



# Abu Dhabi Hosts Middle East's First World Ocean Summit

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As an area known more for its huge fossil fuel industry than its environmental sustainability, it may come as a surprise that Abu Dhabi will be hosting the World Ocean Summit this year. The summit will be the sixth annual event and the first to be held in the Middle East.

As well as attempting to bring environmental issues to light, the event aims to change the image of the Middle East as a non-environmentally friendly region. The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Thani Al Zeyoudi, believes the event is proof that his country can play a key role in combating threats to the world's seas.

## Environmental threats

Al Zeyoudi says the event is “sending a message to the region and the world that the ocean has been and will continue always to be an integral part of our economy and our society”. He also emphasised the need for a unified approach, adding that “governments cannot do it alone, NOGs (non-governmental organisation) cannot do it alone. We have to work together, and we have to bring the private sector on board with us”.

The UAE is one of the most affected countries globally if sea levels continue to rise and ocean pollution does not come to an end. With the country's blue economy – encompassing fisheries, maritime transport, renewable energy and tourism – making up 68% of the UAE's gross domestic product, the economy is set to take a huge hit if the oceans are not taken care of.

As well as [plastic pollution in the oceans drastically impacting marine life](#), any rise in sea levels could cause devastation for the Middle East. “Any sea level rise is going to affect a huge part of our coastal areas. Almost 80 percent of our population is living in coastal areas, so their communities are going to be destroyed”, [says Al Zeyoudi](#).

## Making changes

The UAE, as well as the wider Gulf region, are making the necessary changes now to avoid further damage to the world's oceans and our landscape. As a signatory to the Paris Climate Accords, the UAE pledges to reduce fossil fuel-based power production and to increase renewable energy usage to 27% of total energy by 2021.



The country also earned praise in 2016 as the home to the Middle East's most sustainable cities, with Dubai and Abu Dhabi coming in first and second for the region. Dubai came in 52<sup>nd</sup> place globally, displaying the UAE's improving dedication to reducing climate change and protecting the world's oceans.