



Investing in Ocean Solutions: Towards a Brighter Future for the Ocean

High Level Retreat

14-15 January 2025, Incheon, Republic of Korea

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

The ocean is currently in a state of emergency. Issues such as ocean acidification, warming, eutrophication, and deoxygenation are escalating and often interacting, all compounded by climate change. Plastic pollution continues to plague marine and coastal ecosystems, and overfishing remains a significant concern, with over one-third of global fish stocks being exploited at biologically unsustainable levels. With less than six years remaining to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14), action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet the targets.

However, since the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, several critical milestones have been achieved in global efforts to conserve and sustainably use ocean resources. In March 2022 a historic resolution titled “End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument” was adopted at the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly. Negotiations for this plastic treaty are ongoing, with the goal of completion by the end of 2024. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted in June 2022, aims to halt harmful fisheries subsidies, and efforts to negotiate the overfishing articles are well underway.

In June 2023, after nearly 20 years of discussions, the historic Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction was adopted. The UN Ocean Decade Conference was held in April 2024, Barcelona, highlighting the important role of the science-policy interface and science-based innovation in ocean action.

The SIDS4 conference in May 2024 saw unanimous appeals for the protection and sustainable use of ocean resources for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Ocean-based solutions have been incorporated into mainstream discussions under the frameworks of UNFCCC COPs and CBD COPs, addressing the crucial interlinkages of ocean-climate change-biodiversity.

It is against this backdrop that the 2025 UN Ocean Conference is going to take place in Nice, France from 9-13 June, 2025, with the overarching theme “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”. The Conference, comprising an opening segment, ten plenary sessions, ten Ocean Action Panels (OAPs) and a closing segment,



aims to support further and urgent action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and identify further ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14.

The ten themes of the OAPs recently endorsed by the membership of the General Assembly covers key areas including sustainable fisheries, marine and coastal ecosystems conservation, regional cooperation, marine pollution, ocean-climate change-biodiversity interlinkages, sustainable ocean-based economies, food from the ocean, science, finance and law of the sea. The Conference will adopt, by consensus a brief, concise, action oriented and intergovernmentally agreed declaration, which along with a list of voluntary commitments, will be referred to as the “Nice Ocean Action Plan”.

The Communities of Ocean Action (COAs), established following the 2017 UN Ocean Conference, have been instrumental in advancing the implementation of Voluntary Commitments (VCs). The online registry of VCs, managed by UNDESA, currently hosts over 2,100 commitments from governments, UN entities, philanthropic organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders. As we navigate towards the Nice Conference, it is imperative for the COAs to review, reinvigorate, and reorganize their efforts by aligning priorities with the co-hosts of UNOC3 and forging coalitions with key stakeholders.

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

This workshop seeks to provide an informal yet substantive platform for principals of the COAs, representatives of the co-hosts, and key stakeholders to:

1. **Share Information on Recent Developments:** Exchange updates on ocean-related processes and initiatives since the last gathering highlighting progress, prospects and synergies with UNOC3.
2. **Foster Interaction with Stakeholders, Practitioners and VC Holders:** Facilitate direct engagement with those actively involved in implementing VCs and SDG14, allowing for an exchange of insights and experiences.
3. **Brainstorm Pathways Forward:** Collaboratively explore strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the COAs, with the ultimate aim of building a robust coalition for a successful and action-oriented UNOC3.
4. **Enhance substantive preparations for the UNOC:** Explore key substantive areas and identify emerging issues through in-depth interactive sessions, to inform and enrich the UNOC Ocean Action Panels.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Enhanced alignment of COA priorities with the objectives of UNOC3.
- Enhanced understanding of how members of COAs and stakeholders can individually and collectively contribute to UNOC 3, including in deliberations and outcomes.



- Strengthened coalitions among key stakeholders committed to ocean conservation and sustainable use.
- Clear, actionable strategies for revitalizing COA efforts in the lead-up to the Nice Conference and transition towards COA2.0 post- Conference.
- Development of clear and coherent messaging on thematic issues related to UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels