

# An evaluation of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's role in global marine science and oceanography

*February 2015*



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

United Kingdom  
National Commission for UNESCO

**Policy Brief**

# 13

**Published by the UK National Commission for UNESCO**  
February 2015

UK National Commission for UNESCO Secretariat  
3 Whitehall Court  
London SW1A 2EL  
United Kingdom

+44 (0) 20 7766 3491  
[www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk)

Any part of this publication may be reproduced without  
permission but with acknowledgement.

Designed by Soapbox, [www.soapbox.co.uk](http://www.soapbox.co.uk)  
Typeset by Cambridge Publishing Management Limited, [www.cambridgepm.co.uk](http://www.cambridgepm.co.uk)

Copies: For additional copies, contact the UK National  
Commission Secretariat  
Copyright © UK National Commission for UNESCO 2015

ISSN 2050-8212 (Print)

# 1 / Executive summary

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) was established by the United Nations (UN) in 1960 to be the focal point for ocean science in the UN system. The UK was a founding member of IOC and has participated fully in every aspect of IOC's work from the earliest days. The UK continues to see value in its membership of IOC and its participation in IOC functions.

However, the environment in which IOC operates has changed significantly over the years and IOC today faces some key challenges. Since IOC was established, a plethora of ocean bodies with a range of ocean-related remits have been created. Combined with changes in the jurisdiction of the seas, these developments have the potential to confuse and reduce IOC's once central role in marine science. In addition, to demonstrate its continuing relevance to societal needs, IOC must adapt to change and provide the sort of scientific policy advice that UN Member States require as they begin to exploit more of their ocean resources.

Despite these challenges, IOC still has a vital and unique role to play, given the importance of its current work in international marine scientific data centres, intergovernmental coordination of marine scientific research, tsunami warning systems and the growth of new roles such as marine spatial planning.

*In order to retain its relevance in an increasingly crowded space, and position itself for a successful long-term future, this policy brief recommends that IOC focus its resources and expertise on the areas where it plays a unique role. IOC is encouraged to position itself as an intergovernmental ocean science organisation that plays the leading role in coordinating and disseminating scientific ocean data to underpin marine science policy.*

## 2 / Introduction

IOC is a functionally autonomous UN specialised agency located within UNESCO. Formed in 1960, IOC was established to act as the '*competent body and focal point for ocean science in the UN system*'.<sup>1</sup>

Since its formation, much has changed in terms of the legal status of the ocean, the technology available to obtain marine scientific knowledge, and the sort of the data that is now required. For example, private individuals and companies are now able to access the deepest parts of the ocean, which was something that only government-backed projects could manage in 1960. Half a century since formation, *is IOC still the focal point for ocean science in the UN system?*

This policy brief aims to revisit IOC's mandate, to consider how this has changed over the years, and to establish where – in an increasingly crowded space – IOC can have the greatest impact and add the greatest value. It also considers whether IOC can reestablish itself as a global focal point in ocean science.

1 IOC Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021

# 3 / Background

## 3.1 IOC's beginnings

When the UN Charter was first drawn up in 1945, ocean interests were far less developed than they are today. There was no marine spatial planning, subsea mining or deep ocean oil and gas development, and over-fishing was a problem that had not yet become apparent. The Freedom of the Seas was an age-old 'given' that governed how nations treated the ocean, including conducting scientific research – often to within a few miles of the coasts of other nations.

With the emergence of successive iterations of Law of the Sea conventions during the early Cold War era, interest in national jurisdiction of the oceans began to grow alongside the need for agreed international protocols and standards. Consequently, the need for intergovernmental cooperation became more apparent.

In response to this, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) was established in 1960 as a functionally autonomous body within UNESCO.

UNESCO was considered to be a sensible choice of home for IOC because, in keeping with UNESCO's mandate in education, science and culture as a vehicle for '*building peace in the minds of men and women*', IOC's mandate was perceived to cover more than traditional ocean science endeavours. IOC had a pivotal educational role to play too, particularly in facilitating international cooperation by disseminating scientific ocean data.

Underpinning the suitability of the pairing between IOC and UNESCO, UNESCO said in 1960, "*Oceans cover some 70 per cent of the Earth's surface, exert a profound influence on mankind and even on all forms of life on Earth [...] In order to properly interpret the full value of the oceans to mankind, they must be studied from many points of view. While pioneering research and new ideas usually come from individuals and small groups, many aspects of oceanic*

*investigations present far too formidable a task to be undertaken by any one nation, or even a few nations".<sup>2</sup>*

While this was certainly thought to be the case in 1960, whether UNESCO remains the most sensible home for IOC today will be explored in a follow-up policy brief.

## 3.2 IOC's role

The main function of IOC, as outlined in its current 2014 – 2021 Medium Term Strategy, is to:

- **promote international cooperation** and coordinate programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, data and information management, hazard mitigation, and capacity development in order to understand and effectively manage the resources of the ocean and coastal areas. By applying this knowledge, IOC aims to improve the governance, management, institutional capacity, and decision-making processes of its Member States with respect to marine resources and climate variability and to foster sustainable development of the marine environment, in particular in developing countries.
- **coordinate ocean observation and monitoring** through the co-sponsorship of Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS)<sup>3</sup> which aims to develop a unified network providing information and data exchange on the physical, chemical, and biological aspects of the ocean. Governments, industry, scientists, and the public use this information to inform marine policy.
- **build the knowledge base of the science of climate change** as well as the impact of acidification from increasing CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the ocean. Through its International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange programme (IODE),<sup>4</sup> IOC works to maintain the Ocean Biogeographic Information system (OBIS);<sup>5</sup> a global marine biodiversity knowledge base

2 UNESCO, 1960 taken from 'Troubled Waters: Ocean Science and Governance', Edited by G. Holland and D. Pugh (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

3 <http://www.ioc-goos.org/>

4 <http://www.iode.org/>

5 <http://www.iobis.org/>

that provides an integral view on the past and current diversity, abundance and distribution of marine life in the ocean.

- **promote the development of marine ecosystem-based management tools**, at a regional level, to empower marine managers to implement best policies.
- **lead a global effort to establish ocean-based tsunami warning systems** as part of an overall multi-hazard disaster reduction strategy. In this context, it coordinates and fosters the establishment of regional intergovernmental coordinating tsunami warning and mitigation systems in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the Caribbean Sea and in the North East Atlantic, Mediterranean and connected seas.
- **promote the equitable participation of all Member States** as well as gender balance, in its activities through its capacity development activities implemented mainly through three (regional) sub-commissions.

### 3.3 The value of IOC to the UK

The UK was a founding member of IOC and has participated fully in every aspect of IOC's work from the earliest days. As one of the leading global marine science nations, the UK obtains value from IOC membership in the following ways:

1. **International marine scientific cooperation:** the ability to easily obtain diplomatic clearance to operate the UK's fleet of research ships via the relationships and bilateral interactions built up over many years of dealing regularly with other IOC Member States. The UK's membership to IOC's elected, Executive Council enables it to directly influence the evolution of international marine scientific activity, especially as new technology becomes available, and feed directly into the UN Regular Process.
2. **Access to international marine science data centres** via IOC's International Oceanographic Data Exchange programme, and to international marine science projects such as Argo,<sup>6</sup> which maintains the global fleet of over 3000 Profiling Drifting Instrumented Floats throughout the ocean.

6 <http://www.argo.net/>

3. **Access to the emergency warning systems** provided by IOC's regional tsunami warning services. This is particularly pertinent given the UK's overseas territories, 6 in the Caribbean region alone, many of which are vulnerable to extreme events such as tropical storms and tsunamis.
4. **Agreed standards:** IOC works closely with the international marine science community to ensure agreement of fundamental factors such as the international standard seawater equation, the best methods for analysis of various parameters, participation in international inter-calibration exercises and rapid dissemination of new ideas and techniques.
5. **Knowledge exchange and capacity building:** Through its membership to IOC, the UK is able to interact with a large number of developing and established marine science nations and institutions, students, researchers and policy makers for mutual understanding and progress in securing better scientific understanding and stewardship of the global ocean.

Considering all the above factors, if the UK were to leave IOC it would significantly harm its ability to carry out marine scientific research outside of the UK's home waters, damage its international scientific reputation, and in the long term, the UK's ability to inter-operate effectively with the wider international community.

# 4 / Challenges

While membership to IOC is valuable to UNESCO's Member States, there is a sense that IOC no longer commands the same level of authority that it once did. Consequently, IOC faces a number of challenges:

## 4.1 Is IOC still the focal point for ocean science within the UN system?

**IOC is no longer the only UN body that has an ocean remit.** Although IOC remains the prime focus for marine scientific expertise, it is arguably no longer the focal point within the UN system for the oceans, that role having been taken on by UN-Oceans.

- **Emergence of new ocean bodies** since the formation of IOC have diluted the role of IOC as the competent body and focal point for ocean science in the UN system as set out in IOC's Medium Term Strategy. To date, **there are now significant ocean-related roles in over 20 other UN bodies** including the World Meteorological Organisation, International Seabed Authority, and Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.<sup>7</sup> With the many new agencies that have come onto the scene, many of which play similar roles, both IOC and other UN ocean bodies have the potential to be eclipsed by other, more high profile bodies.

This was evidenced at the Our Ocean 2014 conference that was hosted by US Secretary of State, John Kerry in Washington, June 2014. This high-profile conference was addressed by Heads of State, Heads of NGOs, received pledges of millions of dollars from high profile figures, such as the actor Leonardo DiCaprio, and saw many countries announcing new marine protected areas and other ocean initiatives. The conference is set to become an annual event, with Chile hosting the next conference in 2015. **Yet the UN's numerous ocean bodies, including IOC, were invisible at the event, with the exception of the World Bank.**

7 See Annex 3

- **The development of UN-Oceans<sup>8</sup>** has further muddied the waters regarding which ocean body should take the lead on certain oceanographic issues within the UN system. At the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Delegates adopted 'Agenda 21', the International Programme of Action for Global Sustainable Development for 21st Century. Chapter 17 deals with oceans, their protection, rational use and the development of their living resources. To undertake the required actions, the UN agencies dealing with the ocean formed the Sub-Committee on Oceans and Coastal Areas. By 2003, this evolved into an 'Oceans and Coastal Areas Network' which later became known as UN-Oceans. IOC is no longer the only science provider with UN-Oceans possessing a full-spectrum ocean remit which requires information about fisheries, geological, geographical and human/economic factors that lie outside IOC expertise. **IOC is now just one of some 20+ other bodies who all contribute to the work of UN-Oceans** which has now, arguably emerged as the 'competent body and focal point for ocean science in the UN system'. This inevitably leads to some confusion over which agency should take the lead on a given issue.
- **Changing jurisdiction of the seas** is depleting the UN's, and thus IOC's, area of influence. Since UNCLOS (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) came into force in 1994, many nations have expanded their territory seawards, to as much as 350 miles offshore in order to include seabed resources within their jurisdictional waters. As a result, areas of national sovereignty may now extend over much of the marine space that was, until recently, the property of no single state. **This has the potential to further sideline IOC by decreasing the area of international waters and increasing the amount of regional legislation governing ocean areas.**

## 4.2 Is IOC still relevant and does it meet societal needs?

There has perhaps been an unwillingness at IOC to adapt to change and provide the sort of scientific policy advice that UN Member States require as they begin to exploit more of their ocean resources. This is partially due to IOC's low profile, and a **lack of awareness** among Members States of the role that IOC could play on the global stage. It is also due to a **potential reluctance** at IOC to get involved with such policy advice.

8 <http://www.unoceans.org/about-un-oceans/en/>

- **Lack of awareness:**

The ever-growing human and farm animal populations demand increased resources from the ocean in the form of fish protein, minerals, hydrocarbons and renewable energy from wind, tide, current and wave. Technology has become available that enables resource exploitation by private industry or sovereign States of the deepest and coldest parts of the ocean. This new paradigm is rapidly generating **new science and legislation** to underpin the associated marine spatial planning, provision of protected areas and sensible governance of the marine estate. All of these new legislative activities are rapidly evolving **without any input from IOC to Member States or indeed without Member States even realising that IOC might have any role to play in the process.**

- **Potential reluctance to get involved with policy:**

There is a growing field known as ‘Operational Oceanography’ – fast data turnaround that is fed to offshore operators such as shipping companies, oil and gas platform operators, navies, fish farmers and others who need rapidly updated information. **Attempts by members to encourage IOC to embrace a role at the heart of the Operational Oceanography revolution have frequently met with some reticence from other Member States.**

For example, the introduction of marine autonomous systems as platforms to gather data has been met with some reservations at IOC. Some Member States appear to be unhappy with the concept that robot systems might be making measurements from within their waters without any ability to take on board an observer or have the data screened before it passes into the public domain. There appears to be a preference for IOC to stick to traditional, ship-based methods of data collection, which are resource intensive and are likely to become insufficient to provide the necessary quantities of data to inform new legislation.

Increasingly, IOC risks stagnation due to lack of engagement beyond its traditional communities, preventing it from adapting to rapid technological developments and engaging with science-policy mechanisms. There is a risk

that if delegations to IOC were dominated by lawyers rather than scientists, it could curtail IOC's ability to adapt to change, by focussing on process and procedure rather than innovative science to meet societal need.

IOC runs the risk of being sidelined by other ocean bodies, like UN-Oceans, which are more visible and better equipped to translate its science into policy. **If IOC is to remain relevant then this apparent reticence by some Member States to engage with operational oceanography and the science to policy knowledge exchange agenda must be addressed.**

# 5 / Areas where IOC plays a unique global role

If seabed minerals are dealt with by the International Seabed Authority, legal questions through UN-DOALOS,<sup>9</sup> fisheries science by FAO,<sup>10</sup> Arctic shipping by IMO,<sup>11</sup> seabed charts by IHO;<sup>12</sup> if Member States are looking after their coastal regions with domestic legislation and marine planning systems, and even private citizens are able to dive to the bottom of the Marianas Trench without any government support requirement, do we still need an IOC?

We argue that there is still a key role for IOC to play in the global ocean science scene because of the unique role that IOC plays in the following areas on which we recommend that IOC should focus its resources and expertise.

## 1. Tsunami Warning Systems

IOC is making a real difference by helping nations prepare for marine hazards via the establishment of tsunami warning systems. These systems help 'at risk' territories to monitor ocean response to climate change by monitoring ocean ecology and ecosystem health and supporting a variety of marine ecosystem-based management and marine information systems. The data centres are critical to the smooth running of global marine science. When it comes to these essentially data-related, capacity development, training and facilitation roles (e.g. training nations in tsunami response) IOC does a world-class job of delivering data and capability that could ultimately save thousands of lives, mitigate the huge financial cost of tsunami damage, improve conditions in many developing nations and small islands. However when it comes to carrying out marine scientific observations, data acquisition and international programmes such as the proposed 2nd International Indian Ocean Expedition, IOC is merely the facilitating body (not always on its own), and is not the

9 <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/index.htm>

10 [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

11 <http://www.imo.org/Pages/home.aspx>

12 <http://www.iho.int/srv1/>

operational agency that is actually doing the job. This makes it hard to secure additional funding as it is not seen as a 'doer', just an enabler – an important task but tempting to cut when funding is tight. These tasks do fit-in well with the wider UNESCO remit but some IOC Member States do not appear enthusiastic about IOC moving away from the original remit which was very much focussed on core ocean science.

**IOC's work on developing tsunami warning systems can potentially save thousands of lives, and enable coastal regions and island communities to attract investment. The work requires good science, fast response data systems, and training of people, and fits in extremely well with the remit of parent body UNESCO.**

## 2. Protecting 'The Area'

There remains the large expanse of ocean, which lies outside national jurisdiction – 'The Area' as it is termed under UNCLOS. The Area has few, if any, legal protections from human exploitation and, since by definition it lies some distance offshore, is often of little direct interest to governments, who certainly are not keen to spend money on curiosity-driven research, or on policing activities, unless it can be shown to generate a useful financial return at some point in the future.

IOC is one of the very few global bodies that can advocate for these waters beyond national jurisdiction. It would find itself having to learn how to work with today's champions of 'The Area', Non-Governmental Organisations such as the Global Ocean Commission,<sup>13</sup> Worldwide Fund for Nature,<sup>14</sup> Pew Foundation<sup>15</sup> and more controversial groups such as Greenpeace<sup>16</sup> and Sea Shepherd.<sup>17</sup>

**IOC can have a role as an 'honest broker' able to facilitate the gathering of high quality data and provision of unbiased policy advice to help manage the ocean areas outside of national jurisdiction. At present**

13 [www.globaloceancommission.org](http://www.globaloceancommission.org)

14 <http://www.wwf.org/>

15 <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en>

16 <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/>

17 <http://www.seashepherd.org/>

***there is no body set up to do that, but it is an area where the UN could mandate a specific role for IOC.***

### **Promoting multidisciplinary science and consistent methodologies**

Marine science has progressed enormously since IOC was established and few scientists would advocate a return to single-discipline marine science – looking only at marine physics, or chemistry or biology in isolation from the wider ecosystem. The consensus is that the ocean is best understood on an ‘ecosystems basis’ and that joined-up thinking is essential as we move into effective marine spatial planning and management. For example, Europe’s Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>18</sup> requires EU member States to achieve ‘good environmental status’, as defined by 11 indicators that include ocean noise, pollutants, marine litter etc. Indeed as UN member states increasingly apply their own domestic laws, or regional multilateral agreements to the governance and monitoring of large areas of the global ocean, the domain over which IOC is able to exert influence as an ocean science champion and organiser of research is diminishing. The UK’s Marine and Coastal Access Act<sup>19</sup> (2009) and Marine (Scotland) Act 2010<sup>20</sup> were developed without any reference to IOC.

The world is increasingly turning to the private sector to gather and interpret marine scientific data and IOC must embrace this change, working closely to encourage private sector data to held in IOC’s data repositories and to take part in capacity building and knowledge exchange programmes.

**IOC has an important, coordinating and standards setting role to play in ensuring that scientists across the globe use consistent methodology, standards and symbology.**

18 [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/marine-strategy-framework-directive/index_en.htm)

19 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/contents>

20 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents>

## 4. Training and capacity building

IOC has a strong track record in training ocean scientists in the developing world and in encouraging the most developed nations to share best practice and ideas.

The view of the UK IOC Committee is that IOC must be seen as first and foremost a science body, out of which capacity development opportunities can be generated, rather than a capacity development agency that might generate some useful science on the side. This is especially so given the tight financial restriction under which IOC operates. IOC should of course do what it can to meet parent body UNESCO's aspirations such as developing capacity in Africa and working to ensure gender equality. Our belief is that these objectives can be best met by incorporating the UNESCO Medium Term Strategy objectives into the design of science programmes rather than by designing training programmes that do not include the collection of real ocean data. Without a firm basis in real world data that will be used to inform decision making on a local, regional or international scale, capacity development risks becoming a short-term exercise, not closely tailored to operational needs and incapable of income generation.

**In the future, IOC can open that partnership to include the private sector, and in particular the Learned Societies and Professional Bodies who are becoming major providers of training and Continued Professional Development, not just to industry but also to government researchers and universities at a global scale.**

## 5. Data and information sharing

IOC's International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange network (IODE)<sup>21</sup> underpins all of global marine science and provides the information that enables governments to run their new marine spatial planning systems, operational oceanography services and emergency response systems.

**IOC needs to invest some outreach effort into reminding stakeholders that IODE is essential, and needs continued investment.**

21 <http://www.iode.org/>

# 6 / Recommendations

Overall, IOC is recommended to differentiate itself from the many ocean related bodies within the UN system by focusing its resources and expertise in the areas where it plays a unique role. When considering how to do this, IOC is encouraged to consider the following recommendations:

- 1. Position IOC as a global hub for ocean science advice and information** by playing the leading role in coordinating and disseminating scientific ocean data and information produced by the many ocean bodies that have come onto the scene. IOC needs to be able to underpin the development of science-informed-policy. In order to do this, IOC needs to raise its profile among Member States and within the UN system as the essential go-to partner for information, science and data required to inform marine policy.
- 2. Confidently embrace full-spectrum ocean science, using an ecosystems approach, with an additional focus on areas beyond national jurisdiction**, whilst still providing a full range of services such as data centres and tsunami warning systems to coastal nations at all levels of scientific advancement.
- 3. Encourage cooperation with NGOs and industry**, as UN Member States do not have jurisdiction in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- 4. Ensure common standards for scientific measurements at sea in conjunction with the International Standards Organisation.** Through IODE, IOC will continue to lead the world in marine science data management and distribution. IOC should also ensure that common symbology is used on diagrams, charts and maps in conjunction with IHO and other bodies.
- 5. Initiate dialogue and perhaps have an Associate Member category for private industry contractors** who are increasingly responsible for

gathering routine ocean data in many regions of the world, and ensure that privately gathered data becomes available in time through the IODE network.

6. **Work with international Professional Bodies and Learned Societies to promote accreditation of training standards** for marine scientists.
7. **Consider how to 'switch off' legacy programmes.** Does IOC have a mechanism to assess the need for a programme and when to switch off the life support? Does it peer review its priorities?
8. **Continue to promote capacity building and knowledge exchange.**
9. **Continue to support the tsunami warning systems.**
10. **Encourage all national delegations to be fully supported by expert scientific advice.**
11. **Tailor IOC's scientific outputs towards suitable stewardship of the Ocean.** A statement in the Mission and Medium Term Strategy reinforcing that IOC is operating in line with the UN's sustainability agenda

# 7 / ANNEX 1

## IOC Vision and High-Level Objectives for 2014–2012

IOC's Vision Statement is "*Strong scientific understanding and systematic observations of the changing world ocean climate and ecosystems shall underpin sustainable development and global governance for a healthy ocean, and global, regional and national management of risks and opportunities from the ocean.*"

More specifically, through international cooperation, IOC aspires to help its Member States to collectively achieve the following High-Level Objectives (HLOs), with particular attention to ensuring that all Member States have the capacity to meet them:

### **1. Healthy ocean ecosystems and sustained ecosystem services**

Developing indicators of ocean status, and locating their tipping points relative to marine ecosystem functioning, are important in the prediction or early detection of changes in ecosystem states, and in the evaluation of ecosystem resilience. Such knowledge and analytical tools will be valuable in ocean management in general, and in placing management of single sectors into an ecosystem-based approach. The local and regional capacities, in terms of knowledge and tools, are also central for understanding how much an ecosystem can be stressed before it moves to other states from which recovery may be difficult. Current research on these topics is still piecemeal and needs coordination.

### **2. Effective early warning systems and preparedness for tsunamis and other ocean-related hazards**

The ultimate objective of this HLO is to reduce risk, by encouraging communities to implement effective mitigating measures and become aware of the hazards they face. As coastal development continues at a rapid pace, society is becoming

increasingly vulnerable to coastal flooding and other extreme sea-level events such as tsunamis. Ensuring that nations have access to the necessary information for coastal adaptation planning and safe and secure operations in the marine environment, is dependent on continued progress in the implementation of tsunami and ocean observing systems, improvements of models of the climate systems and ocean services and the development of local decision support tools.

### **3. Increased resiliency to climate change and variability and enhanced safety, efficiency and effectiveness of all ocean-based activities through scientifically-founded services, adaptation and mitigation strategies.**

Climate variability and change impact many elements on which human well-being depends, modifying patterns of rainfall and drought, sea-level and coastal erosion, and through temperature changes and ocean acidification, adding stress to ecosystems and impacting on the goods and services they provide. Thus, human development goals including food security, access to water resources, and preparedness and resilience to disasters are threatened. It is known that the ocean plays a key role in climate; IOC will therefore assist its Member States in developing capacity so as to enable them to develop and improve climate impact mitigation and adaptation strategies that are based on growing scientific knowledge.

### **4. Enhanced knowledge of emerging ocean science issues**

A broad range of emerging environmental issues such as new contaminants, invasive species, marine renewable energies, the expansion and intensification of uses of marine resources, cumulative effects of human maritime activities, etc., jeopardize the conservation and sustainable use of marine spaces and ecosystems. It is important to improve our understanding of the opportunities and of the changes that are occurring within the Ocean, including the deep sea. IOC's role is to encourage scientific research, technical analyses and syntheses of scientific information needed to effectively address these emerging issues, inform policy, and advance solutions in a timely and transparent manner.

# 8 / ANNEX 2: UN-Oceans

See <http://www.unoceans.org/about-un-oceans/en/>

## Terms of reference for UN-Oceans

### A. Scope and objectives

1. UN-Oceans is an inter-agency mechanism that seeks to enhance the coordination, coherence and effectiveness of competent organizations of the United Nations system and the International Seabed Authority, in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The respective competences of each of its participating organizations and the mandates and priorities are approved by their respective governing bodies.

### B. Mandate

2. UN-Oceans will:
  - a) Strengthen and promote coordination and coherence of United Nations system activities related to ocean and coastal areas;
  - b) Regularly share ongoing and planned activities of participating organizations within the framework of relevant United Nations and other mandates with a view to identifying possible areas for collaboration and synergy;
  - c) Facilitate, as appropriate, inputs by its participating organizations to the annual reports of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea and on sustainable fisheries to be submitted to the Secretariat;
  - d) Facilitate inter-agency information exchange, including sharing of experiences, best practices, tools and methodologies and lessons learned in ocean-related matters.

## C. Modalities of work participation

3. In order to fulfil its mandate on ensuring United Nations system coherence on issues related to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, participation in UN-Oceans is open to United Nations system organizations with competence in activities related to ocean and coastal areas and the International Seabed Authority.

### Focal point

4. The Legal Counsel/Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea will be the focal point of UN-Oceans. In that capacity, it will:
  - a) Convene the meetings of UN-Oceans and organize those meetings, including by preparing and disseminating meeting minutes, reports and background documents;
  - b) Facilitate communication among UN-Oceans participants;
  - c) Maintain and update information about UN-Oceans activities, make this information available to UN-Oceans participants and United Nations Member States and make it publicly available through the UN-Oceans website ([www.unoceans.org](http://www.unoceans.org)); A/68/L.18
  - d) Represent UN-Oceans at relevant meetings, including those under the General Assembly and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its High-level Committee on Programmes.

### Meetings

5. UN-Oceans will hold at least one face-to-face meeting per year, supplemented as needed by virtual (teleconference, videoconference) meetings.
6. As far as practicable, UN-Oceans will hold its face-to-face meetings at United Nations Headquarters, preferably in conjunction with the United

Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

7. Each meeting will be conducted by a Chair, elected for that meeting among UN-Oceans participants present at the meeting. The Chair of a given UN-Oceans meeting cannot be elected to chair the immediately subsequent meeting.
8. UN-Oceans will endeavour to make maximum use of electronic communication and information management and will conduct intersessional work by electronic means such as teleconferences and videoconferences.
9. UN-Oceans will work on the basis of consensus.
10. UN-Water and UN-Energy may participate in UN-Oceans meetings as invited observers, as appropriate and necessary.

## **Work programme**

11. UN-Oceans will regularly prepare a work programme allowing it to effectively coordinate the response of its participating organizations to the mandates approved by their governing bodies.
12. In support of its mandate and work, UN-Oceans may set up time-bound ad hoc assignments to facilitate coordination on specific issues, open to all participating organizations of UN-Oceans.

## **Reporting**

13. To ensure transparency and accountability:
  - a) The Secretary-General will report annually on the activities and work programmes of UN-Oceans through his report to the General Assembly on developments and issues relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea;

- b) UN-Oceans, upon request from the General Assembly, will also report to Member States in the context of the meetings of the Informal Consultative Process;
  - c) Upon request from the General Assembly, feedback and consultation sessions with UN-Oceans may be held in the context of the meetings of the Informal Consultative Process or at any other time deemed necessary by Member States;
  - d) UN-Oceans will also annually brief the High-Level Committee on Programmes on its activities and work programmes;
  - e) UN-Oceans will systematically post all of its meeting reports, assignment reports, annual reports to the Informal Consultative Process, and other relevant documents on the UN-Oceans website ([www.unoceans.org](http://www.unoceans.org)).
- A/68/L.18

# 9 / ANNEX 3

List of Organisations that can participate in UN Oceans. Highlighted entries have strongest overlap with IOC.

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Authority
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IHO	International Hydrographic Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ISA	International Seabed Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBD	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
Ramsar	Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
UNFCCC	Secretariat of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-DESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN-DOALOS	UN Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development

UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission UNESCO-IOC
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNHSP/UN-HABITAT	UN Human Settlements Programme
UNIDO	UN Industrial Development Organization
UNU	United Nations University
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

# 10 / Acknowledgements

This policy brief was produced for the UK National Commission for UNESCO by Stephen Hall, Head of UK Delegation to UNESCO IOC with input from Roland Rogers and Jennifer Riley. The UKNC Director responsible was Dr Beth Taylor and the staff member was Sophie Leedham.

The views contained in this policy brief are those of the UK National Commission for UNESCO and do not necessarily reflect those of the UK Government or the individuals or organisations who have contributed to this report.









Please visit:

**[www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk)**

for more information about our work  
and to download a pdf of this report

Please contact:

**[info@unesco.org.uk](mailto:info@unesco.org.uk)**

for further information

ISSN 2050-8212 (Print)