

2025 United Nations Ocean Conference Preparatory Meeting - Intervention from UNESCO

2 July 2024

UNESCO thanks France and Costa Rica as the co-hosts of the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference and UN DESA for the opportunity to make this intervention and take this opportunity to congratulate Australia and Cabo Verde for their nomination as co-facilitators of the political declaration for the Conference.

UNESCO has been working closely with France and Costa Rica on a range of issues in the lead-up to this preparatory meeting, with a strong focus on ocean science and coastal resilience and looks forward to continuing that strong working relationship in coming months. Moving forward we stand ready to take the leadership on drafting of relevant background papers for the Ocean Action Panels and to support the development and identification of speakers for these Panels.

As requested by the President of the General Assembly, my intervention will focus on UNESCO's suggested recommendations for the Ocean Action Panels and on suggested elements for inclusion in the political declaration.

Ocean Action Panels:

UNESCO welcomes the breadth of issues that are identified in the proposed Ocean Action Panels and notes the strong alignment with the Ocean Decade, and the specific priorities and recommendations arising from the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference and that are captured in The Barcelona Statement.

Furthermore we note that many areas addressed in the Ocean Action Panels align strongly with UNESCO's areas of intervention and expertise including the work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission on ocean science, including our custodian role for two indicators of SDG14, namely SDG14.3 and SDG14.a, and the focus of other sectors of UNESCO including disaster risk and reduction, area-based management and conservation through marine World Heritage Sites and Man and Biosphere Reserves, work across the freshwater and marine interface, and work on underwater cultural heritage.

UNESCO would like to respectfully suggest several modifications to strengthen the issues that will be addressed in these important panels. These suggestions are made with the aim of enhancing alignment with targets of SDG14, enhancing inter-linkages between SDG14 and other SDGs, and reflecting emerging issues related to science and knowledge, inclusivity, and governance including key issues identified through recent priority setting processes such as the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference.

The suggested modifications, are as follows:

- That the third Action Panel relating to cooperation also refer to engagement across all sectors of society (e.g. private sector, civil society, philanthropy, academia, youth) and consider means of ensuring inclusivity of under-represented groups, including SIDS and LDCs. While inclusivity and diverse representation is cross-cutting across all Action Plans, I believe that it is essential that these concepts are explicitly mentioned in the framing of the Action Panels. Suggested wording is as follows: 3. Harnessing all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional level and across all sectors of society and ensuring inclusivity of under-represented groups including SIDS, LLDCs and LDCs
- That the fourth Action Panel on marine pollution make specific reference to pollution across the land-sea interface to reflect that management of marine pollution, the majority of which arises from land-based sources, requires stronger understanding, governance and participation of stakeholders upstream of coastal areas. Suggested wording is as follows: 4. Tackling marine pollution in all of its forms and across the land-sea interface.
- That the fifth Action Panel relating to ocean-climate-biodiversity interlinkages include specific reference to ocean-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation. This is to reflect that there remain important knowledge gaps including in terms of the importance of the ocean as a

fundamental source of solutions for climate mitigation and the role of coastal ecosystems in resilience and adaptation. This expansion of the framing of the Panel will also allow emerging issues such as marine carbon dioxide removal to be addressed through the Ocean Action Panels. Suggested wording is as follows: 5. Understanding and responding to ocean-climate-biodiversity interlinkages including ocean-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

- That the sixth Action Plan relating to sustainable ocean-based economies also refer to the resilience in the face of climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable regions such as SIDS and LDCs for whom sustainable ocean economic development remains a fundamental pillar of future sustainable development. Suggested wording is as follows: 6. Enabling sustainable and resilient ocean-based economies, that leave no one behind.
- That the seventh Action Panel related to promoting sustainable food production from the ocean to address food security be broadened to include reference to wider ocean health and human health links. This reflects the growing understanding and importance of human and ocean health links and provides an opportunity to engage with the health sector, particularly in light of the recent Blue Paper commissioned by the High Level Panel for Sustainable Ocean Economy on the need for urgent action in this area. Suggested wording is as follows: 7. Understanding and enhancing ocean health and human health links including promoting sustainable food production from the ocean to address food security.
- That, in line with SDG target 14.a, the scope of the eighth Action Panel relating to scientific knowledge cite both ocean science and ocean knowledge (to reflect the importance of alternative knowledge systems) and be expanded to refer to capacity development, access to data and information, and technology transfer. This Action Panel should also reinforce the reference to the strengthening the science-policy to be broader than science for ocean health and include a strong and explicit reference to the role of ocean science in underscoring all facets sustainable development. Suggested wording is as follows: 8. Increasing ocean science and knowledge, capacity development, access to data and information, and technology transfer, and strengthening the science-policy interface for ocean health and sustainable development.
- That the ninth Action Panel relating to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans be expanded to include mechanisms beyond UNCLOS and its implementing agreements by recognizing the need to build coherence of ocean action across diverse global policy frameworks, and the potential benefits of the use of other mechanisms such as Sustainable Ocean Planning. This is important to respond to the identified need for coherence amongst adopted and emerging policy frameworks, such as the Global Biodiversity Framework, the BBNJ Agreement, the emerging treaty on plastic pollution, and the Ocean Climate Dialogue in the UNFCCC. Suggested wording is as follows: 9. Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the UNCLOS and its implementing agreements, building coherence of ocean action across diverse global policy frameworks, and through the use of other mechanisms such as Sustainable Ocean Planning.
- That the tenth Action Panel relating to the mobilization of finance include specific reference to the need to invest in science-based ocean action in the support of SDG14 thus underlying the need for investment in ocean science and knowledge as an essential pre-cursor to ocean action. Suggested wording is as follows: 10. Mobilizing finance for science-based ocean action in the support of SDG14.

Elements for Political Declaration:

UNESCO welcomes the focus on a succinct and actionable declaration. We would like to make the following suggestions for consideration by Member States for elements to be included in the Declaration:

UNESCO believes that the Declaration should be framed in a positive light that recognises the evolution and achievements in ocean science, action, and governance since 2022 including via the adoption of global policy and governance frameworks and increased collaboration across the UN system on ocean issues. The Declaration should have a sharp focus on remaining needs and priorities

to achieve knowledge driven action and on identification of the roles, responsibilities and resources needed to achieve these priorities.

UNESCO suggests that the Declaration could be structured around three central pillars of: (i) science and knowledge including the science-policy-society interface, (ii) inclusivity (gender, sectoral, geographical, generational and diversity of knowledge systems), and (iii) optimised investment in science-based ocean action.

The Declaration should recognise links and need to ensure coherence of ocean action across different policy and governance frameworks, which is especially important given the recently adopted and emerging global policy frameworks, which need to be underpinned by relevant ocean science and knowledge which can be furnished by the framework provided by the Ocean Decade, and that have significant interlinkages that need to be recognised and actively harmonised for effective implementation.

UNESCO suggests that the Declaration should also explicitly recognise the contribution and framing provided by alignment with global initiatives, including the role of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and the range of recent global consensus building processes including the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference and the 'Immersed in Change' Conference to identify priorities for science-based ocean action.

UNESCO would also like to note that the actions contained in the Declaration will only be achieved if measures for accountability and monitoring progress are explicitly included in the Declaration.

Finally, we firmly believe that the Declaration should act as a call to action to a broad audience of societal actors including Heads of States and Member States, but also private sector, civil society, the scientific community, philanthropy, and other investment partners. This should include actors outside the ocean community to counter the oft cited 'echo chamber' within the ocean community. A key aim of the Declaration should be that, in reading the declaration, diverse societal actors can easily identify entry points for action and their roles and responsibility in achieving the aims of the declaration. In this respect the Declaration should also catalyze a new wave of action to establish Ocean Literacy in the spheres of education, science, policy, economics, and culture, in accordance with the Venice Declaration adopted on 8 June 2024 at the Global Ocean Literacy Conference organized by UNESCO.