



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission

Dialogue with Permanent Delegations to UNESCO on the future Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 (41 C/4)

- Pillar 3 of UNESCO's Strategic Transformation -

19 July 2019

Introductory note

Context

Ocean, the largest ecosystem on our planet, provides to our civilization a range of existentially important services. To keep benefitting from them, an equilibrium must be reached and maintained between the continuously increasing use of ocean space and resources and restoring and maintaining ocean's health, which is currently in fast decline. This requirement has been manifested in a number of recent developments in the international community's commitments with regard to ocean management. The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes now a stand-alone Goal 14: "*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*". Ocean is recognized in the UNFCCC Paris Agreement (2015), in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015), and in the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS (2014).

The First World Ocean Assessment released in 2016 stated that the humankind is running out of time to start sustainably managing the ocean. Climate change, marine pollution, ocean acidification, loss of oxygen, unsustainable fishing, the degradation of marine and coastal environments create major cumulative negative impact on the ocean, which is projected to further increase as the human population grows towards an expected 9 billion people by 2050.

IOC's comparative advantage

The 2030 Agenda offers a concerted framework of action to set the ocean on a path to sustainability whilst also highlighting the universal dimension of the ocean in promoting other societal goals, such as gender equality, sustainable economic development, food security or climate change, amongst a few. IOC has a leading coordination role in monitoring and assessing the progress in implementing relevant SDG targets. The Commission has been successfully playing its role as "custodian agency" in the framework of SDG 14 for two SDG targets on ocean acidification (14.3) and marine science capacity (14.a). It is a key technical partner for targets focused on marine pollution (14.1) and ecosystem-based management (14.2).

IOC's increased responsibility and the Decade of ocean science

IOC is preparing to enter the period of this Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2029, with a clear understanding of its enhanced responsibility. The development of a sustainable ocean economy responding to the 2030 Agenda and the emergence of an international legally binding instrument on conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea will invoke new economic and legislative requirements on ocean science. To inform policies and raise the knowledge of all stakeholders, a higher level of competence of ocean science will be needed. This was the main motivation for IOC to propose to the United Nations a decade of ocean science, towards the "ocean we need for the future we want". According to the resolution of the 72nd United Nations General Assembly, the UN Decade of Ocean

Science for Sustainable Development (the “Decade”) will run from 2021 to 2030. This unique long-term and high-level campaign will aim to transform the ocean science and enable efficient actions and policies for sustainable use and protection of the ocean. The Decade will directly respond to all UN frameworks that have been endorsed by UN Member States over the last 5 years.

During the years 2022–2029, a major expectation from IOC will be to maintain the activities of all its scientific and operational programs; to support and facilitate the Decade implementation; and to regularly report global progress to the United Nations Secretary General, in addition to contributing its own activities under the Decade. Successful conduct of the Decade assumes its true ownership by many partners and stakeholders who will use its framework and related opportunities to deliver on their mandate in all aspects depending on ocean science. The Decade will offer an exceptional opportunity to highlight the societal benefits of all IOC and several UNESCO programmes through a transformative approach to generating actionable scientific knowledge at the service of decision-makers. It will also allow for a powerful thrust in implementing the collectively agreed global priorities.

Way forward

In accordance with the Commission’s calendar of activities, the work on IOC’s draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 has already started, with the first inputs expected from Member States at the upcoming 30th session of the IOC Assembly, 26 June – 4 July 2019. Further inputs and guidance from Member States will further shape the draft Strategy and guide IOC Governing Bodies in 2020 until reaching the final stages of finalization and adoption by the IOC Assembly 31 in 2021 and subsequent submission of the Strategy to the 41st session of UNESCO General Conference in 2021.

The ability of IOC to deliver on its expanding mandate and respond both to the ambitions placed on the Decade and its Member States aspirations and needs will require, in turn, stronger support from governments, increased decision-making power of IOC governing bodies, and adequate and reliable investment in the whole value chain of modern oceanography.

Some relevant questions include:

- (a) In your view, what are/will be the key global, regional, or essential national trends, opportunities and challenges of relevance to IOC’s mandate over the next 10 years?
- (b) What would be the best way to ensure IOC’s successful support to Member States in the implementation of their agenda in its various domains?
- (c) Where do you see opportunities for a more integrated and interdisciplinary UNESCO approach with IOC’s involvement?
- (d) How to better reflect the Global Priority Africa, as well as the specific needs of island states, in our programme and organizational culture?
- (e) How to better contribute to the strengthening and institutionalization of the promotion of gender equality through IOC’s programmes?
- (f) What would you name as your highest ocean science-related expectations and how they might be addressed through the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030?