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**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**  
(of UNESCO)

**INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

**IOC COMMITMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL AND UN PROCESSES**  
**(BBNJ, CBD, WOA-III, UNFCCC)**

Summary

This information document provides an overview of the contribution of IOC to a number of global UN processes relevant to the ocean, namely UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Biodiversity in Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), World Ocean Assessment (WOA), and the Convention on Biological Diversity

IOC enjoys a recognized role in the UN system, in accordance with its Statutes. As a competent international organization in the fields of Marine Scientific Research and TMT, IOC contributes to various UNCLOS processes, including the emerging international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. In the framework of its current and next Medium Term Strategy, IOC will continue to contribute to major UN global agreements and frameworks including: the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the UNFCCC Paris Agreement by advocating for the increasing role of the ocean; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Samoa SIDS Pathway.

This report provides information on the IOC engagement with the following UN processes:

## **1. Cooperation with and contribution to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**

IOC was instrumental in providing knowledge and recommending leading scientists and experts to act as authors and contributors to the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC). The report exerted a major positive influence on the UNFCCC process. The IOC delegation, led by the IOC Chair, participated in the UNFCCC 25<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties in Madrid in early December 2019. The discussions there, informed by the SROCC, led to the establishment of the UNFCCC Ocean and Climate Dialogue under the Convention's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). IOC actively and visibly participated in the first Dialogue on 2 and 3 December 2020, offering the Ocean Decade as a platform for strengthening the scientific basis for UNFCCC deliberations on ocean and climate.

### *Contribution to the Marrakech Partnership under the UNFCCC*

Under the leadership of the High-Level Climate Champions, the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action supports the implementation of the Paris Agreement by enabling collaboration between governments and the cities, regions, businesses and investors that must act on climate change.

The mission is to strengthen collaboration between governments and key stakeholders to immediately lower emissions and increase resilience against climate impacts. These actions are guided by the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement and undertaken in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The focus is on environmental, economic and social system transformation, promoting higher ambition of all stakeholders to collectively strive for the 1.5 °C temperature goal and a climate-neutral and resilient world.

Within the Marrakech Partnership different thematic areas were identified. IOC actively contributes to the ocean and coastal zones thematic area led by Conservation International and the Ocean and Climate Platform. The IOC-Secretariat is co-focal point for the pathway in the thematic area. Together with the other co-focal point, IUCN, and the support by the High Level Champion Team, the IOC Secretariat, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including NGOs, science organizations, the private sector and UN agencies, produced a first edition of the pathway (including Vision & Summary and an Action Table) in November 2020. An amended and updated version was prepared and published in May 2021. The pathway, the Vision and the Action Table, will allow further engagement with all relevant stakeholders in the lead up to the UNFCCC COP26. The Ocean Action Day during the COP26 will provide the platform to highlight the actions identified in the field of marine Nature Based Solutions, Aquatic Food production, Zero-emission shipping and Ocean Renewable Energy as presented in the pathway.

Contribution to the work of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)

The SBSTA is one of two permanent subsidiary bodies to the UNFCCC. It supports the work of the COP, the CMP and the CMA through the provision of timely information and advice on scientific and technological matters as they relate to the Convention, its Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. The SBSTA Research Dialogue provides a forum between the scientific community and Parties (as well as non-Party stakeholders) to exchange knowledge on the latest scientific information and identify gaps and needs related to the implementation of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

Thanks to the good on-going cooperation between UNFCCC and IOC and to IOC's demonstrated record of provision of relevant and timely scientific information to the SBSTA, the Commission is invited on a regular basis to contribute to the SBSTA Research Dialogue. The thirteenth meeting of the research dialogue (1-2 June 2021) explored two themes:

- Theme 1. Climate system dynamics and modelling: New knowledge and its implications for decision making.
- Theme 2. Resilience for and by nature: Building knowledge and understanding to weave the protection and restoration of nature into decision making on mitigation and adaptation.

The IOC Secretariat mobilized the participation of an expert from the IOC Group of Experts on Integrated Ocean Carbon Research (IOC-R), who made a presentation at the Research Dialogue entitled 'Potential synergies between mitigation and adaptation for the ocean sink and how to evaluate opportunities and tradeoffs'. The presentation allowed to put ocean issues at the heart of the Research Dialogue, was very well received and triggered a number of questions by and interactions between the IOC-R expert and Parties to the Convention.

Since the industrial revolution, the ocean has evolved into a major sink for carbon generated by human activities. Without oceanic and terrestrial sinks, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels would be close to 600 ppm (parts per million), well above the level compatible with a global warming target limited to 2 °C. In the context of climate change, however, it is still unclear to scientists if the ocean will continue to help mitigate the effects of global warming, or its capacity to absorb carbon from the atmosphere will be altered as a consequence of the numerous human-induced ocean changes. Faced with the urgent need to find answers to this and other crucial scientific questions, five international research programmes on ocean and climate interaction have joined the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO to agree on a roadmap for future research, with the ultimate goal of providing decision-makers with the knowledge needed to implement effective climate change mitigation and adaptation policies in the next ten years.

The IOC Working Group on Integrated Ocean Carbon Research (IOC-R), established in 2018, and coordinated by IOC, fosters active collaboration and synergies amongst IOC, the International Ocean Carbon Coordination Project (IOCCP), the Surface-Ocean Lower Atmosphere Study (SOLAS), the Integrated Marine Biosphere Research (IMBeR), the Global Carbon Project (GCP), the core project on Climate and Ocean Variability, Predictability and Change (CLIVAR) of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), and relevant national efforts on carbon research. IOC-R welcomes promotion of this programme from all the Member States, encourages national support of coordinated carbon research, and is open to any other relevant international efforts on ocean carbon research.

A dedicated publication has been made available to IOC Member States attending the 31st session of the IOC Assembly.<sup>1</sup> UNFCCC has collaborated to the shaping of the IOC-R agenda by informing the IOC-R Group of Experts of policy needs for information on scientific and technological aspects of ocean carbon.

Protecting and restoring nature is fundamental for resilience to climate change and to pathways that limit warming to 1.5 degrees while providing co-benefits for ecosystem health, community resilience, and biodiversity. The IOC Secretariat contributed to Theme 2 with a [poster presentation](#) on current work in support of the protection and restoration of coastal blue carbon ecosystems for climate change mitigation and adaptation. This includes the coordination of the [Blue Carbon Initiative](#) with Conservation International and IUCN, and the coordination of the [International Partnership for Blue Carbon](#) with the Australian Department for Agriculture, Water and the Environment. By connecting governments with scientists, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations, the IOC helps building knowledge to weave the protection and restoration of coastal blue carbon ecosystems into decision making on mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Depending on the format of COP26, the possibility of organizing a side event on blue carbon will be discussed with partners from the Blue Carbon Initiative and the International Partnership for Blue Carbon in the lead up to the COP.

#### *Contribution to the Nairobi Work Programme (NWP) on Ocean*

During this period, the IOC collaborated with the UNFCCC and partners on the Nairobi Work Programme (NWP) on Ocean. The NWP works in collaboration with partners and experts to advance activities that produce usable knowledge products and catalyze partnerships for collaborative action through a stepwise approach in response to identified knowledge needs in a wide range of thematic areas (e.g. oceans, coastal areas, ecosystems etc.). The NWP is currently focusing on the topic of Ocean. In line with the NWP knowledge to action methodology, key steps were undertaken to close knowledge gaps on oceans that help scale up adaptation action. A Group of Experts was convened, and a scoping paper was produced in November 2019. IOC participates in the newly created Group of Experts. In addition, a virtual Group of the Expert meeting was held on 21-22 November 2019 to co-design the thirteenth Focal Point Forum and plan collaborative actions.

The Thirteenth NWP Focal Point Forum was held under the guidance of the Chair of the SBSTA as a side event at COP 25, 6 December 2019, Madrid, Spain. The Focal Point Forum focused on four themes: Governance and Participation; Data and Methods; Restoration and Protection; Support (Technology and Innovation, finance and funding, capacity building and education). IOC led and moderated the Data and Methods session.

The UNFCCC and NWP are preparing a report to capture the outcomes in terms of actions as a result of the findings in the scoping paper, Group of the Expert meeting, as well as discussions during the thirteenth Focal Point Forum. The report will include indicative collaborative actions of engaging experts, organizations and partners.

These collaborative actions will aim at addressing the knowledge gaps on this thematic area during the course of 2020. The progress made on these partnerships will be shared with Parties at SBSTA 52 (June 2020). In addition, the NWP intends to explore the possibility of co-

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<sup>1</sup> IOC-R. 2021. *Integrated Ocean Carbon Research: A Summary of Ocean Carbon Research, and Vision of Coordinated Ocean Carbon Research and Observations for the Next Decade*. R. Wanninkhof, C. Sabine and S. Aricò (eds.). Paris, UNESCO. 46 pp. (IOC Technical Series, 158.) doi:10.25607/h0gj-pq41

producing relevant knowledge products in the context of these collaborative actions as well as co-presenting the outcomes in various relevant events/meeting during the course of 2020.

The NWP Expert Group on the Ocean has co-designed collaborative actions based on the second expert group meeting held 17-18 June 2020. IOC also participated in a Third NWP Expert Group online meeting on the Ocean held on 11-12 May 2021. The Group discussed the overarching operating context and overview of the progress the Expert Group on the Ocean has made to date regarding collaborative actions by thematic Groups on: 1) Governance and Participation, 2) Data and Methods, 3) Restoration and Protection and 4) Support. The meeting also discussed how to strengthen the engagement and partnerships of organizations. The Group further explored the work of the constituted bodies and other processes within and outside the UNFCCC, building synergies with other thematic areas under the NWP (e.g. biodiversity) and increasing visibility, monitoring impact and information exchange.

The Expert Group (Restoration) has prepared a Supplement to the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Technical Guidelines on "[Coastal Adaptation and Nature-based Solutions for the Implementation of NAPs: Considerations for GCF Proposal Development](#)". The Supplement was referenced during the NWP negotiations in June 2021 when sharing examples of credible support and knowledge products coming from the NWP's Expert Group on Oceans.

IOC is contributing to a new document on 'Enhancing Resilience of Oceans, Coastal Areas and Ecosystems through Collaborative Partnerships' as a contribution to the NWP on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change.

IOC is co-leading the thematic Group of Data and Methods and currently preparing a data policy brief on Integrating Data and Information into Relevant Adaptation Policies and Plans. Finally, two IOC experts were nominated in May 2021 to support the new UNFCCC initiative for UN-wide rapid technical backstopping for National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

## **2. Biodiversity in Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)**

IOC actively contributes to the negotiation process on an International Legally Binding Instrument (ILBI) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). In October 2020, with a view to inform the negotiation process, the Secretariat published a Non-Paper on existing and potential contributions of IOC-UNESCO to the BBNJ process ([IOC/INF-1387](#)). The 4th Intergovernmental Conference on BBNJ initially planned for March 2021 has been postponed to August 2021 due to COVID-19, and is likely to be further postponed. Intersessional informal consultations took place via a virtual platform between September 2020 and February 2021. The role of OBIS and OceanInfoHub as part of the BBNJ clearing-house mechanism (CHM) has been suggested by a number of Member States and Observers. It is yet unclear who will manage the BBNJ CHM, the BBNJ secretariat or IOC in close collaboration with other UN organisations.

## **3. World Ocean Assessment**

IOC continues to provide scientific and technical support to the World Ocean Assessment (WOA) process established under the UNGA. A second cycle of assessment (2017–2020) was initiated under the UN Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, starting with the holding of five regional workshops in 2017 to build capacity, support the development of assessment(s) and facilitate outreach and awareness-raising. Discussions with DOALOS (Secretariat of the Regular Process) have been conducted with regards to how the conclusions of the WOA-II, particularly in terms of knowledge and capacity gaps, could be addressed by the Implementation Plan of the Ocean Decade.

To showcase this emerging cooperation, IOC and DOALOS organized a joint webinar on the Strengthening the Science Policy Interface for Ocean Sustainability on 1 March 2021. Furthermore, the IOC Executive Secretary took part in the launch event of the [WOA-II report](#) on 21 April 2021. Whilst the first World Ocean Assessment (WOA-I), released in 2015, had warned that many areas of the ocean had been seriously degraded, the latest assessment notes that the situation has not improved — and that many of the benefits that the ocean provides to people such as oxygen, food, jobs, medicine and climate regulation are increasingly being undermined by human activities. The report also identifies a number of key findings and message for further orienting ocean research.

#### **4. Convention of Biological Diversity**

The Convention on Biological Diversity is currently preparing the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). In relation to coastal and marine aspects of the GBF, IOC provided technical comments and suggestions on the indicators and targets, which were reflected in the draft document for submission to the 24th SBSTTA. These comments and suggestions focused on the need to avoid duplication with existing processes and to optimize linkages into efforts to develop a global marine biodiversity observing system based on the Essential Ocean Variables, which are coordinated through the Biology and Ecosystems Panel of the Global Ocean Observing System with support from the Marine Biodiversity Observation Network (MBON) of GEO BON, IOC's own Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS) which act as the data platform in close collaboration with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility and many other partners.

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