

SDG 14 VOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS – IMPROVING ANALYSIS

Marjo Vierros

Coastal Policy and
Humanities Research

Ocean Voices



Photo: National
Geographic

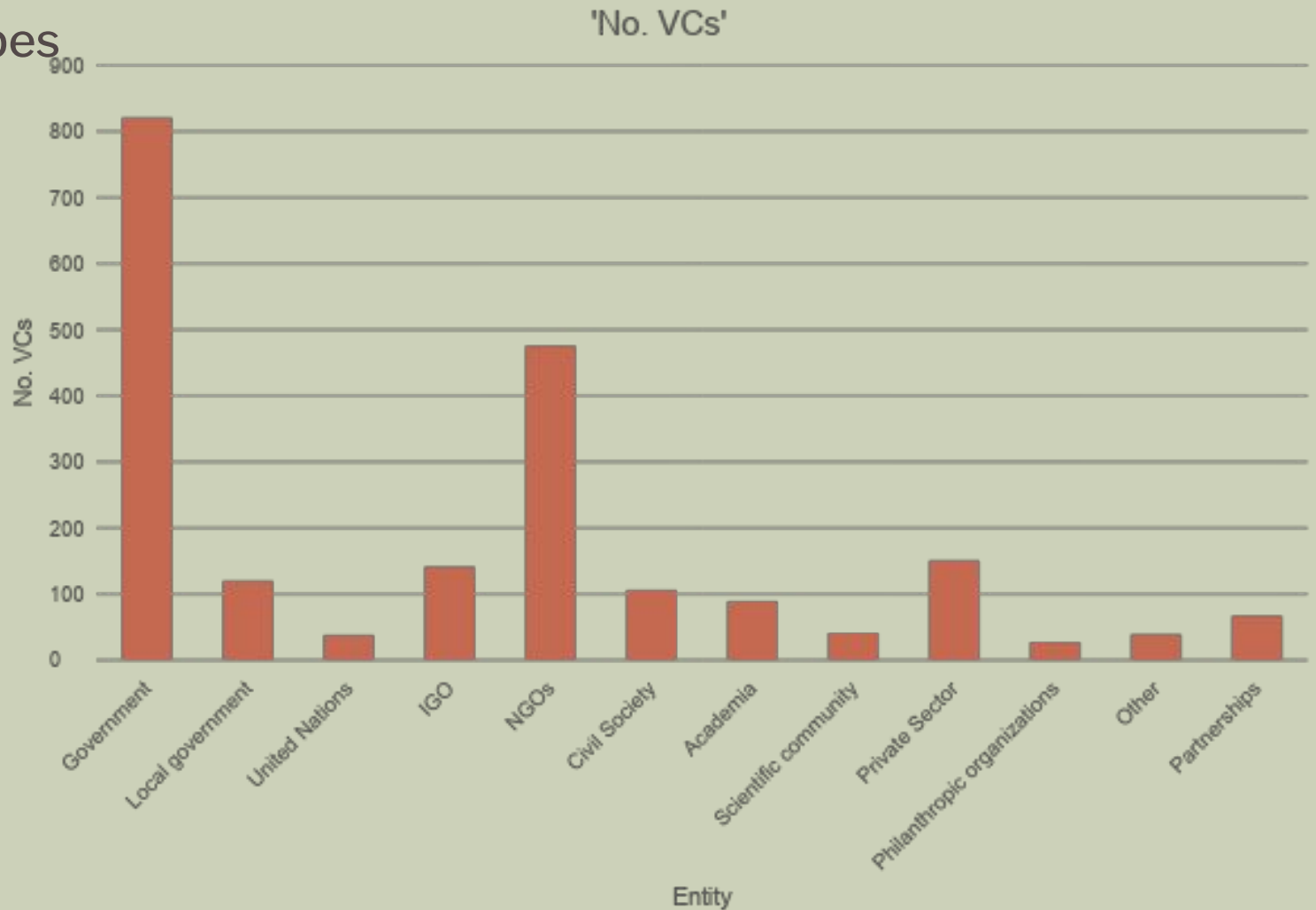


OVERVIEW

- Around 1400 VCs after the first Ocean Conference in 2017
- Total of 2122 VCs now in the database:
<https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/action-networks/ocean-commitments>
- Very diverse in focus, scope and size
 - Challenge for analysis
 - Positive for inclusivity
- Reporting has been lacking (only about 24% have reported on their progress)

WHO PARTICIPATES?

Entity types



INCREASING PARTICIPATION

■ Scientific community participation

- Enhance through the UN Decade on Ocean Science?
- Can we link the Ocean Decade Actions database with the SDG 14 Voluntary Commitments database? Help link science actions with VCs and SDG 14

■ Philanthropic community participation

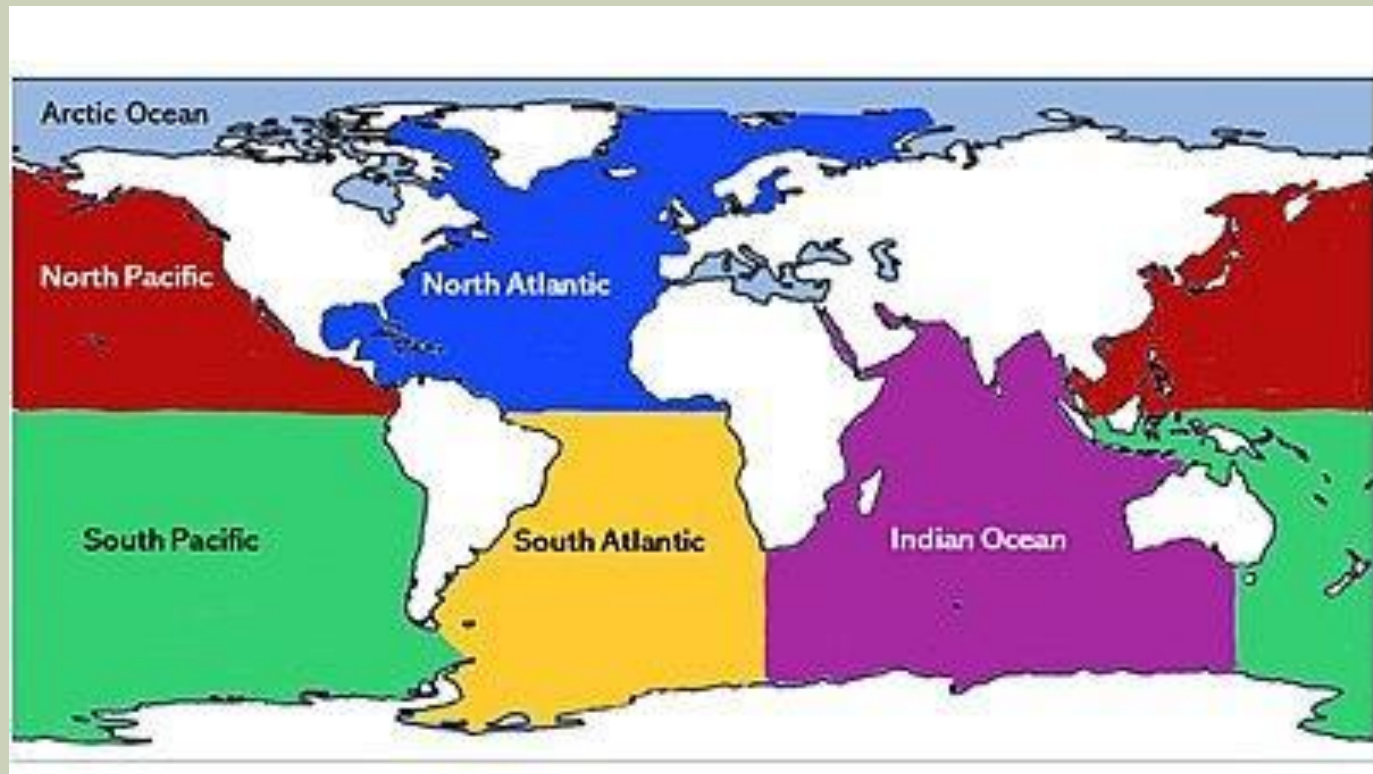
- May be an underestimate, as they may be supporting partners on VCs but not the main entity registering
- UNOC 2 saw quite a few funding announcements (e.g. Protecting our Planet Challenge US\$1 billion)
- Partnerships with diverse ocean funders? Facilitation: Matchmaking VCs with funding support?

■ UN organization participation

- Low participation surprising. Does it reflect reality? Are UN organizations participating through other ways than VCs?
- Commitment fatigue?
- Partnerships a way forward

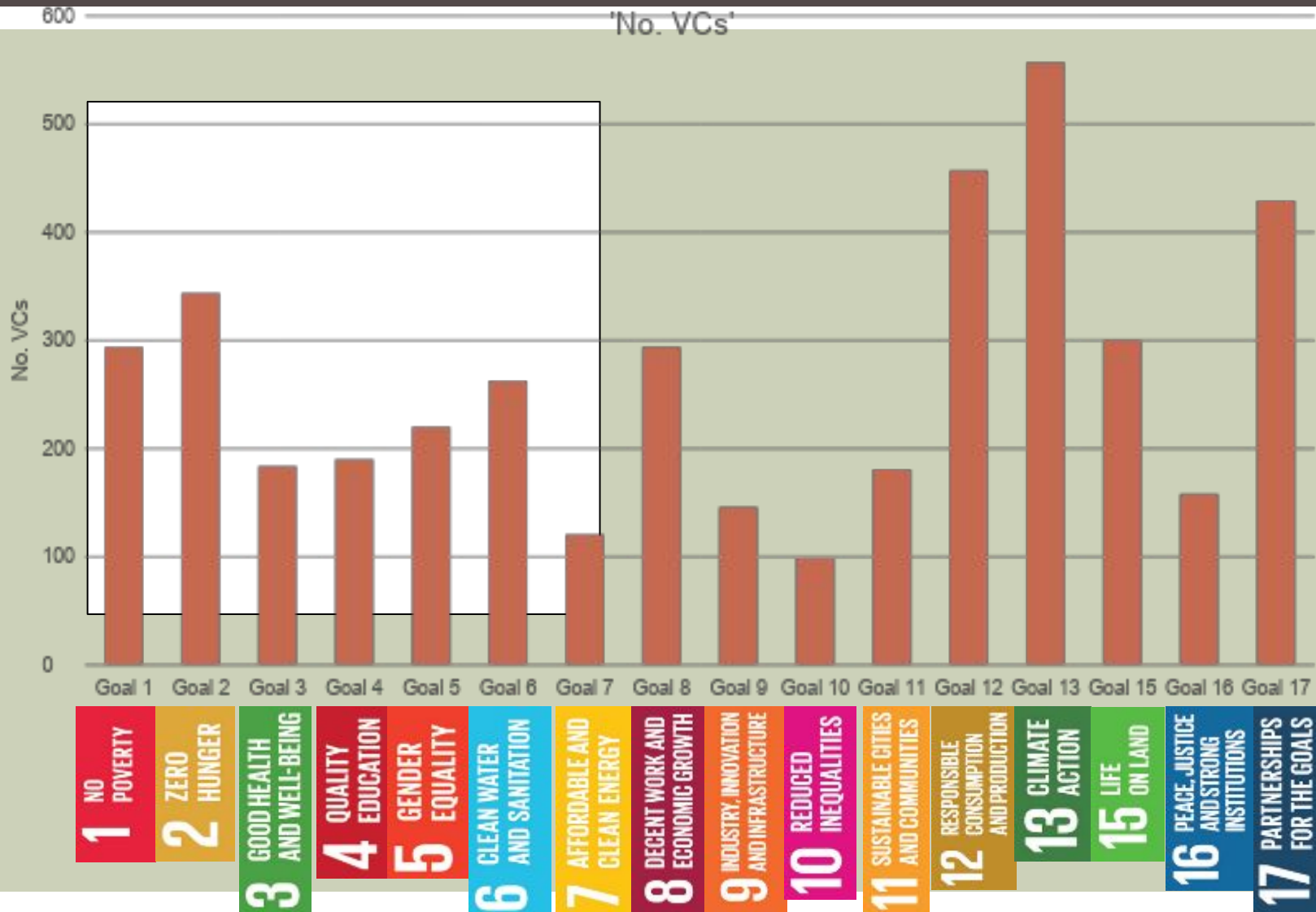
COMMITMENTS BY OCEAN BASIN

- Global: **822**
- Arctic: **91**
- Southern Ocean: **80**
- South Pacific: **441**
- North Pacific: **352**
- North Atlantic: **644**
- South Atlantic: **234**
- Indian Ocean: **398**

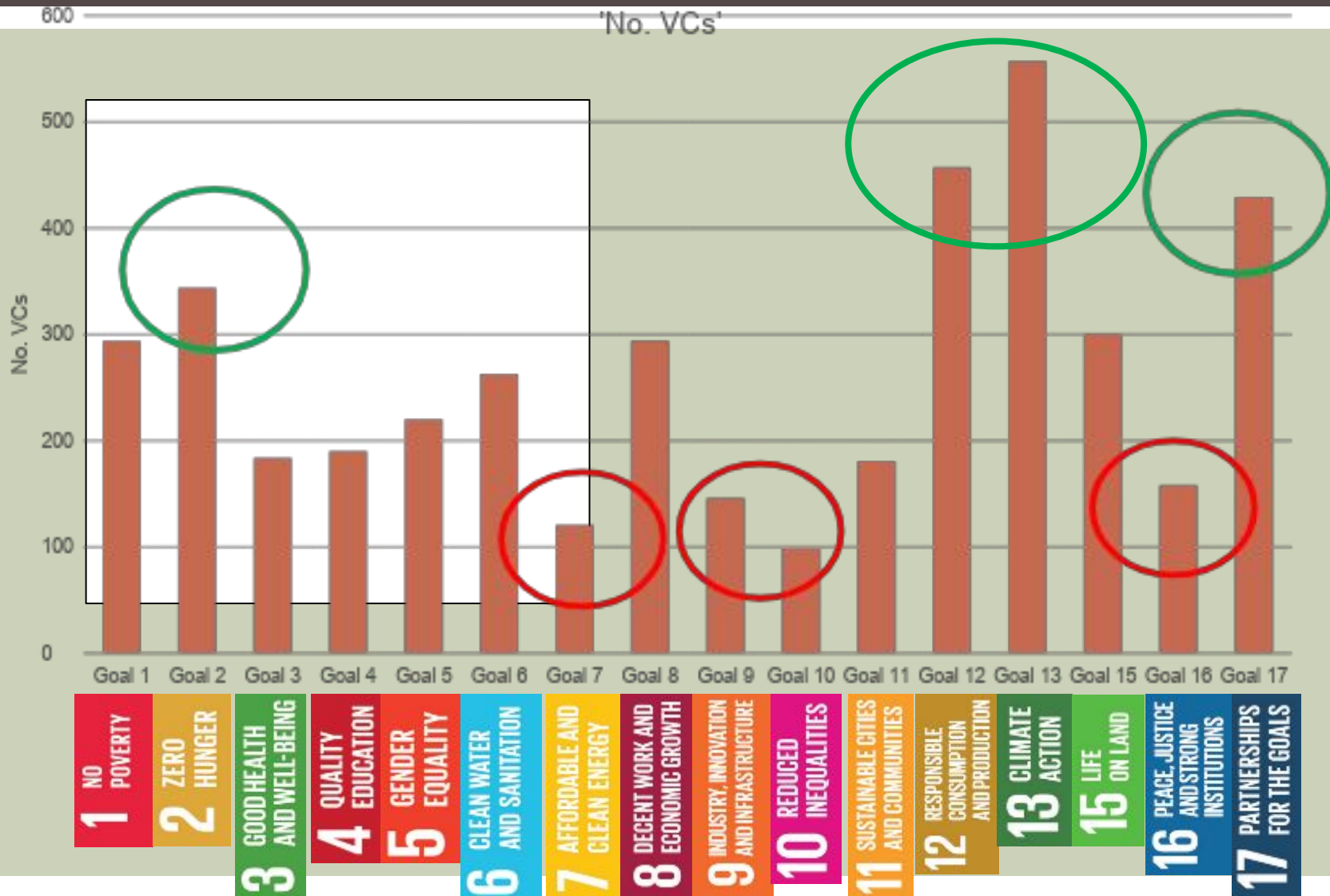


Would be useful to get detail on VCs with a more nuanced geographic focus

SDG 14 AND OTHER SDGs



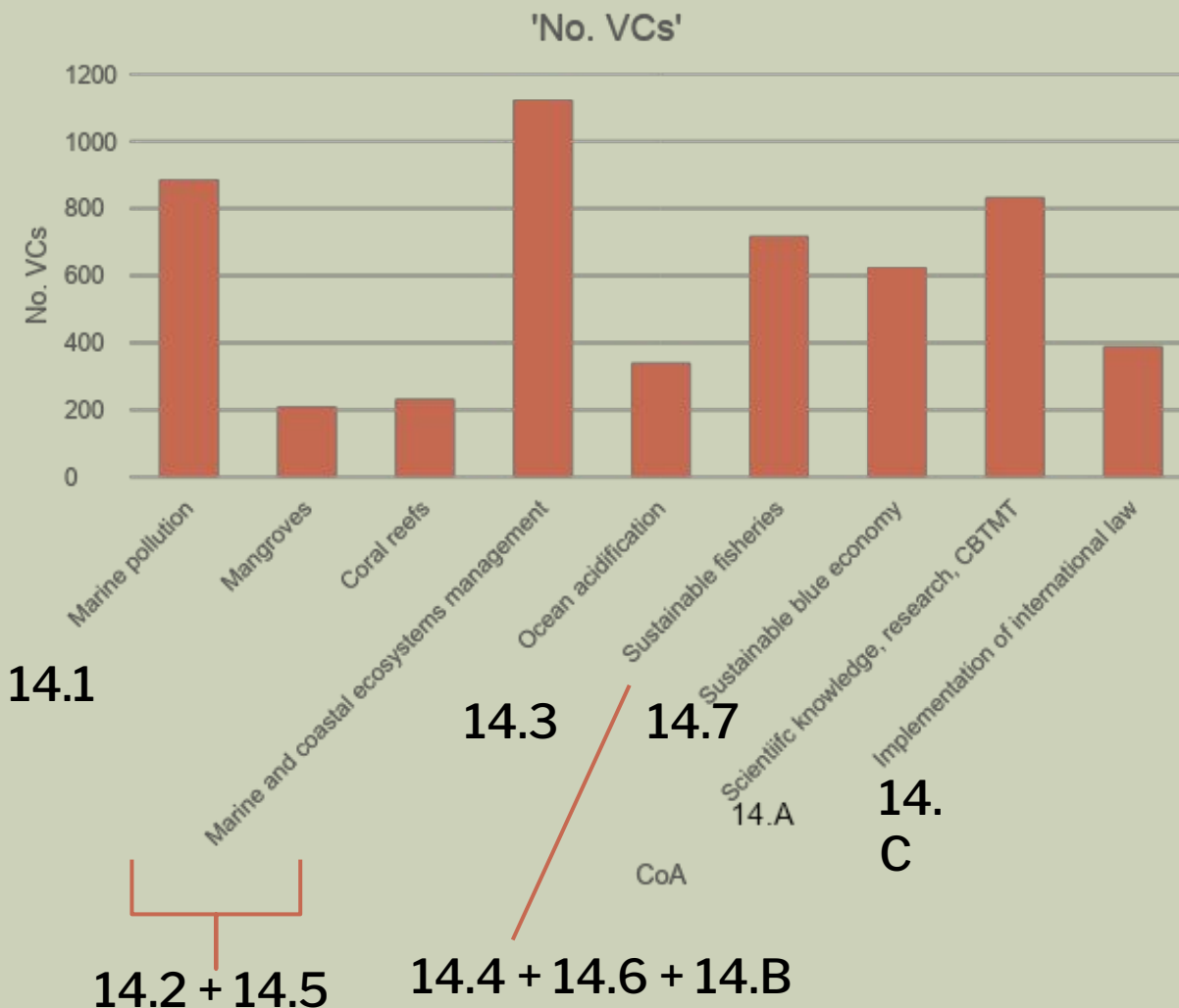
SDG 14 AND OTHER SDGs



WHERE WE COULD DO BETTER

- **Ocean equity (Goal 10: reducing inequalities):**
 - Fundamental for success of blue economy, conservation efforts
 - Lack of equity can kill an otherwise promising ocean action
- **Ocean renewable energy (Goal 7: Clean and affordable energy)**
 - Very few VCs address ocean energy
- **Industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9):**
 - Ocean innovation should be central to blue economies
- **Peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16):**
 - Strong institutions are fundamental for ocean governance nationally and globally. Current fragmentation is one reason behind failures in governance.
 - Strong legislation are also a fundamental for successful ocean management and conservation

COMMUNITIES OF OCEAN ACTION



IMPROVING TRACKING AND ANALYSIS

- **Improvements to online database/VC registry** for ease of analysis
 - Querying by target, start/end date, available reporting, financing
 - Greater query capacity of geographic areas
 - Specific queries for COAs (e.g. tropical coral, cold water coral; spatial extent for protection/restoration)
- **Improving reporting by VCs** - making it easy to commitment holders (uploading/linking to donor reports?)
- **However, standardizing some reporting aspects** would help with analysis of collective impact (e.g. common metrics, such as spatial extent in common units, could produce more comparable data)
- **Support to commitment holders** (include reporting support)
- Regional/national **focal points**?

SOME CHALLENGES

- Complexity of SDGs
- **Understanding synergies and tradeoffs** between SDGs at different scales, including within VCs
- **Understanding spill-over effects** (How one VC might have impacts beyond its expected SDG target)
- **How do the SDGs intersect with other global targets** (such as GBF) – can synergies be built on the VC level?
- Adequate, sustainable and predictable **financing**
- **Technology** (particularly deep sea, MGR, new tools) and capacity
- **Understanding the impact of VCs collectively**
- **Are VCs strategic** in responding to global priorities? Should they be?

INTRODUCING NEW TOOLS

- **Project testing a new approach to VC analysis**
- **Using large language models** (GPT-4 and GPT-4-Turbo) + other natural language processing methods in combination with human experts to analyze the VCs and other similar documents
- Understanding the common **theories of change and models of action** inherent in international commitments
- Trying to understand not just what different organizations are committed to, but **how** they plan to fulfill the commitments
- Looking at how VCs consider their commitments contribute to **equitable outcomes**, including how they contribute to SIDS+LDCs, as well as marginalized groups
- **Project team:** Gerald Singh (University of Victoria), Patrick Boutet, Marjo Vierros, Jessica Vandenberg, Jorge Barbosa, Harriet Harden-Davies, Yoshitaka Ota

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **SDG 14 and particularly the VCs have been a testing ground for new and emerging ideas and actions** – e.g. marine plastics, blue economy, ocean-climate nexus, ocean acidification research
- **VCs bring fresh local ideas and solutions to a global audience** – expand available solutions
- **Inclusivity is important** – all voices need to be represented
- **VCs can and do have real impacts** even if measuring collective impact is difficult

Thank you!

