



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

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Item 4.7 of the Provisional Agenda

**DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW IOC-WIDE STRATEGY
ON SUSTAINABLE OCEAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

Summary

This document provides information on recent advancement in the area of ocean management as well as the rationale and process for IOC and its Member States to consider adopting an IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning & Management which would guide the contribution of the Commission across its programmes on ocean sciences, observation and data, early warning services and assessments, through the development of new services, ecosystem-based management tools, assessment and related information products, as well as capacity development in support to sustainable ocean management.

Financial implications: There are no direct financial implications associated with the preparation of the Strategy but the implementation of it will have financial implications which will need to be reflected in the work plan associated with all Expected Results.

Decision proposed: The Assembly is invited to consider the draft decision referenced as Dec. A-32/4.7 in the Provisional Action Paper (IOC-32/AP Prov.)

Introduction

1. Accelerating integrated ocean management is among the goals of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030. The UN Ocean Conference Lisbon Declaration highlighted the role of science-based actions to enable informed ocean management and planning.

2. In September 2021, UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service published *The Evaluation of the Strategic Positioning of IOC (the Evaluation)* ([IOS/EVS/PI/197; 212 EX/9](#)). The Evaluation included a set of six recommendations and suggested actions. It highlighted the increasing importance of IOC to the sustainable management of the ocean and the central role the organisation should undertake.

“...[With] Agenda 2030, IOC's role only increases in importance. The Decade is thus an opportunity for IOC to reaffirm its global leading position and relevance to the members of UN Oceans, to policy makers and to the world at large in helping to bring about more sustainable management of the ocean.”

3. Further, with increasing international obligations relating to ocean management and planning and these becoming increasingly science dependent, IOC needs to fully leverage its global leadership and position to help nations meet their commitments by bringing to bear the powerful scientific, data and technical expertise of the organisation.

4. The Decade full title, *the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)*, reveals the critical nature of sustainable development to achieving the outcomes of the Decade. Without a strategy to leverage science for marine management, the ‘*for sustainable development*’ element of the Decade will be impossible to meet. IOC is extremely well placed to support countries along the path of sustainable ocean planning; The IOC has access to technical expertise and data like no other global organisation, it must take advantage of this reach and leverage it for the sustainable management of the ocean.

5. In light of these recent advancement in the area of ocean planning and management and considering the objectives of the [IOC Medium Term Strategy \(2022–2029\)](#), it is timely for IOC and its Member States to consider adopting an IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management which would guide the contribution of the Commission across its programmes on ocean sciences, observation and data, early warning services and assessments, through the development of new services, ecosystem-based management tools, assessment and related information products, as well as capacity development in support to sustainable ocean management.

Policy drivers for a strategy

6. A strategy is needed to address the interconnected policy drivers at the global, regional, and national levels for sustainable ocean management. By recognising the importance of SDG14, global and regional frameworks, as well as national legislations, the IOC can provide a cohesive and coordinated approach to support Member States in achieving their sustainable development goals, promoting the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, and fostering effective ocean governance.

7. Both at regional and global level, frameworks and initiatives such as the EU Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive and mechanisms to implement international frameworks such as the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), all reference the growing recognition of the need for integrated approaches to sustainably manage marine and coastal areas. An IOC-wide strategy would acknowledge these drivers and facilitate the harmonisation of efforts, promoting coherence and collaboration in sustainable ocean management and planning across different regions.

8. Moreover, national legislations on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Marine Protected Areas, among others, further emphasise the importance of effective and comprehensive approaches to ocean governance and area-based management at the national level. An IOC-wide strategy can provide guidance and technical support to Member States in aligning their national legislations and policies with global and regional frameworks, fostering capacity building, and facilitating knowledge exchange, ultimately enhancing the implementation of sustainable ocean management and planning practices.

9. Further, the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (Ocean Panel) advanced the idea of Sustainable Ocean Planning (SOP) to achieve 100% sustainable management of member countries ocean area under their national jurisdictions. As part of this call to action, the Ocean Panel has also encouraged all coastal and ocean States to join them in this process. SOPs provide a comprehensive framework that is expected to incorporate various components including area-based plans (such as MSP or ICZM), social considerations (such as equitable roles), economic development strategies, and environmental protection approaches, all of which build on each other to create a cohesive whole which provides clear guidance to decision-makers enabling sustainable management. The data, expertise and relationships that exist within and across IOC, as well as the world-leading experience in marine spatial planning, place the organisation in a unique position to contribute to these plans, and sustainable ocean planning more broadly.

10. Finally, looking forward to the development of an Ocean Decade Programme on Sustainable Ocean Planning (to be developed in 2023–2024) that will bring together the best available technical and science support and knowledge in ecological, social sciences, economics and governance will require a strong contribution from IOC.

11. The purpose of this document is to set out the process for the development of a draft IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning & Management (*the strategy*), why a strategy is necessary and initial ideas as to the areas the strategy might cover. The document will be developed alongside the conceptual framework for the Decade Sustainable Ocean Planning and the process will take advantage of the joint learnings between them; they will be completed by February 2024, with planned adoption of the Strategy by the IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in 2024. Funding has been secured for these activities via the extra-budgetary contributions provided by NORAD and the Sustainable Development Reform Hub (SDR Hub)¹, based at the University of New South Wales (Sydney, Australia), has been engaged to support the process and lead the development of the IOC-wide Strategy.

IOC advancing Integrated Coastal Area Management/MSP to sustainable ocean planning and management

12. An overarching strategy for the IOC on sustainable ocean planning and management would bring together IOC's work in various other areas of ocean management and planning, including Integrated coastal area management (ICAM) and the long history in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). The IOC Strategy for ICAM, approved in 2015 by the IOC Assembly will provide an important pillar for constructing the IOC wide-Strategy. It currently focuses on the development of technical capacities for ecosystem and area-based management tools, the integration of ocean-related hazards and climate change adaptation within coastal and marine management and planning tools; and the use and dissemination of data, information and decision support tools for coastal and ocean management. (cf. [IOC-XXIX/2 Annex 16](#))

13. The history of IOC work in MSP is significant, as described by the evaluation, and there is clearly strong demand by Member States for MSP. The extension of IOC's work in pioneering

¹ <https://www.sustainabledevelopmentreform.org/>

MSP to sustainable ocean planning is a natural extension of the programme and will enable it to address wider issues such as ocean literacy, engaging communities and gender equity, all of which are central to the current IOC Medium Term Strategy.

14. MSP and associated management frameworks play a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability of the ocean economy and is considered a crucial tool in achieving success. The evaluation highlighted those interviewees consistently mentioned the invaluable contribution of IOC in advancing MSP through its well-organized workshops and comprehensive training programs. The production of IOC's guidelines for MSP have been particularly instrumental in driving the implementation of MSP worldwide. The influence of IOC's work is clearly evident in shaping policy frameworks and delivering sustainable outcomes, establishing MSP as a prime example of their impactful contributions. The agency is trusted as neutral; that neutrality builds trust and confidence to enable it to bridge the science policy gap. IOC should leverage these areas and apply this expertise to wider cross-boundary and transboundary sustainable ocean planning. The launch of the MSP Roadmap², together with the European Commission, identified six priority areas. Building on these outcomes to achieve the same successes and priorities in sustainable ocean planning and management is a logical next step.

15. It would also allow the IOC to fill some of the gaps identified in the evaluation and contribute to meeting the objectives of the IOC Medium-Term Strategy. Specifically addressing the needs of ocean dependent nations such as Small Island Developing States, addressing and focusing on their specific needs in supporting their capacity to implement sustainable ocean planning. It would also provide the opportunity to create deeper links with regional technical organisations and thereby integrate data more effectively and avoid duplication. It also has a unique position to be able to operate regionally, the strategy should leverage this.

16. IOC should be stronger in its influence on sustainable ocean economic development discussions and a strategy on sustainable ocean planning and management would enable it to reach beyond the current MSP framework into the wider blue economy discussions. This could increase the policy influence and ensure that data held by institutions, countries and partners can be coordinated into a coherent framework to enable sustainable ocean planning and management to appreciate both the economic value of the ocean but also, appreciate and protect, the natural asset value of the system. Linking to existing frameworks in the space such as sustainable ocean plans, blue economy roadmaps, national ocean accounting and natural capital assessments would all leverage greater influence.

17. IOC has a specific mandate to promote international cooperation in ocean science, observation, and capacity development. The organisation is uniquely positioned to provide technical support and scientific advice for the development of marine policies related to sustainable ocean planning and management. The specialised knowledge enables it to contribute to the design of evidence-based strategies and plans, ensuring the integration of scientific principles and best practices into decision-making processes.

18. IOC has a number of initiatives that contribute to national and transboundary marine spatial planning and sustainable ocean management. Bringing these, and others, under an organisation wide strategy, highlighting the contribution that can be made to sustainable ocean planning and management from IOC programmes will increase the value and influence of both these individual initiatives and the organisation as a whole. Though the development of the Strategy, these will be mapped and consulted.

² <https://www.msfglobal2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MSProadmap2022-2027.pdf>

IOC wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning & Management: Initial thinking

19. A detailing gap analysis will be undertaken as part of the organisation-wide strategy development, see annex 1 for an initial gap analysis. This section describes the initial thinking of the SDR Hub to where IOC may wish to progress sustainable ocean planning and management in the next decade and initial proposals for a sustainable ocean planning and management strategy (2024–2030). The top three outcomes identified for inclusions are:

- (i) **Increased integration and mainstreaming of ocean planning:** One of the primary outcomes would be the successful integration and mainstreaming of ocean planning (underlaid by MSP principles) into national policies, legislation, and frameworks.
- (ii) **Improved data, data frameworks and information management for ecosystem-based management and sectoral applications:** Improvement of data collection, sharing mechanisms, and standardisation efforts relevant to ocean planning and management will be vital for successes and to track of impact. By collating and organising data IOC can aid in enhancing data availability, accessibility, and quality, decision-makers and stakeholders would have access to comprehensive and reliable information for evidence-based decision-making, spatial analysis, and monitoring of human activities in ocean spaces.
- (iii) **Strengthened cross-sectoral integration:** The strategy could facilitate stronger cross-sectoral integration of ocean planning, through fostering collaboration and dialogue among various sectors involved in ocean governance. This outcome would result from the development of guidelines and frameworks for integrating different sectoral interests and priorities, ensuring a balanced approach to sustainable ocean planning.

20. By achieving these outcomes, IOC would significantly contribute to the advancement of sustainable ocean planning, promote ecosystem-based approaches, improve resilience to climate change, and the long-term conservation and management of marine spaces.

21. To facilitate these outcomes, eight preliminary areas have been identified where the strategy could build on existing work. At this stage they have not been prioritised or specific actions or recommendations identified. These are:

- (i) **Strengthening policy frameworks:** IOC could work towards developing and promoting global guidelines and standards for ocean planning and management implementation. This could include supporting the development of legally binding instruments or frameworks that facilitate the integration of planning into national legislation and policies.
- (ii) **Enhanced data collection and sharing:** IOC could focus on expanding the collection, processing and sharing of high-quality data relevant to the ocean and use planning. This could involve promoting the investment in advanced monitoring technologies, such as remote sensing and autonomous underwater vehicles, to gather more comprehensive and real-time information on oceanographic, ecological, and socio-economic aspects of ocean use. Defining standard ocean observation variables for ocean planning coupled with improved data sharing mechanisms, including open data initiatives, could enable greater access and utilisation of this information by stakeholders involved in planning and policy processes, assuming the capacity is developed to utilise these data.
- (iii) **Capacity development and training:** Continued emphasis on capacity development and training is crucial for successful advancement of MSP into ocean planning. Under the outputs and objectives of the IOC Capacity

Development Strategy 2023–2030, IOC could expand its efforts to deliver training programmes, workshops, and knowledge exchange activities, focusing on building the technical skills and knowledge of practitioners and policy-makers. This should likely include targeted capacity-building initiatives for specific regions and country groupings, addressing their unique challenges and needs.

- (iv) **Integration of climate change adaptation, mitigation and coastal resilience aspects:** Given the urgency of addressing climate change impacts, IOC could lead the integration of climate change adaptation and mitigation considerations into ocean planning. This can involve developing tools and guidelines that help decision-makers identify and incorporate climate resilience measures and focus protection on blue carbon habitats. By emphasising the integration of climate science and projections into planning processes, IOC can assist countries in effectively managing the risks and vulnerabilities associated with climate change in their marine planning efforts as well as contribute in a cost effective manner to mitigation efforts.
- (v) **Collaboration with indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs):** To ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and integration of indigenous and local knowledge (ILK), IOC could strengthen its collaboration with indigenous and local communities building on the existing expertise of UNESCO (e.g. [LINKS](#)). This could involve promoting the establishment of mechanisms for engagement, consultation, and co-management with these communities, but it must be meaningful; acknowledging their rights, traditional ecological knowledge, and stewardship practices. By integrating traditional knowledge and local priorities into planning, IOC can foster more holistic and culturally sensitive approaches to ocean planning. However, communities need to see results and see their knowledge used in a sensitive and appropriate manner, this would need careful planning.
- (vi) **Technology innovation and digital tools:** IOC could invest in the development and dissemination of innovative data, digital tools and technologies that support planning and on-going monitoring. This could include the creation of user-friendly software, decision support systems, and online platforms that facilitate stakeholder engagement, spatial analysis, and scenario planning. This could potentially enhance the efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of planning processes, making them more inclusive and participatory.
- (vii) **Cross-sector collaboration:** To address the interconnected challenges faced by the ocean, IOC could strengthen collaboration and coordination among different sectors (and countries). This can involve fostering partnerships with sectors such as energy, tourism, shipping, and fisheries, ensuring their active involvement in planning processes. By promoting dialogue and integrated planning, IOC could help identify synergies, trade-offs, and win-win solutions that contribute to sustainable ocean management.
- (viii) **Increased Financial Support:** To enable effective MSP implementation, IOC could advocate for increased financial support for countries, particularly those with limited resources, to develop and implement ocean planning processes and frameworks. This can involve mobilising funding from donors, development banks, and private sector. Additionally, IOC could assist countries in accessing existing funding mechanisms and promote the integration of ocean planning into national and regional blue economy development plans, enhancing its overall financial sustainability.

Strategy development process

22. The focus of the approach for the Strategy is the engagement of stakeholders in order to develop a co-owned document that all can recognise as reflective of their goals and ambitions. At the heart of the process will be participation, co-development and iteration.

23. To this end stakeholders are defined as:

- IOC and UNESCO Member States,
- IOC programmes, organs, and Secretariat,
- National and regional institutions with a mandate in ocean management,
- Relevant UN and international organisations,
- Representatives from economic sectors (both public and private) with an interest in ocean stewardship,
- Relevant academic and research organisation.

24. These will be consulted initially through a survey and tailored consultations, and will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on this document and its initial findings, before a final document is produced by February 2024. Each commenting round will be accompanied by a webinar for all relevant stakeholders where the team presents the document, approach and main considerations, allowing immediate verbal reactions from the stakeholders, as well as more formal written inputs. The final framework and strategy will be presented to the IOC Executive Council at its 57th session for consideration.

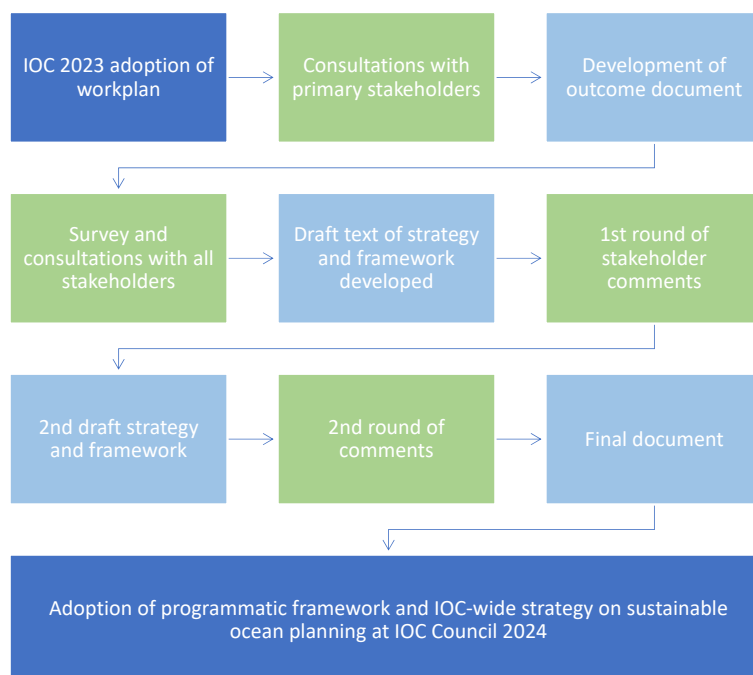


Figure 1: Overview of the process to complete programmatic framework and strategy on sustainable ocean planning

25. The development of the documents will be supported by an extensive literature review of the existing knowledge, data, gaps and opportunities. The review will identify provisions for the implementation of ocean planning and integrated management, relevant stakeholders. Focusing on the opportunities to where the Decade programme can add most value.