

IOC Circular Letter No 3061
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IOC/VR/JB/AC/pbo
17 Octobre 2025

To : Official National Coordinating Bodies for liaison with the IOC (IOC Member States)

C.c. : Permanent Delegates/Observers Missions to UNESCO and
National Commissions for UNESCO of IOC Member States
Chair and Vice-Chairpersons of IOC
Officers of Major Subsidiary Bodies of IOC

Subject: Action Plan resulting from the Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (“the Ocean Decade”)

I am pleased to share the Action Plan for the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Ocean Decade.¹ The evaluation aimed to assess the effectiveness, relevance, and coherence of the Ocean Decade’s implementation to date, and to inform strategic adjustments needed to achieve its intended outcomes over the remaining five years.

Based on the management response by the IOC Executive Secretary, the IOC Assembly requested the Secretariat to develop an Action Plan for presentation to the Decade Advisory Board before the end of 2025 and to report on progress to the IOC Executive Council in 2026.²

The Action Plan contained in Annex 1 was prepared by the Secretariat and discussed with the Decade Advisory Board in September 2025 prior to its finalisation.

The implementation of the identified actions offers a chance to build on the significant achievements already made through the Ocean Decade and to consolidate their impact, providing opportunities also for the future of the IOC. Yet the recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation can only be met if resources—particularly for coordination and governance—are significantly increased. I therefore call on all Member States to expand their financial and/or in-kind support to the coordination of the Ocean Decade at the global level and via regional and technical subsidiary bodies. Annex 2 contains a summary of the most urgent needs of the Secretariat in order to implement the Action Plan.

¹ The Mid-Term Evaluation was foreseen in the *Ocean Decade Implementation Plan* and the process was triggered by [IOC Resolution EC-57/1](#) of the IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in June 2024. The evaluation was managed by UNESCO’s Division for Internal Oversight Services (IOS).

² See document [IOC/A-33/4.8.Doc\(2\)](#) and [IOC Resolution A-33/2](#)

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Member States are kindly requested to widely circulate the above information within relevant networks. Additional information can be obtained from the IOC Secretariat j.barbiere@unesco.org or a.clausen@unesco.org.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Vidar Helgesen
Executive Secretary

Enclosures: 1/ Action plan in response to the mid-term evaluation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development ("the Decade"/"the Ocean Decade")
2/ Immediate resource needs for implementation of action plan for mid-term evaluation

ANNEX 1: ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE UN DECADE OF OCEAN SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (“THE DECADE”/“THE OCEAN DECADE”)

1. The Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development was requested by the IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in June 2024. Managed by UNESCO’s Division for Internal Oversight Services (IOS), the evaluation aimed to assess the effectiveness, relevance, and coherence of the Decade’s implementation to date, and to inform strategic adjustments needed to achieve its intended outcomes over the remaining five years.

2. A [summary of the evaluation and the management response](#) from the IOC Executive Secretary were presented to the 33rd Session of the IOC Assembly in June 2025. [IOC Resolution A-33/2](#) requested the Secretariat to develop an action plan on the basis of the management response for presentation to the Decade Advisory Board before the end of 2025 and to report on progress against the action plan at the 59th Session of the IOC Executive Council. The following Action Plan was prepared by the Secretariat and discussed with the Decade Advisory Board during Meeting No. 03/2025 in September 2025 prior to its finalisation.

Recommendations / Actions	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Streamline and strengthen the governance and coordination framework for the Ocean Decade to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and support progress toward its intended outcomes in the second half.		
1.1 In consultation with the Decade Advisory Board, define and launch a set of flagship priorities that cut across multiple Ocean Decade Challenges and directly address the most urgent ocean science needs for global policy frameworks while leveraging opportunities to strengthen the IOC’s post-2030 mandate (ref. Recommendation 8.1). Mobilize and coordinate clusters of partners from across the Ocean Decade to catalyze collective action delivering on these priorities in the lead-up to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and through to 2030.	Q1 2026	DCU / DAB
1.2 Develop a resource mobilisation package for the operation of the Decade Coordination Unit including scenarios ranging from the minimum viable level to an ideal staffing structure and share with Member States as well as members of the Ocean Decade Alliance, Foundations Dialogue, UN-Oceans and other relevant groups and organisations.	Q4 2025	DCU
1.3 Restructure the Decade Coordination Unit to a minimum viable level that can be supported with existing secured resources while covering essential functions and publish the organisational structure and roles on the Ocean Decade website.	Q3 2025	DCU
1.4 Finalise recruitment of the Ocean Decade Coordinator and formalise other roles within the Decade Coordination Unit.	Q4 2025	IOC ES
1.5 Develop and implement a comprehensive onboarding process for new expert members of the Decade Advisory Board that facilitates their strategic role in the Ocean Decade in line with the revised Terms of Reference adopted at the 33 rd Session of the IOC Assembly.	Q1 2026	DCU
1.6 Develop a roster of expertise and availability of individual Board members to engage in priority elements of Decade implementation (e.g. engagement with decentralised coordination structures, National Decade Committees or informal working groups).	Q1 2026 and ongoing	DCU / DAB

Recommendations / Actions	Timeline	Responsibility
2.Strengthen UN system-wide collaboration and alignment to support the achievement of the Decade's outcomes and reinforce its identity as a collective UN initiative, enhancing its global reach and impact.		
2.1 Invite heads of relevant UN agencies within UN-Oceans to actively engage in and support the Ocean Decade and use UN-Oceans as a mechanism to regularly update members on Ocean Decade progress and engagement opportunities.	Q4 2025	IOC ES / DCU
2.2 Facilitate dialogue with UN agencies to discuss emerging policy priorities and the associated ocean science and knowledge needs.	Q2 2026 and annually	DCU
2.3 Revise the process for membership of UN agencies in the Decade Advisory Board in line with the new Terms of Reference for the Board and actively promote engagement of UN agencies in Board meetings.	Q4 2026	DCU
2.4 Structure Decade Advisory Board meetings to create a dialogue between UN members and expert members on entry points and priorities for the Decade to contribute to global policy frameworks and processes.	Ongoing	DCU
2.5 Develop communications materials to provide information to UN Oceans on how to engage in the Decade and resources to support targeted communications within UN agencies on the benefits of engagement.	Q2 2026	DCU
3.Put in place a comprehensive resource mobilization framework to ensure sustainable funding for the coordination of the Decade and to strengthen the enabling environment for funding and supporting Decade Actions.		
3.1 Secure additional in-kind or financial resources to allow the development of targeted resource mobilisation packages for the Decade Coordination Unit and IOC-led Decade Coordination Offices to support activities around identified flagship priorities (ref. Recommendation 1.1).	Q2 2026I	DCU
3.2 Expand efforts in the development of knowledge products to contribute to the global discussion on improved efficiency and effectiveness of investment in ocean observation, data and science and widely communicate on the role of the Ocean Decade in this area of work including organization of an international workshop on ocean science funding models as part of the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference process/proceeding.	Q4 2026	DCU
3.3 Optimise the impact of the Foundations Dialogue through inviting foundations to support a dedicated secretariat for the group and establishing processes to formalise membership, roles and responsibilities.	Q2 2026	DCU / Foundations Dialogue
3.4 Review the membership of the Ocean Decade Alliance including securing renewed commitments from returning members and communicate widely on these commitments.	Q2 2026	DCU / Ocean Decade Alliance
3.5 Target five new Alliance members to join the group before the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference with clearly identified contributions and with a focus on increasing geographic diversity.	Q2 2027	DCU / Ocean Decade Alliance

Recommendations / Actions	Timeline	Responsibility
4. Strengthen national and regional engagement, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS and other under-represented regions, to facilitate more equitable participation and alignment with local and regional priorities.		
4.1 Create links between the Decade Advisory Board and decentralised coordination structures and National Decade Committees through annual joint online meetings and individual support and advice from Board members to the operations of these structures.	Ongoing	DCU
4.2 Provide targeted support to all Decade Advisory Board and Ocean Decade Alliance members to create National Decade Committees in their home countries.	Ongoing	DCU / DAB / Ocean Decade Alliance
4.3 Collaborate with National Decade Committees to translate the global priorities of the Decade, including the results of the Vision 2030 process and the Barcelona Statement, to the national level.	Q1 2026	DCU
4.4 Work with technical and financial partners to co-design a resource mobilisation and partnership package for Capacity Development Facility initiatives focusing on individuals and institutions in SIDS and LDCs, as well as Early Career Ocean Professionals as a means of ensuring the sustainability of the Facility.	Q3 2026	DCU
4.5 Undertake a rolling process of collaborative evaluations with DCCs, DCOs and National Decade Committees to analyse past impact and effectiveness and identify actions to improve engagement and impact individually and as groups of partners.	Q4 2026	DCU
5. Enhance the mainstreaming of inclusivity, diversity, and equity to ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalized and under-represented groups, are meaningfully included and benefit from the Decade.		
5.1 Complete and publish the Ocean Decade Gender Action Plan.	Q1 2026	DCU
5.2 Complete and publish the Framework for Indigenous and Local Knowledge within the Ocean Decade.	Q4 2025	DCU
5.3 Continue engagement with youth stakeholders to develop practical pathways for youth engagement in the Ocean Decade.	Q3 2026	DCU
6. Strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the UN Ocean Decade Actions to enhance alignment with global and national priorities, promote innovation, support knowledge use and ensure practical application for tangible benefits to Member States and the ecosystem.		
6.1 Depending on availability of additional resources, develop and share an interactive database as a tool for Decade partners to access real-time information on Decade Actions.	Q1 2026	DCU
6.2 Work with existing Decade programmes to document their existing and planned impact for sustainable development outcomes and include requirements for self-reporting on this as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.	Q4 2026	DCU / Decade Actions

Recommendations / Actions	Timeline	Responsibility
6.3 Revise the Call for Decade Actions endorsement request process for Decade programmes to strengthen the identification by proponents of the knowledge, policy and innovation and technology gaps that they will fill and to clearly identify expected impact for sustainable development outcomes.	Q1 2026	DCU
6.4 Define and implement preparation process for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference that is structured around the Ocean Decade flagship priorities (ref. Recommendation 1.1) and that convenes thematic and regional groups of Decade Actions, decentralised coordination structures and National Decade Committees to identify joint action plans, commitments and metrics of success for the remainder of the Decade.	Q2 2027	DCU
6.5 Depending on availability of additional resources, develop and launch targeted and funded Calls for Decade Actions to support strategic communications activities of Decade Actions.	Ongoing	DCU / DCO Connecting People and our Ocean
7.Enhance the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to transform it into a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system.		
7.1 Strengthen the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to require self-reporting from Decade programmes on the ways in which science and knowledge have informed policy and decision making.	Q3 2026	DCU
7.2 Mobilise resources to allow tracking of the metrics of success defined and agreed to during the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference.	Q4 2027	DCU
8. Systematically leverage the Decade to shape IOC's post-2030 agenda and amplify the impact of its programmes.		
8.1 Identify priority areas of work that IOC will lead as post-Decade legacy initiatives and develop work packages that include: (i) actions that leverage and strengthen IOC programmatic work, (ii) metrics of success, and (iii) resource mobilisation targets. These priority areas of work will align with key elements of the Ocean Decade flagship priorities (ref. Recommendation 1.1) and be informed by existing and planned IOC-led initiatives in the Decade as well as complementary processes including the 'IOC and Future of the Ocean' consultation process.	Q2 2026	IOC ES / Management Team / DCU
8.2 As part of the IOC Communications Strategy, strengthen the visibility of the Decade as an IOC flagship initiative and amplify joint messaging and storytelling on milestones and post-Decade priorities.		DCU / IOC Communications

ANNEX 2: IMMEDIATE RESOURCE NEEDS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLAN FOR MID-TERM EVALUATION

Resource Need	Estimated Resources (Financial or In-kind)	
	<i>Financial</i>	<i>In-kind</i>
1. Re-establishment of Science Officer position within Decade Coordination Unit (P3 level)	175,000 USD / year	Secondment / loan of a P3 level individual for 2 year period
2. Development of interactive, online database of Decade Actions	30,000 USD	n/a
3. Coordination staff in Decade Coordination Offices in IOCAFRICA, IOCARIBE, WESTPAC and GOOS	IOCAFRICA: 180,000 USD/year IOCARIBE: 170,000 USD/year WESTPAC: 180,000 USD / year GOOS: 180,000 USD/year	Secondment/loan of four P2/P3 staff
4. Technical assistance to develop resource mobilisation packages and materials	Up to 50,000 USD	Temporary loan of expertise in fundraising communications
5. Supplementary resources for preparatory process for 2027 Ocean Decade Conference (stakeholder meetings/workshops, synthesis products, communications etc.)	Up to 200,000 USD for overall process	Hosting of meetings / workshops ideally including travel for under-represented groups