valuation of fish and accountability of local fishers' management.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**The Regional Government of the Azores promotes a stakeholder engagement process counting on the direct participation of the communities that use the Sea of the Azores, sharing their interests and knowledge supporting the designation of Marine Protected Areas.**

Based on the best available science and transparent collaboration, this participatory process allows the Azoreans that know and use their sea to participate in the process of its protection and management.



# OCEAN LITERACY





**As the ocean literacy component of Blue Azores, the “Educating a Blue Generation” program empowers Azorean teachers with the tools they need to inspire a Blue Generation. This unique program trains primary school teachers and provides them with an extensive manual and curriculum about the ocean, and specifically the Azorean Sea and its history.** Approaching blue literacy through a holistic lens, students learn about the ocean through practical and hands-on teaching activities covering literature, ecology, law, strategy, geography, economics, history, physics, and chemistry.

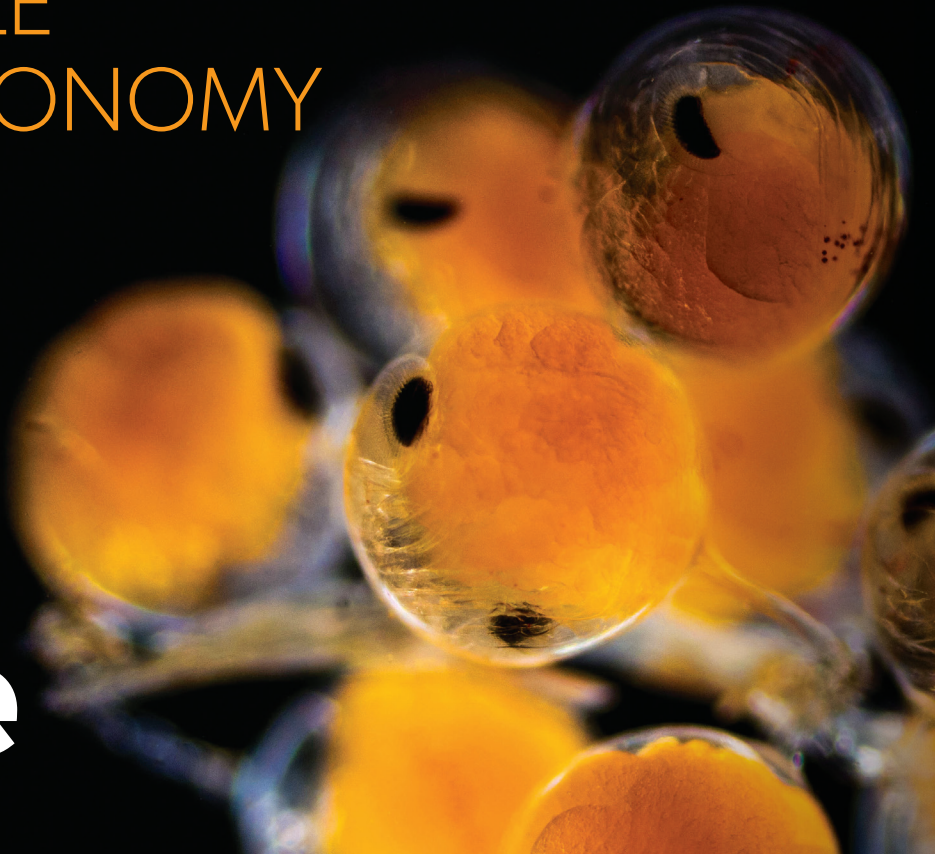
**In just its first year alone, the program in the Azores has:**

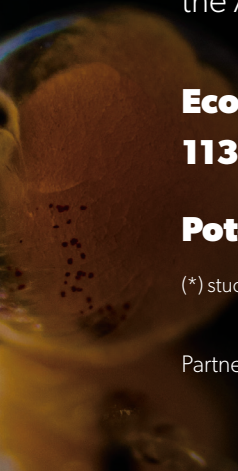
Enrolled more than 4000 elementary school students in the program, trained 377 elementary school teachers in 96 schools on 8 islands

Developed an “Educating a Blue Generation” manual with specific content about the Azorean Sea

# SUSTAINABLE BLUE BIOECONOMY

# Blue Bio Value





**Blue Azores seeks to bridge the gap between academic research and the market by fostering innovation through its support of the Blue Bio Value program. Blue Bio Value held an Azores Ideation Sprint in 2020, which provided students, researchers and ocean enthusiasts with the training, knowledge and guidance needed to begin transforming their projects into sustainable businesses. This ongoing work will continue to build a thriving network of dedicated marine bio-based researchers in the archipelago and beyond.** Blue Bio Value results from a partnership between the Oceano Azul Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and is supported in the Azores by the Blue Azores program and the University of the Azores.

**Economic Evaluation of the Azores Marine ecosystem services up to 113M€/year (\*)**

**Potential market for Blue Carbon Sequestration (\*)**

(\*) study developed by UCSB's Emlab

Partners **Oceano Azul Foundation, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, University of the Azores, Blue Azores Program**

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# PLAN OF ACTION



CONSERVATION

EDUCATION

PROTECT

**30%**

OF THE  
AZOREAN SEA

ECONOMY

LEGISLATION

CO-MANAGEMENT

MARINE SPATIAL  
PLANNING

SCIENCE

# FOUNDING PARTNERS



# REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE AZORES

The Government of the Azores has at its core a commitment to defending Azorean marine and coastal ecosystems. A fundamental part of the value of the sea is its biodiversity and natural wealth. The challenges of the 21st century call for the international community to focus its concerns on the planet's environmental sustainability. The ocean is the space where this decisive battle for the planet's salvation will take place. The Azores will, therefore, be at the center of this battle.

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# OCEANO AZUL FOUNDATION

The Oceano Azul Foundation was established in 2017, with the motivation to contribute to a healthier and more productive ocean. Under the motto "From the ocean's point of view", the Foundation works around three concepts: blue generation, blue natural capital and blue network. Using a science-based approach, the model of change of the Oceano Azul Foundation integrates these three concepts supporting projects on literacy, conservation, sustainable fisheries, campaigns, blue economy and capacity building namely working with governments, foundations and civil society organizations, within the UN and the EU systems, to advance the international ocean agenda.

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# WAITT INSTITUTE

Based in San Diego, California, the Waitt Institute is a non-profit organization that partners with governments to develop and implement plans towards a sustainable ocean that benefit communities, the economy, and the environment.

The Waitt Institute brings a world class team of technical experts focusing on four main pillars of work: Marine Spatial Planning, blue economy, sustainable fisheries and marine protection to help governments around the globe protect their ocean and manage their resources sustainably for future generations. The Institute's sister organization, the Waitt Foundation, specializes in public-private partnership and supports high impact global ocean initiatives with the ultimate goal of sustainable, resilient and thriving seas that benefit all. Both organizations were founded and are chaired by Ted Waitt, co-founder of Gateway, Inc.





The Blue Azores Program is supported by several regional, national and international entities working in partnership to achieve the planned goals. Blue Azores is a collaborative program that relies on all stakeholders of the Sea of the Azores for its success.

**blueazores.org**

 **@ProgramaBlueAzores**