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INFORMATION DOCUMENT

UN ENGAGEMENT IN THE OCEAN DECADE – ROADMAP AND PRIORITY ACTIONS

Summary. This document presents the initial conclusions and recommendations from an analysis of the current and future engagement opportunities for UN entities in the Ocean Decade. Based on a literature review and interviews with UN-Oceans members it examines how the mandates of UN entities provide opportunities for action within the Ocean Decade, the general types of engagement that are currently available for UN entities within the Ocean Decade, the potential for this action to enhance the science-policy interface and concludes with a series of preliminary recommendations to be led by the Decade Coordination Unit. These recommendations will be discussed and finalized with UN-Oceans and their operationalization will take into account the resource requirements for the Decade Coordination Unit.

United Nations (UN) entities have a variety of frameworks and mandates related to ocean science, which provide multiple opportunities for collaboration in the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The importance of collaboration of UN entities in the Ocean Decade is recognized by UNGA in paragraph 295 of A/RES/72/73, where it invited “*UN-Oceans and its participants to collaborate with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission on the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science.*” To date this collaboration has not been fully realized. Twenty-six (26) Decade Actions are led by UN entities, representing 9% of all Decade Actions, but only 3% of Decade Actions are led by UN entities other than IOC/UNESCO.

Considering this, IOC has commissioned an analysis to explore how engagement of UN entities may be enhanced and the initial results of this analysis are presented in this document. The analysis is based on literature review and interviews with members of UN-Oceans. It examines how the mandates of UN entities provide opportunities for action within the Ocean Decade, the general types of engagement that are currently available for UN entities within the Ocean Decade, the potential for this action to enhance the science-policy interface, and concludes with a series of recommendations to be led by the Decade Coordination Unit.

Each UN entity is unique in its mandate, governance, membership and reporting processes, as well as their relationship to science. Many entities are end users of scientific knowledge; a few undertake scientific research or catalyze and enable the conduct of such research; others are engaged in policy-relevant research; and many entities compile and summarize published research in support of their work. Most entities engage in capacity development, and their work generally relates to several interlinked Ocean Decade challenges either directly or indirectly. The unique way in which a particular entity uses, produces, or enables science will be key to determining how they can best partner with the Ocean Decade.

All UN entities, individually and collectively, operate at the science-policy interface and one of the most unique and important aspects of UN entity participation in the Ocean Decade is the value that their mandates at the science-policy interface add to the work of the Decade. The Ocean Decade will not be successful if its science does not respond to the demands of policy, including global goals and targets such as the SDGs (particularly SDG 14 and its linkages to other SDGs) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Because of their broad and interlinked mandates, and their processes that translate science to policy and use science to update regulations and management actions, UN entities have the potential to (i) provide input to the type of science that is needed to address gaps in knowledge; (ii) compile and synthesize this science into a format that is most relevant to a particular policy process at a time that action can and/or needs to be taken; and (iii) ensure that the science is viewed as credible by member countries.

The UN-Oceans is particularly valuable for this science-policy process, given its ability to provide space for collaborative work amongst agencies across their respective mandates, work programmes and priorities. An opportunity for collaboration along the science-policy interface can help support work that transcends the mandates of several UN agencies, sets joint priorities, draws information from each agency and its scientific networks, and feeds into multiple policy processes.

Considering and understanding the benefits of engagement in the Ocean Decade for each UN entity, and for UN-Oceans at large, is a vital component of the UN engagement process. The benefits and motivations may not be the same for each entity, but some commonalities exist. Common benefits include the ability to direct ocean science towards filling knowledge gaps important for each entity, thus further strengthening existing science-policy processes; the ability to collaborate towards co-designing projects that contribute to filling priority knowledge gaps that are important for multiple entities and for reaching global goals and targets; and the ability to reach a broader audience than is possible within the membership of each entity, both in terms of gaining visibility for own work amongst a new audience (e.g. scientists and government scientific entities), but also for broadening collaborative networks.

Currently, UN entities have several opportunities to participate in the Ocean Decade and realise the above benefits, yet many of these opportunities have been under-utilized to date. These opportunities include registration of Decade Actions, engagement in governance and coordination structures, or hosting of decentralised coordination structures.

The challenges that exist for UN entities wishing to contribute to the Ocean Decade and that are contributing to the under-utilization of Decade mechanisms include the fact that the Ocean Decade engagement processes are global and are not designed specifically with UN entities in mind, and may not fit the mandates and modalities under which they operate; the perception that the Ocean Decade structure is complex, creating confusion about how to engage and what is required; a perception that the Ocean Decade may not provide sufficient opportunities for leadership or visibility for UN entities that are participating; and the fact that engagement in the Ocean Decade can only be undertaken within the specific mandates of each entity, and some activities may require approval of their respective governing bodies.

There is a lack of awareness amongst many entities on how they can best contribute to the Decade. UN Oceans members involved in the interviews highlighted that this lack of awareness should not be interpreted as lack of interest, as most entities are interested in participating, but has more to do with identifying the right opportunities for each entity within the Decade, and a lack of awareness of how, and in what form, to contribute. The Ocean Decade structure was perceived as being too complex by some entities, as was the process for participation (including registering Ocean Decade Actions).

Many UN entities confirmed that the most “traditional” form of engagement in the Decade i.e., through registration of Decade Actions, does not work well for their mode of operation. Some entities expressed a preference to co-developing an overarching and holistic strategy with the Ocean Decade, rather than focusing on specific projects or programs. Others would like to align their work with the Decade to support major upcoming meetings, programmatic milestones, or filling key knowledge gaps to support their work. Overall, it was felt that most entities’ work does not fit neatly under one Decade Challenge, but is cross-cutting across many Challenges, and this needs to be taken into account in registering a Decade Action or otherwise getting formal recognition of their engagement in the Decade.

Many UN entities expressed a wish to better understand how individual Decade Actions contribute to a strategic whole, and what the overall scientific and science-policy implications of the Actions are. There was discussion about the need to analyse synergies across Decade Actions, including scientific findings, solutions and gap areas. This information could be used for better engagement with the user community and policy processes across UN entities and global policy goals. UN-Oceans might be one mechanism through which such engagement could be undertaken.

UN entities agreed that enhanced participation in the Ocean Decade could provide an important opportunity to strengthen the Decade’s science-policy interface. Most UN entities operate, in one way or another, in linking science with policy. UN entities participation could, as a result, provide scientific participants in the Decade a possibility to link with new policy audiences. Additionally, UN-Oceans as an inter-entity coordinating mechanism has a potential to help address the science-policy interface from a multi-entity perspective.

Several UN entities expressed that UN-Oceans has been under-utilized as an opportunity to stimulate collaboration amongst UN entities to implement the Ocean Decade. UN-Oceans meetings could offer time and space to pitch potential projects and brainstorm new collaborative ideas to address science-policy gaps, and to start the development of partnerships towards mutually important goals, including resource mobilisation.

Finally, the benefits of participation in the Ocean Decade are not clearly understood by many UN entities, and they will not be the same for each entity. Visibility for the work of an entity alone may not be enough of a motivator, but most entities wanted their participation to have a tangible

impact and benefit to justify the allocation of scarce staff time and resources. For some, an educational component that highlights their work beyond their membership and usual stakeholders is important. For others, a key consideration is the opportunity to shape the direction of the Ocean Decade's research to support their entity's work. Finding a new and impactful audience for their work, and/or mainstreaming their entity's work to new areas through trans-disciplinary collaborations could have added value for many. entities also want visibility and opportunities to share their achievements through the Decade.

A series of initial recommendations was developed as part of the analysis, and will be presented to UN-Oceans for discussion and finalisation. Operationalization of the final set of recommendations will include consideration of the resource implications for the Decade Coordination Unit to lead their implementation.

- (i) Work individually with UN entities with a strong willingness to participate in the Decade to co-develop the best approach for their engagement with the Decade. This will allow both the entity in question and the Ocean Decade to gain maximum benefits from their participation, either as a provider of new information, as a participant in a collaborative activity to fill key knowledge gaps, or as an end user of the science produced by the Decade.
- (ii) Place more emphasis on strengthening the science-policy interface within the Ocean Decade by actively working with UN entities and UN-Oceans to communicate synergies in scientific findings and solutions across Decade Actions to a variety of policy audiences.
- (iii) Create opportunities for UN entities to take a leadership role in Decade-relevant work and encourage collaborative action between multiple entities around common themes for the creation of additional coherence and coordination. Key events, global goals and targets, for example, could benefit from a multi-entity approach in the Decade context, and could increase the level of ambition of collaborative activities.
- (iv) Explore opportunities to formally recognise the engagement of UN entities outside the registration process of Decade Actions. This could include opportunities to recognise work across the science/policy interface and to develop specific reporting mechanisms to the Decade that harmonize with the existing reporting requirements of the entity.
- (v) Establish a standing item at UN-Oceans meetings on the Ocean Decade. Under this agenda item, UN-Oceans members could be invited to report and exchange information on their Decade-relevant activities, and to pitch ideas and brainstorm about the possibility of new collaborative projects. There would also be an opportunity for IOC UNESCO to answer specific Decade-related questions that entities might have.
- (vi) Seek further opportunities to raise the visibility of the Ocean Decade and what it means for UN entities. Develop guidance aimed specifically at UN entities on how to participate in the Ocean Decade and provide opportunities via the Ocean Decade for UN entities to communicate about their Decade-registered work and its achievements.
- (vii) Encourage UN entities to involve their member States and their scientific partners in the work of the Ocean Decade. Awareness raising about the Decade should also include the national level, and UN entities can play a key role in raising awareness of their member States and involving them in Decade-relevant activities.

Continue articulating and better defining the benefits gained from participation in the Ocean Decade. Some benefits are likely to be common across entities, while others are individual to each entity. Articulating these benefits together with participating entities, measuring their impacts, and re-visiting them for lessons learned can help further improve how the Decade collaborates with UN entities.

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