



# Introduction to Marine Bioprospecting



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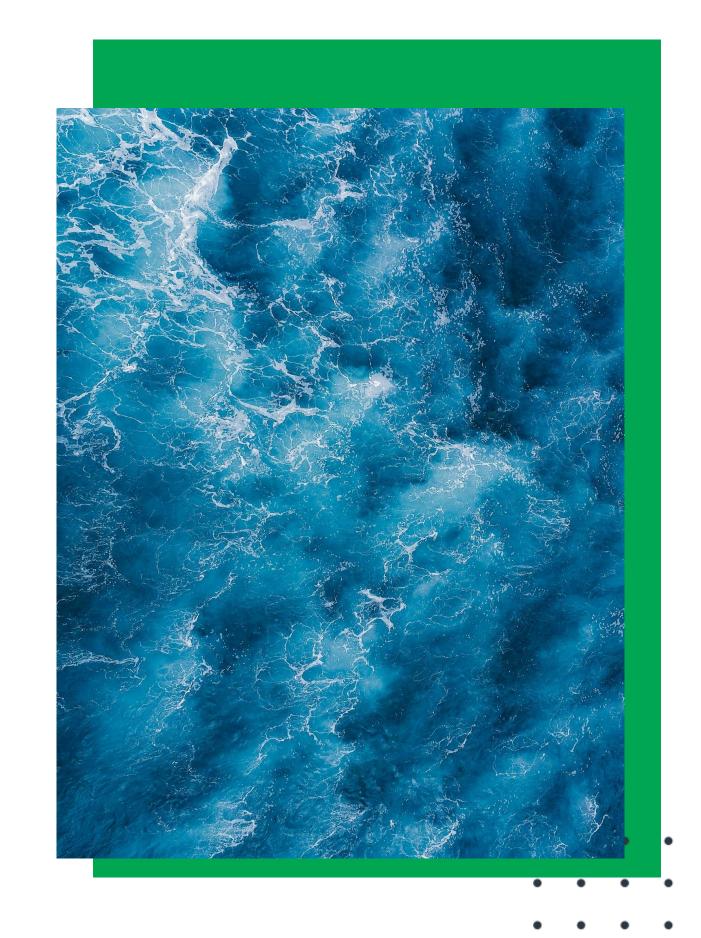
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# Learning Objectives

- Define marine bioprospecting
- □ Identify target marine organisms
- Understand the bioprospecting process
- Recognize industrial applications
- □ Discuss legal and ethical issues







# What is Bioprospecting?

- Bioprospecting: Search for bioactive compounds in natural organisms
- Bioprospecting is nature's treasure hunt—searching for new biological compounds that can benefit society. Done responsibly, it fosters scientific innovation, environmental conservation, and fair collaboration with communities that hold traditional ecological knowledge.

(Skirycz et al., 2016)





(Source: Skirycz et al., 2016.)



# What is Marine Bioprospecting?

- Marine bioprospecting focuses on ocean biodiversity for novel compounds
- Marine bioprospecting is the process of exploring the marine environment for unique genes, molecules, and organisms with potential uses in various industries like pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, medicine and food production.
- This process is driven by the vast and relatively unexplored biodiversity of the ocean, which holds promise for novel compounds, materials, and biotechnological solutions.

(Flemsæter, 2020)



(Source:https://www.asiaone.com/world/map-worlds-uncharted-ocean-beds-takes-shape-despite-crisis)





# Why the Ocean?

- The oceans are a vast and largely unexplored source of unique genes, molecules, and organisms with potential for groundbreaking applications in various fields. (Flemsæter, 2020)
- □ The ocean covers 70% of Earth and home to 90% of the biosphere
- ☐ The ocean has an extreme environment which results in the discovery of unique compounds.
- ☐ The ocean has high biodiversity in species and ecosystem (reefs, vents, etc.)



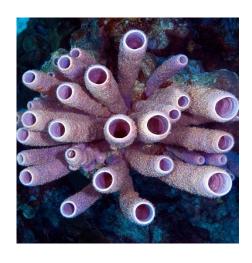
(Source:https://www.asiaone.com/world/map-worlds-uncharted-ocean-beds-takes-shape-despite-crisis)



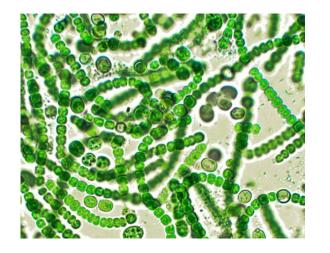


# Marine Organisms of Interest

Sponges



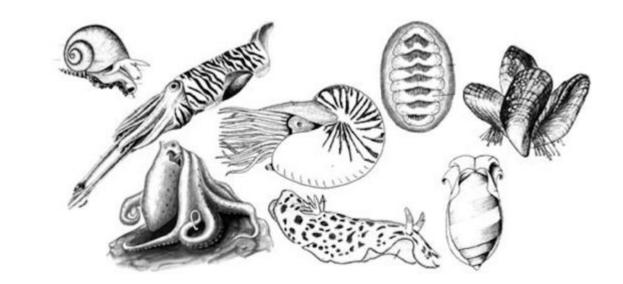
Cyanobacteria



Algae



□ Tunicates, Mollusks



■ Marine fungi & actinomycetes







# Steps in Marine Bioprospecting

Marine bioprospecting involves several key steps:

- 1. Sample collection
- 2. Isolation and screening of bioactive compounds
- 3. Characterization and testing
- 4. Product development and commercialization.

This process aims to discover and utilize valuable biological resources from marine organisms for various applications, including pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, and industrial products.





# Steps in Marine Bioprospecting

#### 1. Sample Collection:

This initial phase involves the exploration and collection of marine organisms from diverse habitats like the deep sea, coastal areas, and even oil reservoirs. The goal is to gather a wide range of biological samples, including microorganisms, plants, and animals.

#### 2. Isolation and Screening:

Once samples are collected, they are brought to the lab for further analysis. Scientists isolate and culture microorganisms, and then screen for bioactive compounds, which are molecules that exhibit a desired biological activity. This screening process often involves various bioassays to identify compounds with potential pharmaceutical or industrial applications.

AntiCancer
Drugs

Antimalarial
Drugs

Antiviral
Drugs

An

(Source: Singh et al., 2021)



(Singh *et al.*, 2021)



# Steps in Marine Bioprospecting

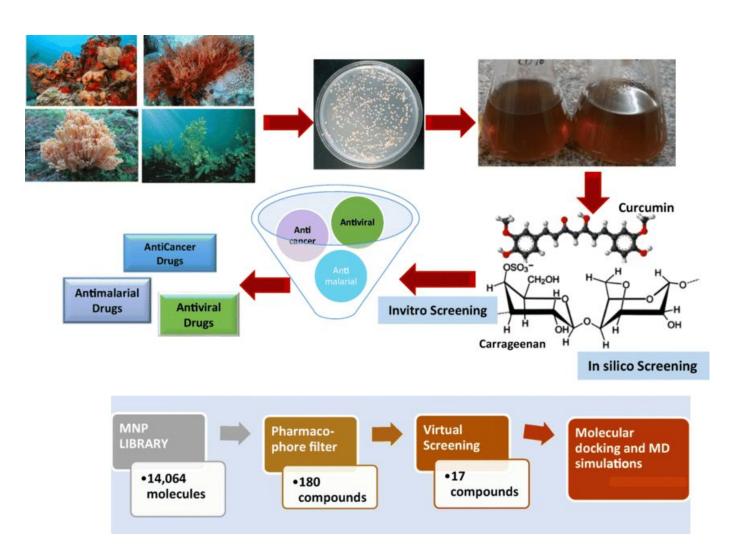
#### 3. Characterization and Testing:

After identifying promising compounds, they are characterized to determine their chemical structure, properties, and biological activity. Further testing is conducted to assess the compound's efficacy, safety, and potential for development into a marketable product.

#### 4. Product Development and Commercialization:

This final phase involves scaling up the production of the bioactive compound, securing intellectual property rights (patents), and developing the product for market. This stage also includes marketing and sales of the final product.

(Singh et al., 2021)



(Source: Singh et al., 2021. Fig.3)



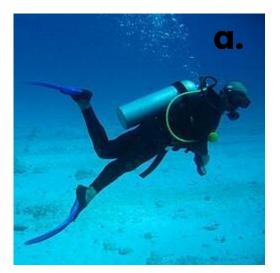


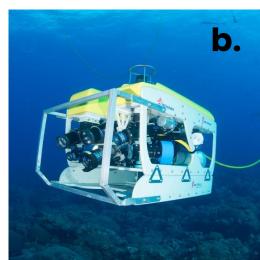
#### 1. Sampling and Collection

This is the first step, gathering biological material from the ocean.

#### Techniques:

- a. Scuba Diving: For shallow-water organisms (e.g., sponges, algae, tunicates).
- b. ROVs (Remotely Operated Vehicles): To access deep-sea organisms without human divers.
- c. Sediment/Core Sampling: For benthic microbes or sediment-associated organisms.
- d. Plankton Nets: To collect free-floating microbes, phytoplankton, or zooplankton.
- e. Settlement Traps or Panels: For recruiting colonizing biofoulers like bacteria, tunicates, barnacles.















#### 2. Taxonomic Identification

It's crucial to know what organism is being studied.

#### Techniques:

- a. Morphological Analysis: Classical taxonomic keys based on shape, structure.
- b. DNA Barcoding: Uses specific gene sequences (e.g., COI, 16S rRNA) to identify species.
- c. Metagenomics: To analyze DNA directly from environmental samples, especially for microbes that can't be cultured.

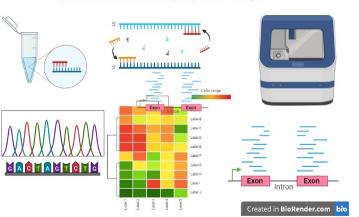
#### 3. Culturing and Isolation (Chang, et al., 2019)

Many organisms (especially microbes) must be cultured to study their products.

#### Techniques:

- a. Selective Media: Culturing bacteria/fungi from marine sediments or organisms.
- b. Co-culturing: Stimulates production of certain compounds by mimicking interactions in nature.
- c. Enrichment Cultures: Favor the growth of desired functional groups (e.g., actinomycetes).

#### **DNA BARCODING**



(Source: https://sciencevivid.com/dna-barcoding/)



(Source:Chang et al., 2019)



#### 4. Extraction of Compounds (Erkey, 2011)

Biomolecules are extracted for testing.

#### Techniques:

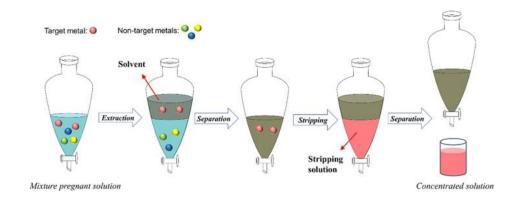
- a. Solvent Extraction: Using ethanol, methanol, hexane, etc. to extract different types of compounds.
- b. Solid-Phase Extraction (SPE): Concentrates and purifies compounds from liquid samples.
- c. Supercritical Fluid Extraction (SFE): A green chemistry technique using CO2 for extraction.

#### 5. Bioactivity Screening

To test whether the extracted compounds are biologically active (e.g., anticancer, antimicrobial).

#### Techniques:

- a. In vitro Assays:
- Cytotoxicity assays (e.g., MTT, LDH)
- Antibacterial assays (e.g., MIC tests)
- Enzyme inhibition (e.g., protease, kinase)
- b. Reporter Gene Assays: Using fluorescent or luminescent markers.
- c. High-throughput Screening (HTS): Automates the testing of thousands of samples.



(Source: Erkey, 2011)



(Source:https://www.csescienceeditor.org/article/how-life-science-journals-can-be-champions-of-better-material-sharing-and-reporting/





#### 6. Isolation and Structural Elucidation

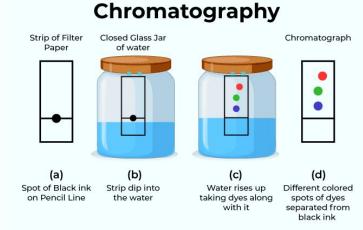
Once a compound is active, it must be purified and identified.

#### Techniques:

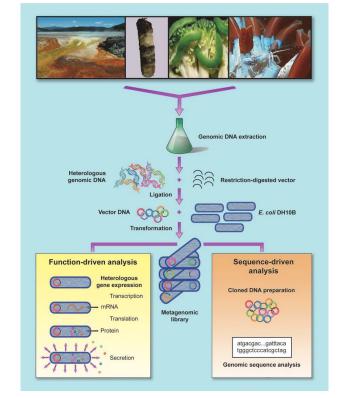
- a. Chromatography:
- Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC)
- High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC)
- Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GC-MS)
- b. Spectroscopy:
- Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR)
- UV-Vis and IR spectroscopy
- Mass Spectrometry (MS)

# Variable slit Prism Line Spectrum Variable slit Variable slit Prism ABSORPTION SPECTRUM Continuous Spectrum

(Source:https://www.priyamstudyce ntre.com/chemistry/spectroscopy)



(Source:https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/chemistry/chromatography/)



#### 7. Genomic and Synthetic Approaches

Used when organisms are unculturable or compounds are scarce.

#### Techniques:

- Metagenomic Libraries: Clone environmental DNA into hosts to produce compounds.
- Genome Mining: Search for biosynthetic gene clusters (e.g., polyketide synthases).
- Synthetic Biology: Insert genes into model organisms (like *E. coli*) to produce marine compounds.



(Source:https://www.bio.davidson.edu/courses/genomics/2014/Cambronero/Metagenomics.html)



# Bioactive Compounds from the Sea

☐ Trabectedin (van Kesteren *et al.*, 2003)

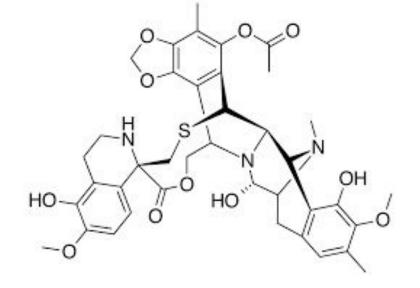
Trabectedin, an anticancer drug, is a marine-derived compound initially isolated from the Caribbean tunicate *Ecteinascidia turbinata*.

It's a semi-synthetic molecule that acts as a DNA-binding agent, specifically targeting the minor groove of DNA.

This interaction with DNA leads to a distortion of the double helix structure, inducing DNA damage and ultimately promoting cancer cell death (apoptosis).



Ecteinascidia turbinata.









# Applications in Industry

☐ Medicine: cancer, infections



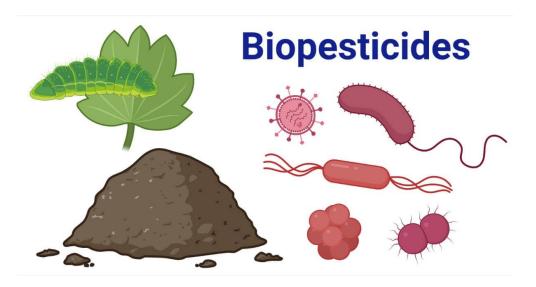
☐ Cosmetics: UV protection



■ Nutraceuticals: omega-3 algae



☐ Agriculture: biopesticides







## Applications in Medicine: Cancer, Infections

#### 1. Cancer Therapy

Several marine-derived compounds have been developed into anticancer drugs:

a) Trabectedin (Yondelis®) (van Kesteren et al., 2003)

Source: Ecteinascidia turbinata (sea squirt)

**Action**: Binds to DNA, disrupting the cell cycle of cancer cells.

Use: Approved for soft tissue sarcoma and ovarian cancer.

Commercialized by: PharmaMar



Source: Synthetic analog of halichondrin B from

a marine sponge (Halichondria okadai)

Action: Inhibits microtubule dynamics in cancer cells

Use: Metastatic breast cancer and liposarcoma

Commercialized by: Eisai Co., Japan

c) Bryostatin 1 (Kowalczyk et al., 2025)

Source: Bugula neritina (bryozoan)

Use: Investigated in leukemia, lymphoma, and as

an immune modulator

**Mechanism**: Modulates protein kinase C (PKC) activity

















## Applications in Medicine: Cancer, Infections

#### 1. Infection

#### **Antimicrobial & Antiviral Agents**

a) Marinopyrrole A (Hughes et al., 2010)

**Source**: Streptomyces spp. from marine sediments

Use: Broad-spectrum antibacterial activity including

**MRSA** 



**Source**: Salinispora tropica, a marine actinomycete

**Action**: Proteasome inhibitor

Status: In clinical trials for multiple myeloma and

glioblastoma

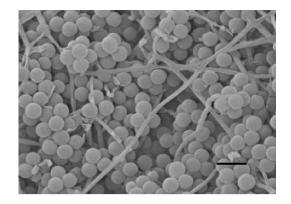


Source: Trididemnum solidum (sea squirt)

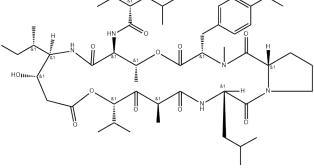
**Use**: Antiviral and anticancer (e.g., plitidepsin shows promise against **SARS-CoV-2** and **multiple myeloma**)

Commercialized by: PharmaMar













## **Applications in Cosmetics: UV Protection**

#### A. Mycosporine-like Amino Acids (MAAs) (Singh et al., 2021)

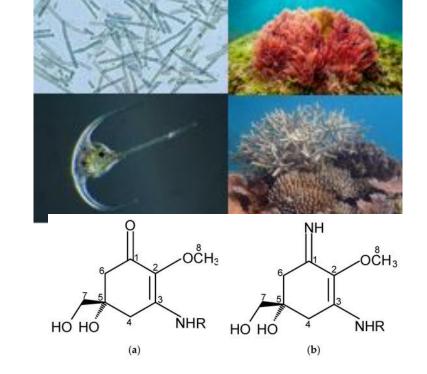
**Sources:** Cyanobacteria, red algae, dinoflagellates, corals.

**Function:** Act as natural sunscreens absorbing UV-A and UV-B radiation (310–360 nm).

Properties: Photostable (don't degrade easily in sunlight),

Water-soluble, Antioxidant activity

**Applications:** Used in natural sunscreen formulations, Incorporated in anti-aging and moisturizing products.



#### B. Scytonemin (Ručová et al., 2023)

Source: Cyanobacteria (e.g., Scytonema species).

Function: Strong UV-A absorber.

**Properties:** Lipid-soluble, Anti-inflammatory and antioxidant

**Application:** Potential for anti-photoaging cosmetics





## **Applications in Cosmetics: UV Protection**

#### C. Marine Carotenoids (Shah et al., 2025)

**Examples:** Astaxanthin, fucoxanthin

Sources: Microalgae, seaweeds, crustaceans

Function: Antioxidants that protect against

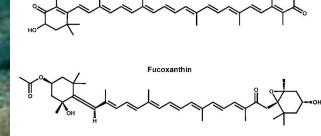
**UV-induced oxidative stress** 

**Applications:** Oral and topical formulations,

Anti-wrinkle, skin-brightening, and

anti-inflammatory effects





#### D. Polysaccharides from Algae (Li et al., 2024)

**Example:** Sulfated polysaccharides

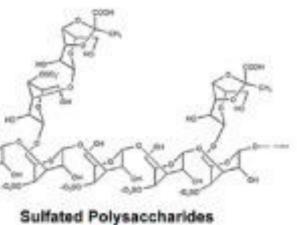
**Source:** Brown and red algae

Function: Hydration and skin barrier protection; some also show UV filtering

capability.

**Application:** Enhances skin protection and is often used with other active ingredients.









## **Applications in Cosmetics: UV Protection**

#### Omega-3 algae (Parrish, 2024)

Marine bioprospecting has led to the discovery of numerous bioactive compounds, with omega-3 fatty acids being one of the most commercially successful nutraceuticals. These essential fatty acids, primarily eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), are derived from marine sources and play a crucial role in human health.

#### **Sources:**

Microalgae (Sustainable Alternative)

Schizochytrium sp. (high DHA content). Crypthecodinium cohnii (used in vegan omega-3 supplements). Phaeodactylum tricornutum (contains EPA).



#### **Commercial Use:**

Algal oil supplements (e.g., Life's DHA® by DSM, Neuromins® by Martek).







## **Applications in Nutraceuticals**

#### **Examples of Products & Brands**

#### a) Helioguard® 365:

Contains MAAs derived from red algae (Porphyra umbilicalis); used as a natural UV-A filter in cosmetic creams.

# b) Blue Light Protection by Algaktiv<sup>®</sup>: Uses MAAs to protect against blue light and UV.



(Algaktiv, 2024)

#### c) Bioastin®:

A supplement and topical ingredient rich in astaxanthin, used in anti-aging and sun-protective skincare.



(Ambati *et al.*, 2014)







## Applications in Agriculture: Biopesticide

Seaweeds (Macroalgae) (Ganesh et al., 2024)

Brown, green, and red seaweeds contain compounds like fucoidans, phlorotannins, polyphenols, peptides and polysaccharides with pesticidal effects (herbicidal, fungicidal, insecticidal, nematicidal, repellents).

#### **Examples:**

- Ascophyllum nodosum extracts promote resistance to fungal and bacterial pathogens in crops like tomato and maize, by priming plant defense enzymes.
- ☐ Gracilaria, Ulva lactuca, Sargassum species exhibit insecticidal, fungicidal, nematicidal, repellent effects through various extraction methods.



Ascophyllum nodosum



Ulva lactuca



Gracilaria



Sargassum





## Applications in Agriculture: Biopesticide

#### Marine Microorganisms & Fungi (Rodrigues et al., 2022)

Marine fungi and actinomycetes produce novel alkaloids, peptides, polyketides with potent anti-phytopathogenic and insecticidal activities.

For instance, certain marine fungi produced compounds active against plant pathogens in lab screens known **marine-derived pesticides** include nereistoxin analogues used regionally, and newly discovered coral- and sponge-derived alkaloids/insecticides like **manzamine A, hydroxycolorenone, pyridoacridines** with specific activity against agricultural pests.







- □ Nagoya Protocol
- Access & Benefit-Sharing (ABS)
- □ Biopiracy
- Sustainable sampling practices







#### Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol is **an international agreement under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** that aims to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with them.

It establishes a legal framework for access to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, promoting transparency and legal certainty for both providers and users.





(Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011)



#### □ Access & Benefit-Sharing (ABS)

Marine bioprospecting, the exploration of marine genetic resources for valuable compounds, necessitates an Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) framework to ensure fair and equitable distribution of benefits derived from these resources. This framework addresses the challenge of accessing marine genetic resources, particularly in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and aims to fairly distribute the profits from commercialization of products derived from these resources.

Key Aspects of Marine Bioprospecting ABS:

#### Access:

Determining who can access marine genetic resources and under what conditions.

#### Benefit Sharing:

Establishing mechanisms for sharing the benefits derived from the utilization of marine genetic resources.

#### International Law:

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Nagoya Protocol, which governs access to and benefit-sharing of genetic resources.

#### Monitoring and Compliance:

Implementing effective measures to monitor the utilization of marine genetic resources and ensure compliance with ABS agreements.





#### Biopiracy

Biopiracy in marine bioprospecting refers to the unauthorized or unethical appropriation and commercialization of genetic resources and traditional knowledge from the oceans, often without fair compensation or benefit-sharing with the communities or countries where the resources originated.

Key aspects of biopiracy in marine bioprospecting:

#### Unauthorized Access:

Accessing marine genetic resources (like microorganisms, plants, and animals) without proper authorization from the relevant authorities or communities.

#### Commercialization without Benefit-Sharing:

Commercialized without fairly sharing the benefits with the communities or countries that provided the resources.

#### • Exploitation of Traditional Knowledge:

Exploited without proper recognition or compensation to the indigenous communities who possess this knowledge.

#### • Impact on Biodiversity and Communities:

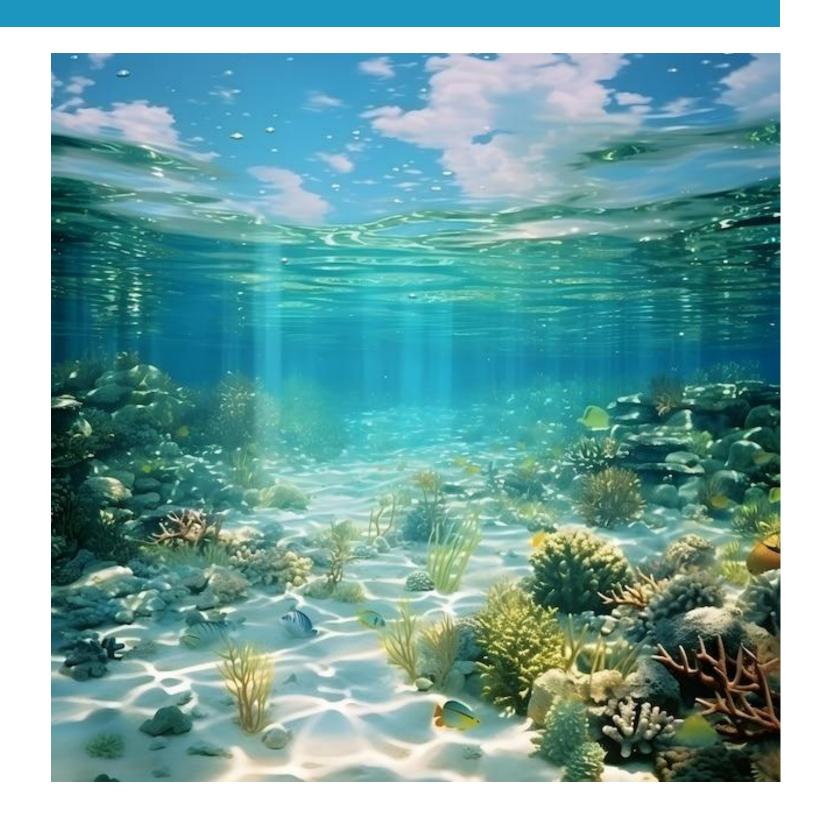
Depletion of marine resources, negatively impact biodiversity, and deprive local communities of potential economic benefits and cultural heritage.





## Summary

- ☐ Marine bioprospecting = future of biotechnology
- ☐ Potential for health, food, and environmental innovation
- □ Needs science, ethics, policy









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