



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

High Level Retreat

14-15 January 2025, Incheon, Republic of Korea

Meeting summary report

Introduction

1. In anticipation of the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) convened a *High-Level Retreat on Investing in Ocean Solutions: Towards a Brighter Future for the Ocean*. The Retreat was held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 14 to 15 January 2025.
2. This high-level event served as a precursor to UNOC3 and offered an informal yet substantive platform for the co-hosts and cofacilitators of UNOC3, UN system and other stakeholders to exchange information on recent developments of major global ocean-related processes and brainstorm pathways forward and strengthen substantive preparations for the UNOC3. The Retreat also aimed to provide opportunities for *Communities of Ocean Action (COAs)* to review, reinvigorate, and reorganize their efforts. Over 50 participants representing Member States, including UNOC3 co-hosts and cofacilitators overseeing the negotiations on the Political Declaration, UN entities, co-focal points and sherpas of the COAs and other stakeholders attended the event.
3. The Retreat included a high-level opening session, 6 panel sessions and a special session dedicated to stakeholder participation. Recommendations, ideas and insights shared throughout the interactive discussions significantly contributed to the reflections on COAs future. The Retreat marked a key milestone on the journey towards UNOC3, providing a privileged platform for participants to discuss key priorities for the Conference.
4. This report presents summaries of the sessions and key messages emerging from them.

Opening Session: Charting the Course for a Sustainable Ocean Future

1. The event opened by a Live Puppetry Performance by TUTOUT (튀튀) titled *The Shadow of the Sea*. Following the introduction by the Master of Ceremony, **Ms. Xin Feng**, Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA, **Mr. Li Junhua**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs delivered a welcome address. USG Li highlighted that 2024 was a stark reminder of global challenges, marked by rising tensions, deepening mistrust, and severe climate-induced disasters, including the worsening state of the ocean. USG emphasized the urgency of scaling up financing for SDG14, investing in ocean-based economies, and a synergy of policy and action to drive ocean-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.
2. USG underscored the need for collective efforts to adopt a treaty on plastic pollution, facilitate the entry into force of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the 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(BBNJ Agreement), as well as achieve the "30 by 30" goal. USG stressed the importance of strong political will, leadership, and swift action, reaffirming DESA's commitment to multilateralism, capacity-building for developing countries, and translating commitments into concrete action. USG noted the significance of the upcoming UNOC3 as a pivotal moment to galvanize attention and drive urgent ocean protection efforts. He reaffirmed the strong commitment from DESA to support both the COAs and the UNOC3 preparatory process.
3. Co-hosts of the 2025 UN Ocean Conference delivered keynote speeches. **H.E. Gina Guillen**, Director General for Foreign Policy, Special Presidential Envoy for the Ocean of Costa Rica stated that strengthening ocean action through multilateralism was key. She reminded participants of the timeline for the Conference preparatory process and informed that co-hosts were currently finalizing the selection of co-chairs for the Ocean Action Panels.
4. Ambassador Guillen further called for a frank discussion on Voluntary Commitments (VCs). She highlighted that SDG 14 was one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the highest number of VCs, but that efforts were needed with regards to their implementation. She stressed the need to encourage commitments from Member States and all stakeholders, as reflected in the modalities resolution of the Conference, but urged commitment holders to put in place ways to accelerate implementation and assess progress towards the same.
5. Through a video message, **H.E. Olivier Poivre d'Arvor**, Ambassador for the Poles and Maritime issues, Special Envoy of the French President for the Third United Nations Ocean

Conference, reaffirmed the importance of UNOC3 for finding concrete solutions to preserve the ocean. While acknowledging collective efforts, he expressed his concerns on a number of issues, such as the large number of ratifications still missing for the BBNJ Treaty to enter into force. He also regretted that COAs did not have the expected impact and urged all parties to help reinforce them, including by strengthening accountability. Ambassador Poivre d'Arvor also called for ambitious and actionable pledges and commitments at UNOC3.

6. **H.E. Mr. Kang Do-Hyung**, Minister of Oceans and Fisheries, Republic of Korea, expressed his hope that the Retreat would be a steppingstone towards UNOC3. He outlined that the Conference would serve as a vital platform to unite global efforts. Minister Kang Do-Hyung reminded participants of the range of initiatives conducted by the Republic of Korea to support SDG 14 implementation. He further reasserted the willingness of the Republic of Korea to host UNOC4 in cooperation with Chile.
7. Joining remotely, **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana**, Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) stressed that the ESCAP region is amongst the most exposed to climate change in the world. She highlighted that the region however also hosts tremendous potential to address ocean challenges. Ms. Alisjahbana drew attention to the launch of Regional Dialogue on Ocean-Based Climate Action (OBCA) piloted by ESCAP.

Panel Discussion 1: Challenges and opportunities inherent in an inter-linked agenda

1. Presentations were made by the following panelists:
 - **H.E. Ms. Tania Romualdo**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cabo Verde to the United Nations
 - **Ambassador Peter Thomson**, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean
 - **Mr. Henry Gonzalez**, Chief Investment Officer of the Green Climate Fund (GCF)
 - **Mr. Manuel Barange**, Director of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Ms. Madhushree Chatterjee, Chief of Natural Resources and Interlinkages Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA, moderated the discussion.

2. The session focused on the Ocean's role in the broader inter-linked agenda: interlinkages and trade-offs between SDG14 and other SDGs, as well as ocean's crucial role in addressing the triple planetary crisis.

3. The panel underscored the ocean's integral role in mitigating climate change, reducing pollution, and preserving biodiversity, highlighting its connection to achieving all SDGs and not only SDG14. Addressing these interlinked challenges requires urgent, inclusive, and transformative action, with the Ocean at the core of global strategies.
4. A roadmap for the UNOC3 political declaration was presented, with the expectation that Member States will agree on a short and actionable document with a focus on bold commitments that address pressing Ocean challenges. The zero draft included inputs from consultations with Member States and stakeholders, including through a global online stakeholder consultation that compiled inputs from almost 400 stakeholders.
5. One of the key challenges identified referred to financing and innovative financing mechanisms, including blue bonds and blue economy initiatives were highlighted. The Green Climate Fund shared examples and efforts to increase available funding particularly to facilitate access to a variety of sectors and partners.
6. Discussions stressed the need for empowering coastal and marginalized communities, which are disproportionately affected by ocean degradation and climate change, including by ensuring appropriate and accessible funding mechanisms and localized decision-making processes prioritizing practical outcomes.
7. Effective governance frameworks and global collaboration were considered essential to address ocean-related challenges. The ratification of BBNJ and the reinforcement of mechanisms to monitor implementation of commitments were outlined as key steps to ensuring sustainable progress.

Key messages:

- **The Ocean is directly affected by the triple planetary crises (climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss) and, at the same time, its protection is key to addressing those crises.**
- **The UNOC3 Declaration should emphasize implementable, transformative actions and consider appropriate follow up mechanisms.**
- **Limited financial resources for SDG14 represent a critical challenge and innovative funding solutions should be devised and target most affected communities.**
- **Empowering marginalized and coastal communities is critical to fostering inclusive, localized solutions for ocean sustainability.**
- **Strong governance frameworks, such as the BBNJ treaty, are necessary to manage ocean resources effectively and sustainably and efforts towards the ratification of BBNJ before and/or during the UNOC3 should be promoted by interested partners.**

- **The Green Climate Fund and other innovative mechanisms are key to mobilizing resources and scaling up impactful ocean-related initiatives.**
- **Integrating sustainable ocean use into broader strategies for food security, biodiversity, and climate resilience is vital for global progress on SDG14.**

Fireside Chat: From ABAS to Nice Ocean Action Plan-Synergies and Priorities

1. The following panelists engaged in discussion:

- **H.E. Mr. Walton Alfonso Webson**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations
- **USG Li Junhua**, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA
- **H.E. Mr. Fatumanava-o-Upolu III Dr Pa’olelei Luteru**, Permanent Representative of Samoa to the United Nations and chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

The panel was moderated by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean.

2. Panelists emphasized that adopting intergovernmental agreements was just the starting point, and that attention should shift towards concrete implementation. The experience of the negotiation of the ABAS in preparation for the SIDS4 Conference was highlighted, including its focus on partnerships. The SIDS Center of Excellence was flagged as an opportunity to support small island states to address data related challenges.
3. Panelists expressed concerns with the complex language used in intergovernmental fora and called for language that would resonate with communities and stakeholders.
4. The persistent gap in financing for ocean-related initiatives, especially for SDG14, was identified as a critical barrier. Panelists called for innovative financial mechanisms that are accessible to the most vulnerable communities and for greater involvement of the private sector to bridge this gap. There is a need for a direct approach in the UNOC3 declaration that leads towards greater and quicker involvement of local communities.
5. The fact that UNOC3 and FFD4 are processes running in parallel opens the opportunity to reinforce the interlinkages between both intergovernmental processes and for a strong push coming from UNOC3 towards FFD4.

6. Discussions also highlighted the need to reinforce commitments and references to coral reef protection, seabed mapping, policy, institutional and financial tools necessary to make sure that we reach 30 by 30 and ocean-climate linkages in the UNOC3 Declaration.

Key messages:

- **Effective implementation of intergovernmental agreements is just the beginning – key challenges still rely on action and tracking implementation.**
- **Example of ABAS where a short and action-oriented declaration was set, followed by an implementation roadmap was highlighted.**
- **The UNOC3 Declaration should focus on concrete actions and must resonate with both local communities who are the most affected by the challenges.**
- **Governance frameworks must ensure the involvement of local communities, bridging global commitments with on-the-ground realities.**
- **Addressing the financing gap for SDG14 demands innovative mechanisms, equitable rules, and private sector engagement.**
- **Capacity building for SIDS, including access to technology, data, and innovation, is critical for sustainable ocean governance.**
- **The fact that UNOC3 and FFD4 are processes running in parallel opens the opportunity to reinforce the interlinkages between both intergovernmental processes and for a strong push coming from UNOC3 towards FFD4.**
- **Stronger emphasis is needed on coral reef protection, seabed mapping, policy institutional and financial tools necessary to make sure that we reach 30 by 30 and ocean-climate linkages in the UNOC3 Declaration.**

Panel Discussion 2: Innovation and Collaboration: Designing the Path Forward for COA

1. **Dr. Marjo Vierros** delivered a keynote presentation sharing insights from a new draft report focusing on the implementation of Voluntary Commitments (VCs) and their impacts. Dr. Vierros outlined a growth in the number of commitments and increased participation from the private sector. It was also noted that a decrease in reporting rates (10% in 2024, down from 24% in 2021) hinders the accurate assessment of their impact. Financially, commitments have attracted more funding, though concerns about uneven distribution of the funds across projects were expressed. New funding sources, such as blended finance and venture capital were observed to be emerging. The analysis shared in the draft report calls for better monitoring systems, greater transparency, and focus on equity issues, including community and Indigenous knowledge.
2. Building on Dr. Vierros' presentation, a panel discussion informed on the status of COAs and explored strategies for revitalizing their efforts not only in the lead-up to the Nice Conference but also in the transition towards COA2.0 post- Conference.

3. The following COA co-focal points and Sherpas joined the discussion:
 - **Prof. Steve Widdicombe**, COA on Ocean Acidification
 - **Mr. Francis Staub**, COA on Coral Reefs
 - **Ms. Kirsten Isensee**, IOC UNESCO- COA on Scientific Knowledge, Research Capacity Development and Transfer of Marine Technology
 - **Mr. Pepe Clarke**, WWF, COA on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Management
 - **Ms. Madhushree Chatterjee**, COA on Sustainable Blue Economy and Moderator
4. Panelists drew from their experience running COAs to highlight practical areas of improvement. For instance, the Panel expressed concerns over the lack of VCs addressing some of the SDG 14 priorities, such as Ocean Acidification (SDG 14.3). Speakers also emphasized that SDGs should be viewed as an interrelated set of equally important goals. In that regard, the Panel called for accelerated resources and actions relating to interlinking efforts between VCs. Panelists also shared process-related feedback on COAs functioning. Accountability and transparency were highlighted as central to addressing the SDGs clearly and holistically.
5. The possibility of consolidating all voluntary commitments in one database was also discussed. It was pointed out that this option was presented after the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, as well as with partners organizing the Our Ocean Conferences. These discussions did not yield any results but, the proposal should be seriously considered. However, such a database, its update and regular operations would require sustained funding and staff.
6. Providing detailed insights on their respective COA status and progress, panelists encouraged specific and concrete actions, including global targets for coral reefs, the need for equitable access to ocean science, strategic research, and sustainable policy implementation to address pressing marine challenges. Ensuing discussions also questioned the use of “sustainable blue economy (SBE)” vs, “ocean-based economy”. Participants pointed out that while there is no UN definition of SBE, the phrase “ocean-based economy” is well defined by OECD and perhaps could be used instead of SBE.

Key messages:

- **Voluntary commitments have driven real-world impacts, innovative solutions, and collaboration at global and local levels.**
- **A key area of action lies in establishing collective monitoring frameworks for VCs. There is a need for an increase in reporting on the impacts of VCs to better understand their impact.**
- **It is important to dedicate efforts on mobilizing resources and strategies to ensure the implementation of existing commitments.**

- **Enhancing interlinkages between SDG 14 and other SDGs is needed.**
- **Since COAs were established, new thematic areas have gained momentum. It will be necessary to take into account emerging global priorities whilst considering the future of COAs.**
- **Participants proposed coalitions around a potentially renewed set of COAs, but with strong review and monitoring systems in place.**
- **Consolidate all commitments in one global database, but the updating and operation of such a database would require sustained funding and staff.**

Panel Discussion 3: BBNJ and Plastic Treaty negotiations - Sustaining Momentum and Doubling Efforts for Ocean Governance

1. The following panelists participated in this discussion:
 - **Amb. Gina Guillen**, Special Presential Envoy on UNOC3 of Costa Rica
 - **Mr. Stephen Mathias**, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, (video message)
 - **Ms. Jyoti Mathur-Filipp**, Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution (INC) Secretariat (Ms. Brenda Koekkoek presented virtually on behalf of Ms. Mathur-Filipp)
 - **Mr. Mahesh Pradhan**, UNEP COBSEA (Coordinating Body for the Seas of East Asia) Coordinator
 - **Mr. Sergio Carvalho**, Oceano Azul Foundation (moderator and panelist)
2. The panel highlighted the immense and multidimensional challenges facing the ocean, including new threats such as deep-sea mining and plastic pollution which require integrated and synergistic governance approaches, particularly through landmark agreements like the BBNJ Treaty and the negotiations of the international instrument on plastic pollution.
3. The BBNJ Treaty was highlighted as a historic milestone in ocean governance, achieved through years of dedication and commitment from leading countries and stakeholders. Participants stressed the urgent priority of mobilizing countries to ratify the Treaty, with the goal of having it enter into force before or during UNOC3. Currently, 15 countries have ratified the Treaty, with 60 ratifications required for it to enter into force. Many expressed optimism about achieving this milestone by UNOC3 and encouraged all participants to join mobilization efforts in this regard. The role played by CSOs in raising awareness, building capacity, and pushing for the ratification and implementation of BBNJ was flagged.

4. The panel acknowledged the critical importance, and the great progress made in the negotiations of the international instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The main current divergences were discussed, these include: (i) plastic products (including chemicals of concern); (ii) sustainable production; and (iii) the financing mechanisms. There is an expectation for Member States to find the necessary agreement for an international instrument on plastic pollution. The urgency of achieving a comprehensive instrument in 2025 was stressed, although the time needed to adjust strategies and promote dialogue between Member States was also highlighted.
5. Regional Seas Conventions were highlighted as essential for linking global frameworks to local implementation.
6. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum and leveraging platforms like UNOC3 to advance commitments, including on BBNJ ratification and the Plastic treaty adoption. Those could include, among others: connecting regional and global efforts, prioritizing capacity building, and fostering high-level leadership to overcome divergences.

Key messages:

- **The BBNJ Treaty marks a new era for ocean governance and its ratification is critical. Strong mobilization from like-minded governments and stakeholders is needed to support the BBNJ's entry into force before or during UNOC3.**
- **Plastic pollution is a pervasive threat, and the future international instrument on plastic pollution must address the full lifecycle of plastics in line with UNEA resolution 5/12. Maintaining the momentum on intergovernmental negotiations in 2025 is critical and UNOC3 has a critical role to play in supporting Member State led efforts to unlock key divergent issues and pave the way for agreement at INC-5.2.**
- **The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans are pivotal for bridging global frameworks with local implementation, including in support to the 30 by 30 initiative. With over 50 years of experience in promoting ocean governance, Regional Seas Programs hold key lessons-learned, expertise and tools that can be tapped into for, and support efforts to, strengthening ocean governance in bridging global and regional mandates, as well as demonstrating concrete activities/results on the ground.**
- **Civil society organizations can play a crucial role in raising awareness, building capacity, and pushing for treaty ratifications and their effective implementation.**

Special Session: Dialogue with Stakeholders - Voices for Action

1. The following speakers participated in the session:

- **H.E. Ms. Tania Romualdo**, Permanent Representative of Cabo Verde
- **Ms. Céline Kahn**, Oceano Azul Foundation
- **Ms. Trina Leberer**, Director for Pacific Regional Partnerships, The Nature Conservancy
- **Ms. Anjali D. Boyd**, Representatives from Youth

The session was moderated by **Ms. Naiara Costa**, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, Outreach and Partnership Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA. Ms. Costa also provided an update on stakeholder engagement in the preparatory process leading up to UNOC 3, stressing their key role towards the implementation of SDG 14.

2. During this dialogue session, representatives from coastal communities, indigenous peoples, NGOs, and the private sector shared concrete insights and solutions to help achieving SDG14. Reflecting on the key role of civil society in ocean decision making processes, the Panel outlined that grassroot approaches can help design better policies. On the other hand, speakers highlighted that the lack of policy and ocean governance could create obstacles for civil society participation. The importance of establishing robust legal frameworks preventing key stakeholders such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities from being marginalized was also stressed.
3. The Panel drew attention not only to the need of further funding for the ocean and civil society but also to the importance of mobilizing innovative sources of funding. New investment models were called to play a vital role in addressing the large funding gap facing SDG14. In that regard, the importance of the private sector in driving concrete changes and innovation was widely discussed by the panel. The Panel recalled that the Ocean economy also presents important opportunities for all stakeholders.
4. During the session, speakers cast light on multiple areas of engagement for the ocean, such as protection and restoration initiatives, nature-based solutions, fisheries and aquacultures and innovative products aimed at tackling pollutions from the shipping sector. The Panel noted the importance of cross-sector collaboration, including public-private partnerships and further recalled that beyond funding, strengthening human capacity also proved a key challenge.

Key messages:

- **Inclusive ocean policy should ensure that no stakeholder, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, are marginalized.**
- **Innovative sources and forms of funding should be encouraged.**
- **All stakeholders, including the private stakeholders, have a role to play in delivering SDG14, and cross-sector collaboration should be encouraged.**
- **An Ocean Base Camp will be set up in Nice at UNOC 3 as a space for stakeholders to discuss ideas, network and engage with each other during the duration of the Conference.**

Panel Discussion 4: Ocean-Based Solutions for Climate Change and Biodiversity

1. The following panelists engaged in discussion:

- **Prof. Steve Widdicombe**, Co-chair of the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON) Executive Council
- **Dr Abdulaziz Alsuwailem**, Chief Conservation and Strategy Officer, General Organization for Conservation of Coral Reefs and Turtles in the Red Sea (SHAMS), co-Chair of International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)
- **Mr. Pepe Clarke**, Oceans Practice Team Lead, WWF
- **Prof. Hyeong-Gi Kim**, Assistant Professor, Department of Marine Environmental Sciences, Chungnam National University

Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head of UN ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office, moderated the panel.

2. During this discussion, panelists reaffirmed that Blue Carbon, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and ecosystem restoration efforts are gaining global recognition, thus enhancing climate resilience and biodiversity conservation. They emphasized the role of regional efforts focused on ocean-based climate action in promoting ocean-based solutions, including the strengthening of marine governance and regional capacity building potential.
3. The Panel argued that Ocean champions should be climate champions. Speakers stressed that to halt and reverse the decline of the ocean, conservation efforts should be accompanied by a rapid phase out of fossil fuels.
4. Attention was drawn to negative emission technologies, such as Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) technologies. Panelists suggested considering such technologies as “climate mitigation” tools rather than a “climate solution”. Speakers outlined that the impacts of

these technologies are still mostly unknown and stressed the importance of using the precautionary principle based on reliable science.

5. Diving into the climate-biodiversity-ocean nexus, panelists noted that blue carbon in the long term can both sequester carbon and conserve biodiversity. Special attention was given to coral reefs. Outlining their downwards trend, speakers stressed that coral reefs not only count amongst the ecosystems most vulnerable to climate change, but that they have suffered greatly from anthropogenic activities. Noting that the value of goods and services provided by coral reefs is estimated at US 9.9 trillion per year, with \$36 billion in coral reef tourism, speakers regretted the lack of consideration they suffer from in ocean policy decision-making.
6. The panel emphasized that the role of UNOC3 should therefore be ambitious when it comes to coral reef protection. A call was made for 100% of coral reefs to be protected, 30% of degraded reefs to be actively or passively restored by 2030, along with addressing the \$12 billion funding gap with biodiversity credits, blue bonds, and new partnerships. Capacity building in coral conservations alongside the engagement of indigenous coastal communities, youth and women were considered a necessity.
7. Beyond coral reefs, panelists also stressed the overall value of nature-based solutions. The importance of effectively managed networks of MPAs was also highlighted. Other dimensions of the climate-biodiversity-ocean nexus were emphasized, such as challenges relating to the sustainability of fisheries, including anticipating shifts in fish population location and the potential related conflicts.

Key messages:

- **Blue Carbon, MPAs and ecosystem restoration efforts are gaining global recognition.**
- **Regional efforts focused on ocean-based climate action play an important role in promoting ocean-based solutions.**
- **Blue carbon and nature-based solutions can offer win-win options reconciling climate and biodiversity action.**
- **To deliver Ocean-Based Solutions for Climate Change and Biodiversity, it is necessary to address funding gaps and capacity building while ensuring the engagement of indigenous coastal communities, women and youth.**
- **The climate-biodiversity-ocean nexus is multifaceted, and all dimensions should be explored and addressed.**

Panel Discussion 5: Investing in Ocean-Based Economies- Unlocking Sustainable Investment Opportunities

1. The following speakers joined the panel:

- **Amb. Webson**, Permanent Representative of Antigua & Barbuda to the UN
- **Mr. Pierre Bardoux**, Director, Nature Asset Team & Global Funds for Coral Reefs (GFCR)
- **Ms. Lena Kern**, Senior Marine Ecosystems Management Specialist, Green Climate Fund (GCF)
- **Ms. Cynthia Barzuna**, Director, Ocean Action 2030 Coalition, Ocean Program, World Resources Institute (WRI)

Dr. Marjo Vierros, Director of Coastal Policy and Humanities Research, moderated the session.

2. The interactive panel discussion aimed at providing insights into the potential of the blue economy, investment opportunities, and strategies to drive sustainable economic growth in coastal and ocean-based sectors in a way that promotes environmental conservation and social inclusion, leaving no one behind.
3. The discussion highlighted the need for creative financial mechanisms, including public-private partnerships with international entities. Speakers called for integrated financial solutions that blend grants with private investments, as well as for increased private sector involvement. Based on specific examples within their organization, they explained how they leverage diverse public and private financial mechanisms, such as grants, equity, loans, and guarantees to fund selected projects. In doing so, they pointed out that technical assistance and de-risking mechanisms are necessary to align private capital with sustainable ocean-based economies. In addition, panelists specifically stressed the need for stronger capacities in SIDS to handle complicated financing systems.
4. Speakers emphasized the importance of prioritizing sustainable economic models and encouraged financing frameworks that support sustainable practices and ecosystem services. Increased stakeholder engagement in the ocean economy, empowering local communities and preserving traditional knowledge were considered critical to achieving these goals. The necessity to prioritize equitable access to resources, ensuring that the benefits of ocean-based industries are shared by all, was also emphasized. Panelists outlined that the ocean is vital to SIDS, providing essential resources for economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Key messages:

- **Innovative financial mechanisms are key to unlocking sustainable ocean-based investment opportunities.**

- **Blended finance combining public and private funding catalyzes private investment, whilst providing the flexibility required to address and adapt to the diversity of projects and funding needs in ocean-based economies.**
- **Technical assistance and de-risking mechanisms are necessary to align private capital with sustainable ocean-based economies, whilst capacity building is needed to ensure all stakeholders are equipped to handle complex financing systems.**
- **Increased stakeholder engagement in the ocean economy, empowering local communities and preserving traditional knowledge are critical to ensure investments prioritize sustainable economic models and practices.**

Panel Discussion 6: Bridging Gaps: From Science to Policy to Practice

1. The following panelists engaged in this discussion:

- **Mr. Vidar Helgesen**, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission UNESCO (via video message)
- **Rear Admiral Luigi Sinapi**, Director, International Hydrographic Organization (IHO)
- **Dr. Marjo Vierros**, Director of Coastal Policy and Humanities Research at UN DESA, Senior Associate at the Global Ocean Forum
- **Dr. David Obura**, Chair of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and coral reef scientist (Director, CORDIO East Africa).

The session was moderated by **Ms. Kirsten Isensee**, Programme specialist at IOC UNESCO.

2. Experts discussed how to effectively integrate scientific research, traditional knowledge, policy frameworks, and community initiatives to achieve tangible results in ocean sustainability.
3. Speakers outlined the importance of ocean science in our societies. They reminded that ocean science directly enables many critical maritime activities, for example by providing nautical charts for shipping and playing a vital role in supporting the submarine cables industry and monitoring the health of ocean ecosystems and their provisioning of multiple benefits to economic sectors and society. Panelists recalled the direct continuum from science to policy to practice. They explained the value chain from the identification of a specific need to collecting data, how that is then turned into information and knowledge, which is used to make informed decisions in view of attaining policy objectives such as delivering SDGs and informing users actions ‘on the ground’.

4. The discussion also stressed that many gaps still exist in our knowledge of the ocean. For instance, only 26.1% of the ocean floor had been mapped in 2024, and full representation of ocean sciences in global assessments is often incomplete. Reflecting on how to address these gaps, panelists highlighted some of the challenges faced in advancing ocean science. They outlined the difficulties met in financing science and emphasized the need to design innovative solutions fitted to the scope and scale of global scientific and policy objectives.
5. Challenges relating not only to the collection of ocean data but also to its use, including obstacles to public use of scientific data, were noted. Capacity sharing focusing on learning and exchange among scientists in developing countries as well as blending of different knowledge mechanisms, including of Indigenous People and local communities were also highlighted. Noting that science related VCs increased after the Ocean Decade, among which capacity building and technology transfer have the largest number, panelists highlighted the importance of consolidating science-related voluntary commitments registered under different processes for stronger impacts as well as large scale voluntary commitments to galvanize collective efforts.

Key messages:

- **Ocean science directly supports the implementation of SDGs.**
- **There are still major knowledge gaps on the ocean, which also has effects on our capacity to meet policy objectives.**
- **There is a need to address the challenges that hinder ocean science and its use, including funding or public availability of data.**
- **Capacity sharing should also focus on learning and exchange among scientists in developing countries and integrating across different knowledge systems.**
- **UNOC3 should address commitment to sustainable ocean planning, accelerating seabed mapping, collecting new data and improving data infrastructure, improving investment in ocean science and its integration with other sciences,**
- **Furthermore, the Conference should commit to using ocean science to support both the health of the ocean ecosystems and the sustainable use of its resources for the benefit of people.**
- **It is suggested that science-related Voluntary commitments registered under different processes should be consolidated for stronger impacts.**