

## MSC FOUNDATION CELEBRATES THE OPENING OF ITS MARINE CONSERVATION CENTER AT OCEAN CAY

- The MSC Foundation has officially opened its brand-new Marine Conservation Center at Ocean Cay.
- The state-of-the-art center features a fully equipped Bio Lab, a land-based coral nursery, a multifunctional lecture hall, along with a welcome hub and more.
- Prime Minister of The Bahamas, the Honourable Philip Davis, marine biologist Dr Sylvia Earle, and MSC Foundation representatives were among those to officially inaugurate the facility.

**Ocean Cay, The Bahamas – 10 April 2025** –The MSC Foundation has today celebrated the official opening of its Marine Conservation Center at Ocean Cay, marking a key milestone in its commitment to coral conservation and marine research in The Bahamas.

The MSC Foundation's Marine Conservation Center will be a base for biologists, scientists, students and island visitors alike, and will feature interactive pavilions, a lecture hall, a Bio Lab, and a land-based coral nursery.

The new research facility will also provide educational opportunities for visitors on the importance of the marine ecosystem and the critical need to protect coral reefs, and will be the hub for the MSC Foundation's Super Coral Reefs Programme.

Launched in 2019, the MSC Foundation's Super Coral Reefs Programme has been driving efforts to help restore coral reefs in the 64-square-mile area around Ocean Cay with coral species that are more resilient to environmental stressors such as rising ocean temperatures.

The opening of the Marine Conservation Center represents a significant investment in the future of The Bahamas, reinforcing the nation's leadership in marine conservation and sustainable tourism. This facility will not only advance scientific research in line with the parameters authorised by the Bahamas Department of Environmental Planning and Protection and in alignment with national priorities of the Ministry of Education, Technical, and Vocational Training, but also provide invaluable educational opportunities for Bahamian students, researchers, and conservationists. Through our partnerships with institutions such as the University of The Bahamas, The Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute, and the Perry Institute for Marine Science, the MSC Foundation is helping to equip the next generation of Bahamian environmental stewards with the knowledge and tools needed to protect our oceans.

The Marine Conservation Center was officially opened this morning by the Chair of the MSC Foundation Executive Committee and Executive Chairman of the Cruise Division of MSC Group, Pierfrancesco Vago, with Diego Aponte, MSC Foundation Board Member and MSC Group President, Rick Sasso, MSC Foundation Ambassador and Chairman MSC Cruises (USA) and MSC Foundation Executive Director Daniela Picco, together with the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, the Honourable Philip Davis, the Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable I. Chester Cooper and renowned marine biologist Dr Sylvia Earle.

Key Cabinet ministers from The Bahamas, local Bimini Council members, other dignitaries and key stakeholders from The Bahamas were also in attendance, together with other MSC Foundation representatives and partners.

**Pierfrancesco Vago, Chair of the MSC Foundation Executive Committee**, said:

"The opening of our Marine Conservation Center marks a defining moment in our multigenerational commitment to ocean conservation. It brings to life the MSC Foundation's concrete plans for restoring coral reefs, advancing science, and creating training opportunities for Bahamian and international students. With the continued support of the Government of The Bahamas and local authorities, our work here is contributing to the circular economy through ecosystem preservation, regeneration, and knowledge sharing."

Dr Sylvia Earle, the renowned marine biologist and founder of Mission Blue, who participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony nearly two years after the NGO designated Ocean Cay as a "Hope Spot" — a site important to ocean health — said: *"Bravo to MSC and the MSC Foundation for creating the Marine Conservation Center at Ocean Cay, a treasured Mission Blue Hope Spot. The Center is a place to discover why the ocean matters to everyone, everywhere, and to inspire actions that can be taken to restore and care for the vast blue realm that makes possible the existence of life— humankind very much included."*

The new facility features a fully equipped bio-lab and The Aquaria, a dedicated land-based coral nursery housing 22 coral tanks to support restoration efforts. It also boasts a 50-seat lecture hall, providing a space for educational programmes and scientific collaboration.

The center's Welcome Hub and Discovery Pavilion will also offer immersive experiences for visitors, including guided tours, interactive exhibits, and hands-on coral restoration activities, fostering a deeper connection to marine conservation.

**Daniela Picco, Executive Director of the MSC Foundation**, stated:

*"This facility will connect marine scientists, educators, and the public, annually supporting up to 30 marine science students from four universities. By strengthening partnerships with Bahamian and international experts, engaging the wider community and making a bridge to hundreds of thousands of island visitors, we have laid foundations for lasting ocean stewardship and meaningful conservation efforts."*

### **About the Super Coral Reefs Programme**

The Foundation began collaborating with the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University in 2020 to develop the Super Coral Reefs Programme through Florida-based graduate internships in marine science. Since 2022, we have been focusing on identifying hardy species of coral at Ocean Cay, conducting research in accordance with parameters of permits authorised by The Bahamas Department of Environmental Planning and Protection, and propagating such types of coral species, mainly focusing on critically endangered elkhorn coral. The work builds upon MSC Cruises' multi-year restoration of Ocean Cay's marine ecosystem, which began when the company started redeveloping the former sand-mining site. The 64 square miles of waters around the island have since flourished. With the opening of the new Marine Conservation Center, the Foundation is scaling up its efforts.

Among the Super Coral Reefs Programme's successes to date:

- *Identifying high thermal resilience in some genetic populations of corals, focusing on critically endangered Elkhorn coral.*
- *Developing techniques to grow corals in open-water nurseries.*
- *Successful start to outplanting resilient corals, aiming to increase outplanting capacity over the coming years to 6000 corals annually.*
- *100% survival of nursery-grown corals during the unprecedented marine heatwave of summer 2023.*

## **ABOUT THE MSC FOUNDATION:**

The non-profit MSC Foundation implements the MSC Group's marine conservation, humanitarian, and sustainable development commitments worldwide, utilising MSC's global reach and unique knowledge of the sea to protect and nurture our blue planet, its people, and our shared cultural heritage.

Concentrating on four areas – Environment, Community Support, Education and Emergency Relief – the Foundation promotes the protection and sustainable management of ecosystems, empowers vulnerable communities around the world to realise their full potential, supports equitable and inclusive quality education to foster enduring individual and collective development, and helps disaster-struck populations toward recovery.

The Foundation works to achieve this both independently and with dedicated partners: independently, by leveraging MSC Group engagement in designing and managing projects, connecting communities, raising awareness, and mobilising the financial support of thousands of people, and together with trusted partners selected for their strong innovative vision or track record for effective action.

### **Media Contact**

**kim.mancini@mscfoundation.org**

**+41 76 249 8434**

**MSC Foundation**

**Chemin Rieu 12-14, 1208 Geneva, Switzerland**

**[Website](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)**