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Welcome to the February 2019 issue

One of the things that gets me through the dark, damp days of a London winter is planning a holiday getaway in the sun or snow. And I am scarcely alone.

Roughly 1.3 billion overseas trips were made by travellers in 2018, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, another record year, and a doubling of the numbers just since 2000.

In our sustainable tourism briefing this month we look at what the hotels industry, the cruise sector and airlines are doing to try to reduce the climate and social impacts of their soaraway growth.

As Angeli Mehta reports in her package on airlines, CO2 emissions from aviation are on course to grow by up to 700% by 2050, with even the most ardent environmentalist having difficulty kicking the flying habit.

The contradictions are particularly evident as we publish this issue in the week top executives from companies around the world gathered in Davos to discuss climate change at the World Economic Forum, having reportedly chartered 1,500 private jet flights – an 11% increase in such flights from last year.

Angeli Mehta looks at industry moves to cut airlines’ climate impact, including the use of biofuels, and assesses the impact of new voluntary rules for offsetting under the Corsia scheme.

Many airports now claim to be carbon-neutral in their ground operations, but Heathrow Airport believes its greater impact will be in influencing what happens in the skies. Angeli Mehta reports on how the airport intends to use landing charges to incentivise adoption of cleaner and quieter fleets and wants to become a hub for the development of sustainable aviation fuels.

The cruise industry has been under fire because of the growing protests in European cities about over-tourism, and due to their contribution to pollution and CO2 emissions. In January a new €8 tax on “day-tripper” cruise passengers
came into effect in Amsterdam, prompting two cruise lines to cancel future stops in the city. Eric Marx looks at how cruise operators are working to defuse their biggest sustainability challenges. And he also reports on their nascent interest in wind propulsion.

Meanwhile, Amy Brown reports warnings from The International Tourism Partnership that the hotels industry, to be compliant with the Paris Agreement, will have to cut its carbon emissions per room per year by 66% from 2010 levels by 2030, and 90% by 2050. She looks at how big hotel chains are working to align themselves with the Global Goals and the Paris Agreement, setting goals to tackle water scarcity, carbon emissions, human rights and youth employment.

She also writes about how the hotel industry is at the frontline in the fight against human trafficking, while Barbra Anderson of Destination Better argues that the travel industry needs to put robust programmes in place to address the risks of participating in modern slavery.

Our second briefing is on the global push to rescue oceans, which are under unprecedented stress. They play a critical role in soaking up CO2 emissions, and alarming new research shows they are feeling the strain, with the Barents Sea in the Arctic predicted to become sea-ice free with a few decades, and possibly even within one decade. Angeli Mehta looks at a plethora of initiatives, including the just-launched Alliance to End Plastic Waste, new rules to cut shipping emissions, the UN Global Compact Action Platform for Sustainable Ocean Business, and the proposed expansion of the Natural Capital Protocol to include oceans.

She also reports on how initiatives like Global Fishing Watch, Sky's Ocean Rescue and the retailer-led Seafood Task Force are trying to tackle over-fishing, a practice that is doing untold damage to the marine ecosystem.

As always, there’s a lot to digest in our February issue. We hope our subscribers find that it is time well-spent.

Terry Slavin
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Turbulence at 30,000 feet as airlines plot flightpath on CO₂ emissions

With emissions from air travel expected to grow by up to 700% by 2050, Angeli Mehta looks at innovation in biofuels and whether new voluntary rules for offsetting under Corsia will achieve lift-off

When Finnair asked its customers if they would be willing to pay to reduce the carbon footprint of their air travel, more than 70% of them said yes – but only if the money was to be used for environmental work. More than half thought supporting biofuels would be the most effective means.

So Finnair has just introduced Push for Change, a scheme, in partnership with Dutch renewable fuels company SkyNRG, whereby passengers are able to choose to pay for biofuel for a future flight with a donation of €10 for domestic flights, €20 for European flights and €65 for intercontinental. Alternatively, customers can choose to offset their emissions by investing in a project to enable people in Mozambique to use more efficient cookstoves, helping to avoid deforestation.

Finnair was amongst the first airlines to test renewable jet fuels, but says future use will depend on whether customers are willing to invest.

Such a direct measure certainly offers consumers a way out of the “flying dilemma”, where even the most environmentally conscious find ways to justify their flying habits.

Air travel has rapidly moved from a luxury to a right, and there seems no appetite amongst passengers to cut back. In fact, air travel is predicted to
grow so quickly that by 2037 8.2 billion of us will be flying.

Direct emissions from aviation, which today account for 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions, are on course to grow by anywhere between 300% and 700% by 2050.

“The travelling public do have a role to play – but you can’t make responsible choices if the thing you want to choose doesn’t exist. It does need some stimulation from government,” says Damian McLoughlin, commercial development manager for renewable jet fuel at Neste, a Finnish oil products and renewable fuels company.

The UN aviation agency, ICAO, wants to see biofuels substituted in “significant” quantities by 2050, and a working group is thrashing out technical criteria. But its Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (Corsia) is widely regarded as being a weak incentive for airlines to switch fuels. Offsets are cheap, and renewable jet fuel significantly more expensive than fossil-based kerosene.

The voluntary phase of Corsia began in January. Airlines flying from the 77 nations that have so far signed up agreed to start monitoring their emissions, to establish a baseline from 2020. From 2021, airlines will be required to offset any further growth in emissions: some 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions are expected to be offset between 2021 and 2035.

However, a 2016 EU report concluded that offsetting has significant shortcomings, with fewer than 10% of UN projects assessed as delivering on their promises.

Significantly, neither China nor India has yet signed up, and Corsia alone isn’t tough enough to enable Europe to meet its 2030 commitments to cut aviation emissions.

Were Corsia accepted by the EU as the sole measure to tackle aviation emissions, that would mean only domestic flights would be covered by its emissions trading scheme. According to the NGO Transport & Environment, that would risk “creating a gap of 96.2 million tonnes CO₂ – equivalent

30 SECOND READ

- It is predicted that by 2037 8.2 billion of us will be flying. Direct emissions from aviation account for 2% of GHG emissions, and are set to grow 300% to 700% by 2050.
- The UN aviation agency, ICAO, wants to see biofuels substituted in “significant” quantities by 2050. But its Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (Corsia) is regarded as weak. Offsets are cheap, and renewable jet fuel more expensive than kerosene.
- Corsia does force airlines to monitor carbon emissions. From 2021, airlines will be required to offset any further growth in emissions from a 2020 baseline: 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions are expected to be offset between 2021 and 2035.
- Pairing Corsia with national incentives and subsidies is critical. The UK’s decision to include sustainable jet fuels under its Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation (RTFO), for example, has been instrumental in securing investment in solid waste-to-fuel. However, the biggest impact on emissions remains to reduce demand.

Neither China nor India has yet signed up to Corsia, and it isn’t tough enough to enable Europe to meet its 2030 goal to cut aviation emissions.
to Europe’s steel and iron emissions in 2015 – [compared] with the EU’s 2030 target [for airline emissions] due to its weak target and reliance on discredited offsetting”.

“However, Corsia does force airlines to monitor their carbon – no other sub industry in tourism is doing that … and [it] will raise awareness for customers,” says Susanne Becken, professor of sustainable tourism at Australia’s Griffith University.

**Stimulating biofuels**

“We need to see a meaningful shift; Corsia paired with national-level policies,” says Nik Pavlenko, fuels researcher at the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT). Projects whereby renewable jet fuels are added at major airline hubs – whether airlines want them or not – are still at demonstration scale.

United Airline’s partnership with California-based AltAir Fuels (now World Energy) has seen it take over two million gallons of fuel since 2016. It also has a $30m investment in another California producer, Fulcrum BioEnergy, with a commitment to take one billion gallons of alternative fuels. Both deals are the largest to date.

But Pavlenko expects the EU’s renewable energy directive will prompt member states to incorporate an incentive for aviation fuels.

The UK’s decision to include sustainable jet fuels under its Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation (RTFO) has been instrumental in getting the £4.9m investment needed to go ahead with detailed engineering planning on a plant that will convert solid waste, otherwise destined for landfill, into jet fuel. Renewable fuels company Velocys, alongside partners British Airways and Shell, expects to make a final investment decision next year. The 500,000-tonne plant would make enough fuel to power several of BA’s transatlantic routes. Over the next 20 years there’s likely to be upwards of 20m tonnes of waste available.

Neville Hargreaves, vice-president of waste-to-fuels at Velocys, describes the RTFO amendment as “the most important policy step on the transport side”. He adds: “On the waste side … the jury is still out, but we’re happy as long as people don’t prevent waste coming to us.”
Last October, Virgin Atlantic became the first airline to use LanzaTech’s breakthrough fuel, which is made from industrial waste gases. LanzaTech wants to build a 40-50m gallon jet-fuel plant in the UK, and both it and Velocys are competing for a share of a £20m government grant.

Craig Kreeger, Virgin Atlantic Airways’ recently retired chief executive, called on the UK government to commit to bringing the technology to the UK by extending biofuels incentives to carbon capture and utilisation technologies such as LanzaTech’s. With policy and investment support it could have three UK plants running by 2025. Because it’s made from industrial waste gases, LanzaTech says the fuel has a “fighting chance” of coming in on a par with current fossil fuel prices. Crucially, it would also provide some of the pull necessary to get investors interested in UK carbon-capture projects.

Because few airlines have been prepared to pay the price differential for biofuels, subsidy is crucial. This was amply demonstrated when a plan by Geneva airport to add 1% of renewable jet fuel made by Neste collapsed after the Swiss government pulled funding last year. (See Search for sustainable biofuels beset by turbulence)

“The key message is: the longer it takes for the industry to scale up, the more expensive it [renewable fuel] will remain,” says McLoughlin at Neste. He had expected the Geneva project to further that goal, but is optimistic that California’s extension of its Low Carbon Fuel Standard to include alternative aviation fuels will see increased demand this year from airlines.

Neste is working with other fuel suppliers and four airlines on San Francisco’s plan to develop the supply chain and infrastructure for renewable fuels at its international airport.

The ICCT estimates that some 223-225m tonnes of waste and residues are technically available to the EU, which could supply over 36m tonnes oil equivalent of liquid fuel each year. In 2016 alone, EU demand for jet fuel was 40.4m tonnes. But aviation will be competing with road transport for the same fuel stocks. Pavlenko suggests it’s generally cheaper to turn feedstock into road fuel because it requires less processing than jet fuel, and optimising facilities is less expensive.

“We will need every and all types of producers with different tech pathways to achieve scale – whether for ground or aviation fuel,” says McLoughlin.
To get aviation emissions down means significant capital expenditure for scale-up, and that requires security of long-term policy and guaranteed demand. “Alternative fuel deployment alone can’t be the answer, [while] improved efficiency can take a long time because of the lifetime of aircraft. Reducing the demand side could have the biggest impact,” suggests Pavlenko.

How that can be achieved, however, remains an unanswered question.

“Price is big moderator,” says New Zealand-based Becken. “Airlines jump up and down about anything that looks like a tax, and flights have become cheaper and cheaper, so flying is the cheapest form of transport in my part of the world.”

However sensitive airlines are, there has been no discernible impact on passenger numbers since the UK introduced air passenger duty in 1994. It has also increased the duty regularly since.

Airlines pay no fuel tax, and VAT in the EU is charged only on domestic flights. According to calculations by European campaign group Environment & Transport (E&T), levying 15% VAT on all EU flights would raise €17bn, while a kerosene tax levied at the same rate as minimum diesel taxes would raise another €9.5bn.

E&T suggests the funds could plug a post-Brexit budget hole, although others might suggest it could be invested in renewable fuels.

The idea of an individual carbon allowance was discussed in the UK 10 years ago, but the government concluded it wouldn’t be able to sell it to the public. Perhaps amid rising awareness of the urgency of climate change, the time may be ripe to revisit that idea.
While many airports now claim to be carbon-neutral for ground operations and infrastructure, the far greater impact they could have is in influencing what happens in the skies.

Heathrow, which in December became the first airport in the world to publish a roadmap towards carbon-neutral growth, points out that ground operations and infrastructure account for just 1% of its carbon footprint, while passengers travelling to and from the airport accounts for 4%, emissions from planes as they take off and land account for 6%, and inflight emissions from aircraft that originate at Heathrow are responsible for 89%.

Matt Gorman, Heathrow’s sustainability director, says despite the small impact it makes in its own operations, Heathrow intends to “use its scale and influence to advocate change in the sector”.

He adds: “As the airport, we don’t control the emissions from all the flights, but people will see addressing climate change as part of our licence to operate.” Indeed, in 2016 the airport reached agreement with the UK government to build a controversial third runway by promising that future growth would be carbon-neutral.

According to the roadmap, Heathrow intends to redesign the use of airspace in order to end routine circling by landing aircraft.

It will also use landing charges to incentivise adoption of clean and quiet fleets; and while electric aircraft are still some way off, one idea is that Heathrow will allow them to land free for their first year in operation.

It also has ambitions to become a leading hub for the development and deployment of sustainable aviation fuels. The question is how to encourage scale. Again landing charges could be a tool. It’s working with BA and Virgin on their efforts.

Not all Heathrow flights will be covered by the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (Corsia), which began in January (see Turbulence at 30,000 feet), so
Gorman wants to work with airlines to explore how to fill the gap. It’s also looking at offsets – and importantly, how the airport offsets.

Andrew Chen, head of emissions strategy at Heathrow, says the consensus amongst the airport’s stakeholders is that “offsetting is not verifiable; you can’t monitor; can’t ensure benefits are actually delivered”.

So the airport decided to get directly involved in a project, rather than going through third parties. It funded a pilot with the Lancashire Wildlife trust to restore peatland.

“We think it offers a really cost-effective way to offset carbon, as well as providing other benefits ... for biodiversity and communities,” says Gorman, who admits he’s become a peatland enthusiast.

Eighty percent of UK peatlands are degraded, emitting around 16m tonnes of carbon dioxide each year – roughly equivalent to the amount released by departing Heathrow flights.

Restoration, achieved by blocking up drainage ditches to prevent moisture escaping, stops the peatland drying out and emitting carbon, and gradually, as the ecosystem starts to recover, it will begin to sequester carbon again.

Peatland restoration projects have a minimum life of 30 or 50 years, and whilst there is a peatland code for uplands, Lancashire’s project is on lowland. Gorman explains there is a Defra methodology, but there might be a case for establishing a lowlands code. It will report on the project and as part of that, look at third-party certification.

Which offsetting credits will be allowed into the new system is being decided by The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) now, and guidance is expected early this year. “We’re keen to see what emerges and then engage the UK government on the eligibility of peatland,” Gorman adds.
Treading more lightly in the hotels industry

Amy Brown looks at how big hotel chains are working to align themselves with the Global Goals and the Paris Agreement, setting goals to tackle water scarcity, carbon emissions, human rights and youth employment.

The estimated $550bn global hotel and hospitality sector is one of the world’s fastest-growing industries. And with some 17.2 million rooms booked each year, it is also one of the most impactful.

Tourism contributes about 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and those are set to grow by 130% by 2035, according to the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership.

The International Tourism Partnership (ITP) warns that the hotel industry must reduce its carbon emissions per room per year by 66% from 2010 levels by 2030, and 90% by 2050, in order to stay within the limits of the Paris Agreement.

Megan Epler Wood, director of the International Sustainable Tourism Initiative at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, says: “One of the biggest questions now facing the industry is how to cope with the impacts of climate change to ensure there is a transition at the destination level to responsible use of resources.”

She adds: “That includes development of renewable energy solutions at the regional level, protection of coastal infrastructure from sea-level rise, and protection of ecosystems, which help to buffer the impacts of climate change.”
Many hoteliers, however, are making impressive strides in managing their social and environmental impacts.

Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott, Four Seasons, Radisson and the InterContinental Hotels Group are among the 14 members of the ITP, a collaborative platform set up by the UK’s Business in the Community responsible business network. ITP members have set 2030 goals aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals on four key issues: water scarcity, carbon emissions, human rights and youth employment.

“We are opening a hotel a day, so we have to look at destination stewardship’”

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“We are opening a hotel a day, so we have to look at destination stewardship.”

Hilton has said it will double its investment in social impact and cut its environmental impact in half worldwide by 2030 as part of its Travel with Purpose commitment.

Marriott pledged by 2025 to train 100% of its employees to recognise human trafficking, a growing problem for the industry (see Hotels try to turn the tide on human trafficking).

“We have the potential to drive sustainable and inclusive growth across an industry that is rapidly growing,” says Daniella Foster, senior director of global corporate responsibility for Hilton. “We’re opening a hotel a day, so it is important that we look at the future of travel and tourism through the lens of destination stewardship.”

Another ITP member, Soneva, which owns three luxury resorts in the Maldives and Thailand, is providing access to fresh water for local communities with its own water bottling plant, while India-based ITC Hotels Group, with its mantra of “responsible luxury”, has Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED) platinum-certified each of its hotels, integrating elements such as 100% LED lighting, solar panels and living roofs.

30 SECOND READ

- The hotel and hospitality sector is estimated at $550bn. The International Tourism Partnership (ITP) has warned the industry must reduce its carbon emissions to stay within Paris Agreement limits.
- Hilton, Hyatt, and Soneva are among 14 members of the ITP, which has set 2030 goals aligned with the SDGs on water scarcity, carbon emissions, human rights and youth employment.
- Hotels are focused on energy efficiency, as well as water stewardship, cotton use, and plastics and food waste.
- Many hotels support youth employment to help ensure skilled labour – the industry employs one in 10 globally. The ITP’s Youth Career Initiative is a hotel-based programme providing disadvantaged young people with work skills.
- However, small and independent hotels dominate, and research shows these put less effort into sustainability. With overpopulated destinations and strained infrastructure, the industry’s challenges remain considerable.
And the Mercure Convention Center Ancol in Jakarta, Indonesia, winner of the 2018 Green Hotelier Award for responsible hotel of the year, netted 51% water savings on its own property and worked with local government to help 7,300 people improve access to water.

Air conditioning, kitchen and laundry facilities and hotel guest rooms contribute the most to energy consumption, prompting hotels to focus on energy efficiency, switching to renewable energy and electrification. Using ITP’s Hotel Carbon Measurement tool, some 24,000 member hotels saw a 6.8% reduction in energy consumption in 2016.

“That’s significant but a lot more needs to be done,” says Rajesh. “We are encouraging our members to embrace Science Based Targets and to reduce emissions at scale.”

Hilton has committed to reduce carbon emissions by 61% by 2030, and was the first in the industry to set a science-based target. All Hilton hotels are required to use LightStay, Hilton’s corporate responsibility measurement system, to set annual targets for energy, water and waste usage. The platform measures goal progress, tracks energy use and carbon output.

Since 2008 it has reduced carbon emissions and waste by 30%, and energy and water consumption by 20%, saving more than $1bn in operating efficiencies.

At Climate Week New York in September the company signed up to the Climate Group’s EP100 initiative, the energy-efficiency counterpart to the RE100 initiative, committing to expand its smart energy management system and achieve a 40% energy productivity improvement by 2030, from a 2008 baseline.

“If you just look at this from the perspective of running a business, energy is typically a hotel’s second-highest operating cost,” says Foster. “We’re focused on creating innovative solutions to do more with less.”

Whitbread, the UK’s largest hospitality company, uses 100% renewable energy at all its UK sites and has set a science-based target. It recently announced plans to halve its carbon emissions intensity by 2025 and as much as 88% by 2050.

“This was a priority for us, not just because it’s the right thing to do to combat the adverse impacts of climate change,” says James Pitcher, director of sustainability at Whitbread. “If large businesses create more demand for renewable energy in the UK, it should cause more renewable energy generating assets to be built, which will benefit the whole country.”
Fighting waste

Arnfinn Oines, who bears the title of social and environmental conscience at luxury hotel chain Soneva, says its resorts are 100% self-sufficient in water, collecting rainwater at its Thai resort and establishing a desalination plant at its Maldives resorts. In 2008 it began bottling all its drinking water in glass bottles, eliminating plastic ones. It opened a water-bottling plant on a neighbouring island in the Maldives, so the local population not only has access to more clean water but consumes it in refillable bottles.

“Our goal was to provide the local community with water but also to eliminate single-use plastic bottles. It’s run by local entrepreneurs and is something we hope to bring on to more islands in our region, to show you can eliminate plastic-bottle waste and, at the same time, provide good drinking water and run a social enterprise,” Oines says.

Water stewardship is key to Hilton’s initial $1m investment to drive sustainable travel and tourism in Africa, announced in 2018. Hilton’s goal is to reduce its water consumption by 50% and activate 20 context-based water projects in at-risk communities by 2030, with its Africa investment playing a big role.

Whitbread has a large number of greywater recycling systems installed in its larger hotels, such as the Premier Inn Abu Dhabi, where the system has helped cut water usage by nearly a quarter. “That’s a significant achievement in one of the world’s highest water-consuming countries,” Pitcher says.

The hotel industry is also facing growing stakeholder pressure to minimise single-use plastic, such as straws, cups, bottles and laundry bags. Hilton eliminated plastic straws from its hotels by end of 2018 and will phase them out of its global portfolio by mid-2019, on the path to its goal of cutting waste by 50% by 2030.

Finding the best replacement for single-use plastics for a company as large as Hilton is not easy, says Foster. “We want to understand what the best alternatives are, things that have potential to go to scale. We need to understand if there is access to recycling or to composting, as that would influence the use of biodegradable products. We’re trying to be thoughtful about it and that may mean working with local partners to drive recycling infrastructure where none currently exists.”

At Whitbread, 100% of waste from its owned Premier Inn and restaurants sites is diverted from landfill. Soneva ended use of single-use plastics in 2008.
and recycles 90% of its solid waste. Organic waste is composted and used in the hotels' vegetable gardens.

To reduce food waste, Hyatt worked with other major hotel brands, the American Hotel & Lodging Association and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to develop the Hotel Kitchen Toolkit, which includes guidance and best practices around food waste reduction at hotels. At Hilton, each property has its own food and beverage waste reduction goal.

Social and procurement impacts
One in every 10 jobs globally is in the hotel industry. Hotels are often the major employer in developing countries and thus are responsible for the micro economy around them. The industry will need qualified labour to meet its huge growth over the next ten years.

Many hotels are supporting youth employment to help ensure a supply of skilled labour and address an acute social issue. According to the International Labour Organization, more than 40% of the world's young people are either unemployed or living in poverty.

“In providing inclusive employment, the industry has massive opportunities and is making real efforts,” Rajesh says. The ITP Youth Career Initiative is a 24-week hotel-based education programme that provides disadvantaged young people with life and work skills.

Hyatt’s global programme, RiseHY, pairs hospitality career opportunities with young people aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor working, with a goal to hire 10,000 young people by 2025.

“At Hyatt, we are in a unique position to be part of the solution because hospitality is an industry where people can start in entry-level roles and build meaningful, life-long careers,” says a Hyatt spokesman.

Through sustainable procurement, hotels can also demonstrate leadership and minimise risk. If exploitation or environmental damage is uncovered in the supply chain, the risks to reputation and profit are real.

“The hotel industry is vast, and its procurement methods have enormous potential for good,” says Harvard’s Epler Wood.

Hilton’s commitment to double its spend in local sourcing by 2030 is a central part of its Africa initiative, according to Foster.
Hotels are big users of cotton, one of the most resource-intensive crops, with one kilogramme of cotton using 2,000 litres of water to produce, as well as pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. (See Unpicking the confusion over what constitutes sustainable cotton)

In Britain, Whitbread, which is second only to the NHS in the volumes of cotton it procures, has mapped its cotton supply chain down to the farms in Pakistan where it is grown. “This has allowed us to have fully traceable and sustainable cotton in our supply chain in the past year,” Pitcher says.

Some hotels have been innovating in procuring sheets made from alternative textiles, and in more circular approaches to textile waste.

The Peninsula Hotels, a luxury hotel chain operated by The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, is working with social enterprise and retail partners to upcycle cotton from its used bedcovers, turning them into robes for children.

The Westin Hotels & Resorts group worked with South Carolina-based Divergent Energy to develop a proprietary way to break down the fibres in sheets, re-weave them into fabric, and upcycle them into children’s pyjamas, a pilot project that it is rolling out throughout its group.

But while the major companies are demonstrating progress, there remain daunting challenges. Epler Woods points out that as tourism grows rapidly around the world, “destinations are becoming increasingly overburdened, and infrastructure is strained. In many regions, there is no sewage treatment and inadequate solid waste management. Hotels frequently do not take responsibility for the lack of adequate infrastructure, even if they seek to manage their own properties sustainably.”

Those that are trying to act more sustainable are in the minority, points out Epler Wood. “The problem is that the big brands [which have sustainability programmes] only represent a small proportion of the hotel industry. The barrier is the dominance of small and independent brands, which have been shown by academic research to do much less to review sustainability in their business practices.”

ITP’s Rajesh says to make progress, all hotels have to be on the same journey. “Our ambition is to make this an industry-wide movement for responsible growth and not just for larger companies.”

But as more in the industry realise how they can balance profit with purpose, she suggests, others will follow suit.
Hotels try to turn the tide on human trafficking

The hotel industry is at the frontline in the fight against human trafficking. The International Labour Organization estimates that 24.9 million people worldwide are victims of labour and sex trafficking. Trafficking networks often rely on legitimate businesses, including hotels, to sustain their illegal operations and infrastructure, using them to house their victims while in transit or to sell their victims’ forced services.

Many hotels are taking broad measures to tackle the problem, both individually and collectively. The International Tourism Partnership (ITP), a hotel industry platform, has embedded human rights, including elimination of fees charged to workers to secure employment, into the corporate governance of its members. Last June, ITP launched its Principles on Forced Labour, and is working with its members to incorporate these in their operations.

It also supports a Youth Career Initiative programme that helps hotels to re-integrate survivors of human trafficking through secure employment.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) has an anti-human trafficking taskforce across its operations. It works on reinforcing policies, providing awareness and education to employees and key stakeholders through training and communication campaigns, and by collaborating with stakeholders, such as the World Childhood Foundation, which was co-founded by the Carlson Family Foundation and works to prevent abuse and exploitation of children.

In partnership with Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT) International, a global network of organisations working to end the sexual exploitation of children, it also recently launched digital anti-trafficking ads on the company’s intranet “myCWT” platform with a simple call to action: “report it”. CWT has also made training videos produced by the BEST Alliance (Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking) available to all employees worldwide.
James Pitcher, director of sustainability at Whitbread, the UK’s largest hospitality company, says Whitbread works to raise awareness of the issue across its operations, including training its Premier Inn teams to identify and report suspected cases of modern slavery.

“It’s important not to be afraid to ask uncomfortable questions – both of ourselves and our suppliers, and we make sure we constantly challenge, scrutinise and interrogate,” Pitcher says.

“While we are committed to working collaboratively with our suppliers, we are very clear through our responsible sourcing policy that we will not tolerate those who persistently disregard our standards,” he adds.

By the end of 2018, Hilton had trained all of its supply team members in the risks of modern-day slavery in the supply chain and set 2020 as the deadline to train all of its 300,000 employees in anti human-trafficking.

Marriott is in the middle of a huge effort to ensure all of its almost half-million employees in 125 countries have completed mandatory training to recognise human trafficking by 2025.

At Hyatt, human trafficking training is mandatory for all its hotels worldwide, including franchisees.

Like other major hotel brands, Hyatt has signed the non-profit ECPAT code of conduct. It also supports the US Department of Homeland Security’s Blue Campaign to end human trafficking.

Signing the code is not enough, however, says Joanna Rubenstein, president and CEO of the World Childhood Foundation (USA), and a board member of the UN World Tourism Network on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism (See The travel industry is at the front line of human trafficking. It must act).

“Whenever I travel, and I travel quite a bit, I ask a hotel employee or manager if they’ve signed the code and many don’t know what I’m talking about. It’s important that those who sign report on the actions they are taking to live up to the code,” she says.

Rubenstein says that fighting anti-trafficking and modern slavery should become a core part of a business and a liability issue if they don’t measure up. “If a hotel does not have this kind of standard in place to prevent human trafficking, it should lose its license to operate,” she says.

Amy Brown
‘Over-tourism’ crisis and fuel emissions dog cruise industry

Eric Marx reports on how cruise operators are working to defuse their biggest sustainability challenges

Looking back at 2018, the travel industry will likely celebrate another year of record growth. Roughly 1.3 billion overseas trips were made by travellers last year, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Globally, that’s a doubling of the numbers just since 2000.

Yet amidst the celebrations the industry is now also hearing another sound: municipalities bemoaning how tourist hoards are crowding out locals in popular destinations, particularly Mediterranean port cities. The pressure is especially fierce for the world’s 20 hottest tourist destinations, which have an increasing proportion of the market. By 2020 it is forecast that they will see more visitors than the rest of the world combined.

The fast-growing cruise industry is seen as the prime offender. Some port cities are putting limits on cruise ship arrivals. Santorini in Greece is one example. Others include Barcelona, Ibiza and Majorca.

In January, a new €8 tax on “day-tripper” cruise passengers came into effect in Amsterdam, prompting two cruise lines, MSC Cruises and Cruise and Maritime Voyages, to cancel future stops in the city.

The Venetian government has also supported a proposal to impose a €10 tax on day-tripping cruise passengers in its recent budget bill.
According to industry research, from 2004 to 2014 global cruise vacations grew 20% faster than global land-based vacations. In Europe alone, the cruise market has grown by 49% in the past 10 years.

There are over 300 cruise ships in service today and more are being launched over the next few years. Moreover, the ships themselves are growing in size, with the largest ships holding more than 6,000 passengers and burning upwards of nearly 100,000 gallons of fuel a day.

But academics say the cruise industry is well suited to managing the over-tourism crisis. “Cruise ships still have quite a bit of integrated control in the level of service and quality, and in the size of their ships,” said Christian Laesser, a tourism professor at the University of St Gallen in Switzerland.

Unlike air travel, theirs is not a commodity business, explained Laesser. Like ports, they have the ability to control access and, thus, carrying capacity.

“You have to negotiate and go through the proper political process,” he added. “That is essentially what the tourism industry and cruise ships do.”

That’s a position backed by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the world’s largest cruise industry advocacy group, which describes the recently introduced day-tripper tax in Amsterdam as “disproportionate”.

“Transit cruise passengers represent only 1% of the total tourist traffic in Amsterdam and last year the City of Amsterdam received over €60m in net revenues from the Port of Amsterdam as a result of cruise calls to the city,” the CLIA said in a statement. “In comparison the remaining 99% of the tourist traffic are expected to contribute … just short of €80m [in tourist taxes] in 2019. It is self-evident that the contribution of cruise passengers is extremely disproportionate.”

Typical cruise-line itineraries are established more than a year in advance. Destinations know how many passengers are arriving months ahead, as well as when they’re leaving and how long they will stay, noted the association’s director of public affairs, Catharine Montgomery, in an e-mail.

“Putting limits on tourism is not necessarily the answer,” Montgomery continued. “Tourism that is beneficial to the residents and guests of a destination requires planning and management.”
A case in point is Bergen, a popular cruise port that lies in the heart of Norway’s fjord region.

As recently as October, local media reported a majority in the city council favouring a reduction in the number of cruise ship calls at the city. But CLIA headed this off by working to find long-term “sustainable solutions” that make it possible to resolve concerns, Montgomery said.

Another example is Dubrovnik, a frequently visited cruise destination whose picturesque Old Town is regularly stampeded by travelling hordes numbering in the thousands – a situation that has been exacerbated by its starring role as a backdrop in the hit TV series Game of Thrones.

Threatened by Unesco with the loss of its heritage status, Mayor Mato Franković responded by working with CLIA to curb the number of cruises during peak times and stagger arrivals. The plan is to limit the number of visitors to 4,000 people a day, and to tackle other measures such as rising coach visits, said Mayor Franković, speaking at last year’s Responsible Business Summit Europe in London.

But with a new EU-funded airport and a highway under construction linking the airport to Dubrovnik there are those who remain sceptical of the mayor’s efforts.

Like Dubrovnik, Rome wants to experiment with redirecting tourists and perhaps even limiting them. Barcelona is no longer approving new hotels, Paris has strictly regulated Airbnb and other apartment-rental platforms, and Palma de Mallorca has even completely banned the renting of holiday apartments on them.

“The entire travel industry must work together,” warned Montgomery. “There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to destination sustainability.”

**Emission targets**

But over-tourism is only one of the cruise industry’s challenges. Its environmental impacts are also under the spotlight, with global regulations being instituted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on sulphur and carbon emissions stemming from ship exhaust fumes.
A global cap on sulphur emissions coming into effect in 2020 should go a long way to curtailing the industry’s use of bunker fuel, an extremely low-quality, high-polluting fuel blend, while a hard mandate limiting CO₂ emissions could be in place as soon as 2023.

This expectation was bolstered by a strategy document issued in April by the IMO, which is a UN agency in charge of shipping representing 170 signatory countries.

The historic agreement defines for the first time the shipping industry’s commitment to tackle climate change: by 2050 all commercial vessels will have to cut their CO₂ emissions by at least 50%.

Already this has prodded Maersk, the world’s largest container shipping company, to announce in December a pledge to slash its emissions to zero by 2050.

“We will have to abandon fossil fuels,” Søren Toft, Maersk’s chief operating officer, told the Financial Times. “We will have to find a different type of fuel or a different way to power our assets. This is not just another cost-cutting exercise. It’s far from that. It’s an existential exercise, where we as a company need to set ourselves apart.”

There is also movement in the cruise sector, but thus far neither Carnival Corporation nor Royal Caribbean Cruises, the industry leaders, have offered up anything resembling a hard zero decarbonisation commitment.

Royal Caribbean Cruises will be introducing its first fleet of liquified natural gas (LNG) ships in 2022 and is investing in fuel cell technology, which converts chemicals into electricity. Carnival Group, which owns AIDA and the P&O lines, has also increased its investment in LNG, which burns sulphur and is soot-free.

Some LNG ships claim a reduction in CO₂ emissions of 15%, though that depends crucially on keeping leakage of the greenhouse gas methane to a minimum in ships and bunkers.
“LNG can reduce air pollutants significantly, but its carbon footprint is more or less the same as with diesel/HFO [residual fuel oil],” according to Dietmar Oeliger, head of transport policy at NABU, a German environmental group that monitors cruise shipping.

“Investing massively in LNG infrastructure might cause lock-in effects,” Oeliger added. “Why not switch to diesel instead, install emission-abatement technology, and wait for a decarbonised fuel?”

Most ocean-going cruise liners are either installing new exhaust filtration systems (“scrubbers”) or purchasing cleaner-burning distillate fuels. For the sector’s 300 ocean-going cruise liners LNG is simply too costly an investment, said experts.

Many see LNG as a transitional technology that will lead to the banishing of conventional petroleum-based fuels.

That prognosis was given significant backing last March with the release of a report by the International Transport Forum (ITF), an inter-governmental organisation with 59 member countries that acts as a thinktank on transport policy for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The ITF report asserts that an almost complete decarbonisation of shipping could be achieved by 2035 using currently known technologies.

The challenges are considerable, but the report authors point to high-level reductions coming from hydrogen or methanol in fuel cells, advanced biofuels, electric energy from renewable sources or energy from environmentally friendly technologies such as power-to-gas, solar, battery storage and wind assistance.

Meanwhile, in April 2018, Norway’s parliament adopted a resolution that would halt emissions from cruise ships and ferries in the Norwegian world-heritage fjords “as soon as technically possible and no later than 2026”.

The assumption is that the fjords will only service electric ships in eight years’ time, bringing about what would be the first zero emissions zone at sea.

It seems the net zero-emissions future is already here. The hardest part may just be in changing industry mindset.
Cruise industry finds the answer may be blowing in the wind

The shipping sector’s interest in “sail tech” took on greater urgency after the International Maritime Organization reached an agreement last April to slash emissions by 50% by 2050.

“Just in the last six to 12 months we’ve seen a significant groundswell of support,” said Gavin Allwright, secretary of the International Windship Association (IWSA), a membership organisation that promotes wind propulsion for commercial shipping and boasts over 100 members.

In the past year there’s been a threefold increase in rotor-sail installations, with 14 rotors fitted on six vessels, said Allwright.

Rotor sails have a large spinning cylinder amidship. Wind hitting the rotor creates a vertical force that reduces the power requirement from a ship’s main propellers, a phenomenon known as the Magnus effect.

“This is not about guys with shaggy beards and pipes pulling in the rigging,” said Allwright. “These are all computer-operated, with weather stations on vessels helping to get the maximum utility from the rigs.”

Last April, the Finnish shipping company Viking Line’s M/S Viking Grace, which was the first passenger ferry to run on liquified natural gas, became the first passenger ferry to be fitted with a rotor sail, made by Finland’s Norsepower.

Up to that point most of the installations had been on tankers, general cargo ships and bulk freight carriers.

The Peace Boat project, which aims to build the world’s most sustainable cruise ship, the Ecoship, will be fitted with 10 retractable sails, which together will be expected to produce an average of 4% of the 55,000-ton boat’s propulsion power.
And Chantiers de l’Atlantique (formerly STX France) has unveiled plans for a new line of hybrid wind and dual-fuel cruise vessels, the largest of which will be the 190-metre Silenseas, carrying 300 passengers and 80 crew.

“The entire industry has had its eyes on the cruise sector, for two main reasons,” said Allwright.

One, is its profitability, which at the moment far surpasses the commercial freight segment. Second, is its interface with the public.

The question is whether wind propulsion can deliver on its promises: between 10%-30% fuel savings on retrofits, and up to 50% for optimised new builds, meaning a renewable energy source, free and abundant delivery at the point of use.

It’s a massive number compared with savings offered up by other alternative fuels and renewable energy options, which are typically working on one to two per cent changes.

“There’s a lot of industry scepticism,” Allwright acknowledged.

But with large companies like Maersk, Airbus and Renault all pursuing various wind-propulsion initiatives, Allwright said there’s now both high visibility and a backbone of support in the form of access to capital.

Small sail carbon vessel projects are slated for lift-off through EU funding programmes for cross-border renewable projects. A wide range of projects, not just for rotors but also for hard and soft sails, are currently under way.

Third-party verification tools for wind-technology uptake are being developed, alongside wind-propulsion hubs that will cluster together wind-propulsion technology developers, engineering firms, research institutes, shipping companies and ship builders.

A 2017 EU Commission report forecasts the market potential for wind propulsion in 2030 to be upwards of 10,000-plus installations, primarily on bulkers and tankers.

“That’s just in 12 years’ time,” said Allwright, who noted the report’s arrival in 2017, prior to the industry’s renewed focus on decarbonisation.

“The market is just starting to kick in,” he added.

Eric Marx
‘The travel industry is at the front line of human trafficking. It must act’

Barbra Anderson of Destination Better says that by having robust programmes in place, hotels will be better placed to address the risks of participating in modern slavery

We often think of human trafficking as taking place on the other side of the world. But this form of modern slavery happens in virtually every community. Poverty, crime, war, the internet, and gender-based violence are a few of the drivers that put people in positions vulnerable to being trafficked, according to ECPAT International, a 107-member organisation in 95 countries that seeks to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The travel and tourism industry is impacted daily as traffickers transport victims on aeroplanes, taxis, trains and buses, even more so during major sporting events, conventions and at vacation destinations. Hotels may unknowingly, and sometimes knowingly, sell rooms to sex traffickers for exploitation or may hire labour-trafficked individuals to work in their operations. (See Hotels try to turn the tide on human trafficking)

Even after 20 years in the travel industry, I was not fully aware of the impact human trafficking had on the sector until I led global corporate responsibility for Sabre, a leading technology provider to the industry.

In 2011, after conducting an exercise with Sabre leadership to identify the company’s significant social and environmental impacts, we realized that travel companies were unwittingly used by human trafficking operations. A
cross-organisational team developed a three-part strategy to educate the travel industry on human trafficking, advocate for legislation change and provide opportunities for leaders to collaborate.

We branded the initiative Passport to Freedom, and became the first technology company to sign the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, a multi-stakeholder initiative with the mission to provide awareness, tools and support to the tourism industry to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.

Our team was able to establish an awareness that ultimately set a precedent of zero tolerance and sparked conversations across the industry.

**New legislation on horizon**

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in a joint briefing with the US Congressional Caucus on Human Trafficking, reported in May 2018 that although transportation and hotel professionals now recognise the role they can play in identifying potential trafficking victims, some companies have been slow to join the fight.

It pointed out that **legislation pending in Congress** will require hotels and airlines to train their employees to spot and report signs of trafficking before the companies can become eligible to win government contracts, and noted that more decentralised systems of travel and tourism — such as Airbnb and Uber — may need new frameworks to ensure that their systems do not become the preference of traffickers on the move.

As the leader of Sabre’s Passport to Freedom team, I learned that a crucial step in ending this horrific crime is to drag it into the light. I later co-founded a company, Destination Better, that ensures human trafficking is included in the methodologies we use to assess social and environmental risks for our clients.

For organisations of any size there are six actions we recommend taking to identify operational and reputational risk associated with human trafficking:

1. Work with procurement departments to identify goods and services associated with a high risk of trafficking, such as labour used in cleaning crews, call centres, hotels and retail outlets.
2. Review your company’s bookings process, sales cycle and on-property interactions and research online interactions to make sure that a company is in no way linked to suspicious referral websites or companies.

3. Design and deploy training programmes for front-line employees to identify potential human trafficking situations, including how to appropriately and safely respond, and educate travelling employees about acceptable conduct and the need to protect children.

4. Engage your supply chain by identifying risk and sharing knowledge and expertise.

5. Proactively respond to the legislative actions that have forced companies to take a look at their own supply chains, for example, the UK Modern Slavery Act.

6. Consider aligning your business to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically, target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.”

We also recommend companies sign relevant codes, such as ECPAT’s Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, and the UN World Trade Organisation (WTO) Code of Ethics.

As Edmund Burke famously wrote, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”. The time has come for organisations to address human trafficking by leveraging their business to save lives, create positive economic impacts and leave a meaningful legacy for those caught in the reprehensible practice of modern-day slavery.
Saving our oceans
High seas rescue mission: the global push to save oceans

From the Alliance to End Plastic Waste to new rules on cutting shipping emissions, Angeli Mehta looks at the plethora of initiatives to relieve the unprecedented stresses on marine life

Our oceans give us life. They produce half the oxygen we need to breathe, and they soak up carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere. They also provide us with food and recreation, and enable 90% of the world’s trade. But they’re under huge stress.

Climate change would be worse if it weren’t for the fact that the oceans take up about half the carbon dioxide we add to the atmosphere. But the extra carbon dioxide is changing the chemistry of the oceans so they’re becoming more acidic.

“The rate of acidification is unprecedented in the last 800,000 years,” says Sarah Cooley, director of the ocean acidification programme at the Ocean Conservancy. “Marine life has never experienced such a fundamental shift in ocean conditions this quickly.”

And acidification is just one challenge. She points out that marine life also has to contend with warming, disease, plastics pollution and over-fishing. In just 180 years, we have managed to change systems that took millennia to evolve.

The oceans will continue to take up carbon dioxide but it’s not clear how much – or for how long. “The sooner we can decrease carbon dioxide emissions, the better,” suggests Cooley. But meanwhile, other stresses – such as
nitrogen run-off from agricultural land, and coral reefs being hit by boats or damaged by humans standing on them – can all be tackled.

The first alerts came from the now well-documented damage to coral reefs from both warming and acidification, and the large-scale loss of oyster hatcheries on the pacific coasts of North America. Cooley says efforts are under way to cultivate bivalve shellfish such as oysters and mussels together with kelp, so protecting not only livelihoods, but helping to restore coastal ecosystems.

Kelp absorbs carbon dioxide five times as fast as land-based plants, and also likes nitrogen. In Florida, scientists are growing coral fragments, and trying to discover the best stocks and methods for planting into depleted reefs. Aside from their rich biodiversity, coral reefs protect coasts from erosion and flooding by reducing wave energy and trapping sediment.

“One of the biggest benefits of that work is that when you train hundreds of volunteers to plant out baby corals, you educate those volunteers about the scale of the problem the reefs are experiencing,” Cooley says.

What has been more challenging, she adds, is engaging onshore industry.

Wanted: global action

Addressing our oceans’ woes is made difficult because of a lack of joined-up ocean governance, with a complex web of authorities and players all impacting on our oceans’ health. And both waters and marine species cross borders at will.

Since last autumn, states from around the world have been negotiating a UN treaty to protect marine biodiversity in the high seas, which are beyond national jurisdictions. At the moment, according to the High Seas Alliance of NGOs, there is no legally binding mechanism to establish marine-protected areas there, or even to undertake environmental impact assessments.

The UN has also asked business for help, because global governance processes tend to move only slowly. Last year, the UN Global Compact, a voluntary corporate sustainability initiative, brought leading industry players in shipping, energy, and fishing together with finance and equity companies to create the UN Global Compact Action Platform for Sustainable Ocean Business.
“The idea is to ... establish a set of principles on best practice for business in the oceans; and ensure that we get better at protecting the oceans while developing business opportunities,” explains Bjørn Otto Sverdrup, head of sustainability at Norwegian energy company Equinor.

One of its first acts was to map ocean governance. “I would say it [the ocean] has been mismanaged on the governance side,” suggests Sverdrup. The government of Norway may have something to offer: it takes a holistic approach to the management of the environment, “with science-based dialogue, and transparency between business, government and academics,” Sverdrup points out. “A lot of countries don’t regulate their environment in that way.”

A lack of governance is preventing capital from flowing at the scale required to make a difference, according to Torsten Thiele, an ocean finance expert who set up another platform, the Global Ocean Trust, to work on technology and finance solutions to deliver sustainable governance.

“Marine-protected areas work if monitored, and are connected, but you have to do it right,” says Thiele. He’s optimistic that a structure can be found for marine-protected areas (MPAs) on the high seas, and advocates satellite technology to monitor them.

“We need a single global data resource: the same satellite to catch illegal fishing, help operational fishing, and monitor the MPA.”

He points to Global Fishing Watch, which uses satellite technology and machine learning to track large fishing vessels. “That’s the kind of technology we can also use for conservation.” (See Over-fishing a worse threat to oceans than climate change)

Another example where technology had been used effectively to protect marine species involves the placing of acoustic buoys off the US coastline. These alert shipping to avoid potential whale strikes – once a frequent occurrence.

Thiele estimates the world will spend trillions on infrastructure over the next 10 years: “But with tens of billions, if sensibly guided into ocean governance, we could make a massive positive impact on the ocean and global environment.”
He insists economic benefits will outweigh cost. “The low-hanging fruit of improving coastal resilience is highly profitable,” Thiele says. Indeed many developments like early warning systems for coastal storms, flood prevention, protecting livelihoods, and disaster risk management have been demonstrated to yield positive returns.

“In the longer run we need to be more innovative in using technology – reducing the number of vessels and noise from vessels,” suggests Sverdrup of Equinor. Partnerships have led to the development of underwater robots and autonomous vehicles; whilst Equinor has pioneered floating wind farms, which allow turbines to be placed in deeper waters, where they are less likely to disturb fish. The added advantage is that installation is quieter. Otherwise, creating a bubble curtain around conventional substructures breaks up sound waves to cut noise.

The scourge of pollution

The crisis caused by the vast quantities of plastics littering our oceans has caught the public’s imagination, prompting businesses across the world to launch a plethora of initiatives to tackle it.

The latest – the Alliance to End Plastic Waste – launched in January in partnership with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, brings together 30 companies from the plastics, consumer goods, energy and waste sectors, including Procter & Gamble, Shell, Total, Suez, Veolia, Dow and DSM.

Between them, the companies have committed to investing $1.5bn to tackle waste in the environment over the next five years. Initially, the alliance will partner with cities to design waste-management systems, to plug the gap in infrastructure, and invest in an incubator fund set up by Circulate Capital and the Ocean Conservancy, to help deliver a pipeline of projects for investment.

WWF is setting up a mechanism to make brands accountable for what they’ve pledged, and to drive best practice across cities and tourist regions that will stop plastic entering the oceans in the first place.
Environment groups are urging the EU to back plans for ports to charge a fixed fee for handling shipping waste, to deter them from illegally dumping it at sea. Indeed, for the past two years the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam have been offering free plastic waste disposal to ships entering their harbours.

Plastics waste is but one problem for the oceans caused by marine trade. Despite the contribution of shipping to climate change (some 2.5% of global emissions and rising), its activities were not included in the Paris Agreement. Last year, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), committed to at least a 50% cut in emissions by 2050, and to pursue efforts to phase them out altogether.

The industry has its work cut out to meet this aim (See Cruise industry finds the answer may be blowing in the wind), but an instant gain could come from reducing speed. A recent study commissioned by campaign group Transport & Environment suggests a 10% cut in fleet speed could slice 19% off carbon emissions, even accounting for the extra ships that would be required to do the same work.

So-called “slow steaming” also reduces noise (a huge threat to larger marine mammals) and the risk of whale strikes.

From next year, the IMO will ban ships using fuels with a sulphur content of more than 0.5% – compared with 3.5% now. But it looks like many ship owners will opt to “scrub” the exhaust gases with seawater, rather than use more expensive low-sulphur fuels. The fear is that discharging the water at sea will only add to acidification, and further pollute marine waters.

The concept of natural capital has been embraced by the private sector: now there’s a recognition of the need for a shift of focus towards marine-based activities. The Natural Capital Coalition has begun work on an oceans supplement, to develop a global approach to measuring and valuing business impacts and dependencies on the oceans, to inform decision making.

“People have a fundamental connection to the ocean … [They] want the ocean to thrive,” says Cooley of Ocean Conservancy. “We all have a common interest here, and that gets you a long way into a conversation, to be able to talk about solutions.”

Angeli Mehta is a former BBC current affairs producer, with a research PhD. She now writes about science, and has a particular interest in the environment and sustainability. @AngeliMehta
‘Over-fishing a worse threat to oceans than climate change’

Angeli Mehta reports on how initiatives like Global Fishing Watch, Sky’s Ocean Rescue and the retailer-led Seafood Task Force are trying to tackle a practice that is doing untold damage to the marine ecosystem.

Marine life is struggling to adapt to the rapidly changing ocean environment, but its resilience is being undermined by fishing on an industrial scale. Over-fishing not only threatens a valuable source of food, but the entire marine ecosystem.

Ninety per cent of the world’s fish stocks are described as either fully fished or over-exploited; some populations have collapsed altogether. The big fish – desirable because they reproduce when older – disappear first, so fishermen move down the food chain, taking greater numbers of smaller fish, which are themselves food for other marine creatures.

Fisheries increasingly deploy fish aggregating devices (FADs), which can extend 50 metres or more below the surface. They are an efficient means of catching fish such as tuna, because the fish are attracted to the floating devices. But their use is largely unregulated and causing untold damage.

Callum Roberts, professor of marine conservation at York University, told a House of Commons inquiry: “The scale of these losses eclipses the likely stresses from future climate change. This means that reversing the declines, which we can do by protecting places in marine reserves and
better managing exploitation outside them, will go a long way to mitigating climate-change impacts.”

In 2016, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recommended that nations protect 30% of global waters from all extractive activities by 2030. This would give stocks a chance to recover and help preserve biodiversity, thereby building some resilience in ocean ecosystems.

In 2017, marine-protected areas covered just over 6% of the ocean, but many of these are open to fishing. Even where MPAs exist there’s little information on how well-managed they are. So WWF has been working with Sky News’s Ocean Rescue campaign to improve its management, and look at how to bring money into such conservation areas, initially around UK shores.

**Ending over-fishing**

The EU has a commitment to end over-fishing in its waters by 2020. However, the latest fishing quotas, which were agreed in December, ignore scientific advice and have been set too high to meet that target, according to Andrew Clayton, project director at the Pew Charitable Trusts, which works on marine conservation.

Take mackerel, the UK’s most valuable stock. It’s widely distributed across the north-east Atlantic. Populations have been sustainable in some areas, but gradually catches have crept up, to the extent that some areas are over-fished. “Scientists recommended a drastic cut of 62%, but they [EU] went for a much smaller cut.” The full details on EU quotas aren’t public yet but they are understood to be 20% in the largest mackerel fishing areas.

He acknowledges that fishing ministers are under huge pressure, but “we push our luck and fish at the absolute maximum, then luck runs out and we need to make deeper cuts”.

Scientists say changing mesh sizes of nets, or increasing the minimum landing sizes of fish would lessen impacts, while fisheries managers could give higher quotas to fleets that demonstrate a lower impact on ecosystems.

Another worldwide issue is bycatch, where fishermen net species they can’t sell or don’t want. Tropical prawn fisheries are particularly problematic. The Monterey Bay Aquarium in California estimates that for every pound of
shrimp (prawns) caught, another six pounds of other species are discarded. Turtles, seabirds and larger marine mammals get trapped, too.

According to Lyndsey Dodds, head of marine policy for WWF in the UK, around 130,000 harbour porpoises are caught in fishing nets in UK waters each year.

The EU has set bycatch limits for 2019. It is hoped that the new landing obligation will reduce waste by controlling the total amount of fish caught, rather than the amount fishermen bring to port. “It should mean we can improve our knowledge of what’s happening, and management in the long term,” says Dodds. But while quotas have been increased to take account of the landing of bycatch, Clayton says they allow non-target stocks to be caught in numbers well in excess of scientific advice.

Determining sustainability is presently reliant on certification. The largest scheme is run by the Marine Stewardship Council – and is relied upon by many retailers. But it’s come in for heavy criticism from environment groups, who say it concentrates on quantity not quality – something MSC robustly refutes. (See Are sustainability certification schemes fit for purpose?)

Dodds of WWF, which helped set up MSC, says: “It’s the best that we’ve got and we want to put the effort into ensuring they’re as good as they can be.” She adds: “The challenge for MSC is to look at the wider environmental impact, rather than just the health of the stock that has been fished.”

All these efforts rely on monitoring. “At the moment,” says Dodds, “less than 1% of fishing trips have observers – and when observers are there, fishing boats may behave differently. Observers are also treated badly.” Remote monitoring with CCTV would be cheaper, and even if only 10% of the data collected was analysed, coverage would be better, she adds.

Several organisations are trying to address the data gap, amongst them Global Fishing Watch, which uses satellite technology and machine learning to track fishing vessels and monitor their behaviour. Its aim is to track all large-scale fishing vessels within the next 10 years.

To do that it needs governments to share their data, and has had some striking successes, beginning with Indonesia in 2017. Now Panama, one of the biggest flags in the world, is also considering offering its data. It’s also
Chief executive Tony Long told Ethical Corporation that there’s a patchwork rather than a global system of enforcement. “So rather than try to enforce through half-locked doors, make it a fisherman’s job to be compliant and reward them.” Compliance is easier to track, so countries can focus their efforts on the outliers.

Ideally, suggests Long, “every country in the world says ‘Unless I know who you are and where you’ve been, you can’t get into our port’.”

That’s not yet feasible, but the Agreement on Port State Measures, an international treaty designed to tackle illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, does give ports the power to impound or deny entry to vessels where there is some doubt about where it caught its fish. Invoking these powers should mean states with few resources can better target enforcement measures.

Long’s organisation is philanthropically funded but he wants governments to start taking responsibility: Canada is the first to make that commitment.

At the G7 meeting of environment, energy and oceans ministers in Halifax last September, Canada announced it would invest up to C$11.6m to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing throughout the world and declared support for Global Fishing Watch, committing to publicly sharing information about the health of Canada’s fish stocks and its fisheries management.

Companies and consumers have a huge role to play too, suggests Long. Sainsbury’s, M&S and Morrisons are all leading the way on tracing their supply chains. Sainsbury’s works with Ocean Mind, using both satellite technology and observers to try to ensure its tuna are not caught using FAD, and last autumn M&S launched an interactive map so that customers can see where its fish are caught, and how sustainable stocks are.

Corporate power was amply demonstrated after the EU “yellow carded” Thailand in 2015 over the mis-management of its fisheries. Potentially some €840m of trade into Europe was at risk, says Long.

Thai Union, Nestlé, Walmart and others set up a seafood supply chain task-force, which forced the Thai government into taking action on unregulated, unreported and illegal fishing, and improvements have been made. So much so that last month the EU lifted the yellow card. And it hopes that Thailand’s controls over foreign vessels landing at its ports will have a multiplier effect across the Pacific and Indian oceans.
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