**I. Introduction**

· Background of the Conference.
· Mandate for the background note as per General Assembly resolutions 78/128 and 77/242.
· Structure of the background note, including aim of the note, taking into consideration the overarching theme of the Conference “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”.

**II. Status and Trends**

**I. Status and trends including key milestones.**

Contributions are sought on the status of progress and trends in the implementation of SDG 14, since the United Nations Ocean Conference held in Lisbon in 2022. Entities are requested also to provide updates on the key milestones achieved of relevance to SDG14 in their respective areas since 2022.

**14.3 Reduction of local, regional, and global impacts of ocean acidification.**

Ocean acidification is the consequence of the uptake of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) by the ocean, which changes the chemical composition of the seawater, altering its carbonate chemistry. This results in a decreasing pH and increasing acidification of the ocean, which negatively affects marine organisms and ocean services. Projections reveal that ocean acidification will continue to increase, with consequences for the global climate: As the acidity and temperature of the ocean increases, its capacity to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere decreases, impeding the ocean’s role in moderating climate change.

Data collected towards the SDG 14.3.1 Indicator from an increasing number of countries and stations (178 stations in 2021; 308 stations in 2022; 539 stations in 2023; 638 in 2024) highlights the growing capacity of countries to observe the continued decline of ocean pH in the global ocean as well as the strong regional differences in the pace of change, underlining the need for global efforts to increase high-frequency and long-term monitoring to enable the development of strategies for mitigation and adaptation for all countries and regions at relevant scales. Continuous capacity building efforts to increase the capability of nations to measure and report on ocean acidification, particularly in currently undersampled areas, will be key to achieving the SDG Target 14.3: the reduction of local, regional, and global impacts of ocean acidification.

**14.a.1 Proportion of total research budget allocated to research in the field of marine technology**

Funding for ocean science remains insufficient to fill existing knowledge gaps and deliver the information required for decisions, tools and solutions leading to a sustainable ocean (SDG 14). Overall, the portion of gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) devoted to
ocean science is noticeably small given that the ocean covers more than 70% of the surface of our planet. On average, only 1.1% of national research budgets are allocated for ocean science, with percentages ranging from around 0.01% to 9.5%, with the biggest economies also investing the greatest absolute amounts. Nevertheless, the ocean science budget remains a small proportion compared to the modestly estimated US$1.5 trillion contribution of the ocean to the global economy in 2010 and the 2.5% of world gross value added.

**UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021 - 2030**

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and thus in terms of its contribution to the achievement of SDG14 and other relevant SDGs. Endorsed Decade Actions include 51 programmes, 330 projects and over 80 contributions. They are led by partners from over 60 countries, although gaps persist in Decade Actions led by partners in SIDS and LDCs. Twelve Decade Coordination Offices / Decade Collaborative Centres have been established and are providing essential coordination support to the Decade Coordination Unit housed within IOC-UNESCO. The Decade Advisory Board comprising 15 expert members and five UN entity representatives met regularly throughout this period to review programme submissions and provide strategic advice on Decade implementation. 38 National Decade Committees are currently operational. There is significant action at the regional level including the establishment of the Africa Ocean Decade Taskforce and planning of new regional coordination structures in the South Pacific, Arctic, Africa and Caribbean. A major meeting of philanthropic partners was held in Monaco in June 2023 and identified new initiatives to support Decade implementation. The Ocean Decade Alliance has expanded to include ten Patrons and eighteen institutional members from government, industry, UN entities and philanthropy. The Ocean Decade Vision 2030 process has been launched to identify a collective and measurable ambition for each Ocean Decade Challenge which will facilitate identification of future priorities and resource needs for the Decade. The results of the Vision 2030 process will be presented at the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference in April, 2024 in Barcelona, Spain, which will be a milestone event in the lead-up to the 2025 UN Ocean Conference.

**III. Leveraging interlinkages between SDG 14 and other SDGs towards ocean action: Challenges and opportunities:**

Contributions are sought on the interlinkages between the 10 targets of SDG 14 and other SDGs in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to address:

- Challenges to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources (e.g., areas where gaps and challenges exist, where more action is needed);
- Opportunities for conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources, in particular considering interlinkages with other relevant SDGs.

UNESCO highlights the importance of the ongoing Vision 2030 process of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development as an input to the discussion of gaps and opportunities for ocean science to underpin sustainable development. This process, which will be discussed at, and finalised following the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference (Barcelona, April 2024), will provide a comprehensive global overview of gaps and priorities in ocean science. The outcomes of the process will include targeted recommendations for governments, policy makers and other actors on the means of transforming such priorities to action to contribute to sustainable development and therefore have a potentially important role to inform discussion at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference.
Climate change as powerful impactor and driver of need for strengthening ocean science - SDG 13 and 14 are therefore inseparable and these linkages should be highlighted throughout the background note. The ocean is a fundamental part of the climate system and the global response to climate change. Ocean action and climate action are intrinsically linked and must be strengthened through breaking down silos, integration and collaboration. To date, the ocean has been a critical buffer against climate change but tipping points are being reached and risk is increasing including in terms of extreme events, food security, health and security. Science provides the basis for understanding the action needed and must be strengthened in parallel with action moving forward. The ocean provides multiple untapped and powerful opportunities to mitigate and adapt to climate change, provided environmental and social safeguards are met. Protecting and restoring nature is fundamental for resilience. Climate and ocean action requires the participation of all voices.

The conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources are directly affected by threats related freedom of expression (in particular press freedom) and access to information (SDG16). The prevailing state of insecurity in which journalists work (especially those investigating environmental scandals) is challenging the ability of the people to seek, receive, and impart information on the state of the ocean. Most people lack information about oceans’ interconnectedness, especially in low-income countries. While low Internet access affects access to information, particularly in remote, costal and rural areas, broadcast media serves as primary information source, especially during environmental disasters. Independent media is crucial for ocean conversation, as measures for recovery may not be successful without them. Media institutions must have adequate capacities, resources, and tools to effectively exercise their functions, even in emergencies. Lack of digital tools, dedicated programming for environmental reporting, inadequate editorial capacities, and uninterrupted operations during emergencies hinder media's ability to act as key stakeholders in ocean conservation and sustainable use.

The conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources can rely on accurate, independent, and accessible information. Through implementing the UN Plan of action on the Safety of Journalists, UNESCO can advance the protection of media professionals acting as watchdogs for the preservation of the oceans and, in this wake, protect reliable information. Media organizations play a crucial role in ocean conservation, bridging the gap between science, policy, and public action. They raise awareness about ocean sustainable development, highlighting consequences of unsustainable practices, and influencing public behavior. They hold governments accountable, showcases success stories, and provides platforms for citizens, authorities, scientists, and conservation organizations to discuss work and recommendations for sustainable ocean management.

**IV. Mobilizing all actors to accelerating ocean action:**

Contributions are sought on ways to promote collaboration, cooperation and partnerships to accelerate implementation of SDG 14. The following issues will be highlighted:

1. **Investing in SDG 14a**
   This section will focus on ways and means to support the implementation of SDG14. The following cross-cutting issues relevant to support the implementation of SDG 14 will be explored among others:
   - Mobilizing finance for SDG 14.
   - Ensuring the ocean observing system is sustained and strengthened to be fit for purpose
   - Marine science and technology (including technology development and transfer) and the use of traditional knowledge for ocean health.
   - Capacity-building.
The Ocean Decade is a global action framework for the co-design and co-delivery of ocean science and knowledge to underpin sustainable development. Working across ten Ocean Decade Challenges that have a strong alignment with the targets of SDG14, the Ocean Decade adopts a broad definition of ocean science that includes alternative forms of knowledge, as well as the enabling environment required to ensure successful generation and use of ocean knowledge. While Challenge 9 on “Skills, knowledge and technology for all” is only one of the ten Ocean Decade Challenges, the required ocean science capacity cuts across all ten challenges in all its forms - including human resources, equipments, funding, infrastructure, research policies, access to education and training, access to ocean data and information, resource mobilization and more.

UNESCO has worked with Member States and partners to ensure the awareness, participation and rights issues related to Indigenous Peoples are considered in the design and implementation of the Ocean Decade. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) has invited UNESCO to continue working on the good governance of relevant UN Decades to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are able to fully engage, represent their interests and their knowledge systems. UNESCO is working with the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples’ issues to develop UN systems cooperation on the engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Ocean Decade processes at global, regional and national scales.

IOC-UNESCO has a long tradition in providing capacity development in all aspects of its mandate to develop national capabilities towards sustainable ocean use and management and to ensure equitable participation of its Member States in IOC’s programmes. The recently adopted IOC-UNESCO Capacity Development Strategy 2023-2030 provides a strategic framework of outputs and relevant capacity development activities and actions that respond to regional and national priorities based on top CD needs identified through the use of capacity needs assessments and regional consultations. The Ocean CD-Hub, a central database of capacity development opportunities offered globally, was developed as an important tool to increase access to and information on capacity development opportunities offered globally. The platform also serves to contribute to matchmaking purposes between identified CD needs by various user groups and the existing opportunities that can be found on the CD-Hub. IOC-UNESCO also continues to expand its global network of training centres and makes full use of regional and local expertise to deliver needs-tailored training in key ocean issues through the expansion of training subjects and broader outreach from the continuing development of the IOC-UNESCO OceanTeacher Global Academy (OTGA).

Capacity development is a fundamental element of the Ocean Decade and work undertaken in the Decade builds on IOC’s strong programmatic work on capacity development. The recently launched Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility will provide an interface to increase access to capacity development initiatives for partners engaged in the Ocean Decade, with a focus on Early Career Ocean Professionals, and representatives of SIDS and LDCs. The Ocean Decade has developed an initial framework to ensure that Indigenous and local knowledge is embraced alongside ocean science as a complementary and equal source of knowledge. The Decade is working across UNESCO and with external partners to refine and implement and ensure sustainability of this framework.

Education and awareness raising are an important complement to capacity development. UNESCO would like to highlight the importance of mobilizing the media to play a crucial role in raising awareness about ocean challenges. It should take the conversation on advancing the Sustainable Development Goals out of the policy sphere and into the public discourse. Furthermore, as over 50% of the world’s populations will be electing those who will represent them in 2024 and beyond, it is important to push for effective ocean-climate actions among the elected leaders who will hold the key to change. Furthermore, the media are critical in bridging the gap between science, policy, and public
action when it comes to ocean protection and sustainable use of marine resources. By raising awareness, influencing behavior, promoting solutions, and holding stakeholders accountable, media can help ensure a healthy and thriving ocean for generations to come.

As part of Section IV of the Concept Note, UNESCO also suggests the inclusion of an additional cross-cutting issue on the strengthening of the science-policy-society interface as being of critical importance to the implementation of SDG14. The transdisciplinary co-design and co-delivery of ocean science and knowledge is essential to ensure that relevant and timely knowledge is used to develop applications, services and tools that are needed and used by societal actors.

2. *Strengthening Partnerships (including Voluntary Commitments)*

This section will focus on key initiatives undertaken in partnership at the global, regional and national levels with a diverse set of stakeholders. Contributions may also highlight voluntary commitments made and their impact as relevant.

3. *Mobilizing All actors*

This section will consider the relevant stakeholders that need to be mobilized to accelerate ocean action, with a focus on the role of women, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities to leave no one behind.

V. **Possible themes for the Ocean Action Panels**

Recommendations will be made for the themes of the ten Ocean Action panels in this section, based on the input received.

UNESCO recommends a focus of one of the Ocean Action Panels on ‘**Knowledge and Solutions for SDG14 Implementation**’ and recommends that this Panel adopts the broad definition of ocean science that is encompassed by the Ocean Decade, and including traditional knowledge systems. Furthermore, UNESCO recommends that all Ocean Action Panels include scientific elements and panelists who can speak to science and knowledge gaps, opportunities and priorities for the relevant theme. In terms of thematic priorities for the Panels, UNESCO recommends strong alignment with the themes of the Ocean Decade Challenges as a means of ensuring that the outcomes of the Vision 2030 process that will identify critical gaps and opportunities in ocean science and knowledge can feed into the Panel discussions in a meaningful way.

In keeping with our suggestion above on the inclusion of an additional cross-cutting issue on the strengthening of the science-policy-society interface as a critical element in the implementation of SDG14, we suggest that the composition of the panels is drawn from a wide cross section of societal actors including non-state actors that are less well represented in UN processes including Indigenous and local knowledge holders, industry, civil society, and philanthropy.

VI. **Way Ahead/Next Steps**