



2021 United Nations Decade  
2030 of Ocean Science  
for Sustainable Development

# National Decade Committees

## OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

June 2021

### GUIDELINES




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**INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

**NATIONAL DECADE COMMITTEES  
OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES**

Summary. This document was prepared by the IOC Secretariat in its role as coordinating agency of the Ocean Decade and forms part of a series of guidance materials being developed to assist stakeholders involved in the Ocean Decade.

These Operational Guidelines offer soft guidance to Ocean Decade stakeholders interested in establishing, or having already established, voluntary multi-stakeholder National Decade Committees which support and contribute to the work of the Ocean Decade at the national level.

This document builds on information contained within the Implementation Plan and the results of an online survey circulated to IOC Member States (Circular Letter 2840). It provides guidance on National Decade Committees in terms of their establishment, operations, possible role and responsibilities and linkages with National Decade Committees and other structures of the Ocean Decade (at a regional or international level).

This document will be presented to the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the IOC Assembly (June 2021) as an information document.



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**2030** of Ocean Science  
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# **National Decade Committees**

## **OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES**

**May 2021**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) ('the Ocean Decade') to stimulate ocean science and knowledge generation that can reverse declines in the state of the ocean system while catalysing new opportunities for sustainable ocean use. The vision of the Ocean Decade is 'the science we need for the ocean we want'. The Ocean Decade provides a convening framework for scientists and stakeholders from diverse sectors to develop the scientific knowledge and the partnerships needed to accelerate and harness advances in ocean science to foster a better understanding of the ocean system, and deliver science-based solutions to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The Ocean Decade [Implementation Plan](#) offers a coordination framework to coordinate and promote the Decade globally and in all regions, leaving no one behind and to empower stakeholders to engage, plan, and implement Decade actions in a spirit of co-design and co-delivery.

As part of this framework, **National Decade Committees** will be essential elements to engage national stakeholders and facilitate national contributions to the Decade as well as to promote awareness and interest. These voluntary and multi-stakeholder platforms will be key in linking national action to the international Ocean Decade framework.

These Operational Guidelines offer guidance to stakeholders interested in establishing, or having already established, voluntary National Decade Committees which support the work of the Ocean Decade at the national level. This document build on information contained within the Implementation Plan and provides an overview of the governance and coordination of the Ocean Decade and more specific guidance on National Decade Committees in terms of their establishment, operations, possible roles and responsibilities and links with other Decade coordination mechanisms (e.g., at a regional or international level).

This document has been prepared by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO in its role as coordinating agency of the Ocean Decade. It forms part of a series of guidance materials being developed to assist Ocean Decade stakeholders involved in its governance and coordination structures (see Section 1.3).

## 1.2 The Ocean Decade

The [Implementation Plan](#) will guide the work of the Ocean Decade over the next ten years. The Plan provides a flexible framework and living roadmap to achieve the Ocean Decade's vision of 'the science we need for the ocean we want' and its mission of 'transformative ocean science solutions for sustainable development, connecting people and our ocean'. The Plan provides information on how stakeholders can participate in the Ocean Decade, how efforts will be promoted and coordinated, how resources will be mobilized and how impact will be measured throughout the Decade.

The Plan outlines seven **Decade Outcomes** that describe the 'ocean we want' at the end of the Ocean Decade (Figure 1). Ten **Decade Challenges**, representing the most immediate and pressing needs of the Decade, may evolve as the Decade proceeds and will guide the design and implementation of **Decade Actions** to be co-designed and co-delivered by diverse partners and stakeholders.

Regular Calls for Decade Actions will be held to solicit tangible initiatives ("Decade Actions") which address the Decade Challenges. Actions may take the form of **programmes** (large scale, multi-year and multi-country initiatives), **projects** (shorter more focused initiatives), as well as **activities** (events, publications, exhibitions, workshops, conferences or training opportunities) and/or **contributions** of financial and/or in-kind resources. Decade Actions that meet the endorsement criteria identified in the

Implementation Plan will be officially recognized as part of the collective effort to meet the Ocean Decade’s vision and mission.



Figure 1. Moving from the ocean we have to the ocean we want.

### 1.3 Ocean Decade governance and coordination and the role of National Decade Committees

**National Decade Committees** are voluntary multi-agency and multi-stakeholder national platforms, which support the formal governance and coordination structures of the Ocean Decade which are described in the [Implementation Plan](#). National Decade Committees can be existing or new structures specifically tailored to coordinate a wide variety of stakeholders at the national level. They facilitate the co-design and co-delivery of Decade Actions (at a national level) and facilitate access to benefits derived from the Decade such as data, products, science-policy advice and capacity development.

**National Decade Committees are the subject of this operational guideline.**

Other elements of the governance and coordination structure of the Decade are described below.

#### i. Decade Advisory Board

The Decade Advisory Board is a multi-stakeholder advisory body to the IOC Secretariat that will provide advice on implementation of the Ocean Decade. The Board will review and make recommendations for the endorsement of Ocean Decade programmes.

#### ii. Decade Coordination Unit

The Decade Coordination Unit is the central hub that manages the daily operations and implementation of the Ocean Decade. The Decade Coordination Unit is housed within the IOC Secretariat. Its three main functions are to act as: (i) the primary coordination office for the implementation of Ocean Decade Actions; (ii) Secretariat for the Ocean Decade Advisory Board; and (iii) Secretariat for the Ocean Decade Alliance – a resource mobilisation network that is being established as part of the Ocean Decade.



**iii. Decentralized coordination structures**

Two types of decentralised coordination structures support the Decade Coordination Unit:

- **Decade Coordination Offices** support and collaborate closely with the Decade Coordination Unit. Decade Coordination Offices will be located in existing UN or IOC Member State structures and staffed with UN personnel. Decade Coordination Offices will act as regional or thematic sub-units of the central Decade Coordination Unit.
- **Decade Collaborative Centres** will be hosted by international or major regional non-UN organizations, and will provide technical support to the Decade Coordination Unit and Decade Coordination Offices by catalysing and coordinating Decade Actions at a regional or thematic level, i.e., in relation to specific Decade Challenges.

**iv. Support to coordination and governance structures**

In addition to the National Decade Committees, the following structures will also support Ocean Decade governance and coordination structures:

- **Decade Implementing Partners** are non-UN regional or international stakeholder organisations that sit outside the formal governance and coordination structures of the Ocean Decade. They provide targeted technical support to the Decade Coordination Unit and decentralized coordination structures - including Decade Coordination Offices and Decade Collaborative Centres - in relation to different facets of Decade implementation.
- **Regional taskforces or platforms** are voluntary, informal regional multi-stakeholder groups which will identify regional priorities and needs, as potential Decade Actions for implementation throughout the Decade.

## 2. OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL DECADE COMMITTEES

This section provides operational guidelines for stakeholders interested in establishing, or having already established, voluntary National Decade Committees which support and contribute to the work of the Ocean Decade at the national level. Given the scope and breadth of the Ocean Decade, national coordination of Decade activities will be essential to the ultimate success of the Decade.

### 2.1 Establishing a National Decade Committee

#### Establishment

A National Decade Committee will be an existing or a new structure, relevant to ocean science for sustainable development, which is able to help coordinate Ocean Decade stakeholders at the national level. The mandate of such structures should be aligned with the vision and mission of the Ocean Decade.

National Decade Committees are voluntary and informal in nature. Ideally, over the course of the Decade, all countries will establish a single National Decade Committee to ensure a central national level focus. However, the establishment of such Committees is not a pre-condition for engagement in the Decade by Government or other stakeholders within a country.

National Decade Committees can, but do not need to be, established on the basis of existing national IOC committees. When possible, relevant national authorities, e.g., Ministry of Environment, Ocean, Fisheries or Research and Innovation are encouraged to take the lead in their establishment and operation. This will facilitate interlinkages between national, regional and international level actors and activities of the Ocean Decade.

When a national authority is unable to take the lead in the establishment and operation of a National Decade Committee, this position will ideally be taken by a multi-agency or multi-stakeholder body which represents a wide range of ocean actors across all sectors, generations, genders, scientific disciplines and sub-regions within a particular country. In all cases, the [national IOC focal point](#) will need to seek registration of the National Decade Committee with the Decade Coordination Unit (see below).

#### Registration and operation

- Once the mandate and membership of a National Decade Committee are identified at the national level, the Committee can be registered to become part of the Ocean Decade as a recognized “Ocean Decade Stakeholder Engagement Network”. The request for registration should be sent by the national IOC focal point to [oceandecade@unesco.org](mailto:oceandecade@unesco.org)<sup>1</sup>.
- Once registered, a National Decade Committee will become a member of the Global Stakeholder Forum. The Forum is currently being developed and will be rolled out in November 2021. The Forum will provide a convening and exchange mechanism for all stakeholder engagement networks including National Decade Committees, Decade Implementing Partners, Stakeholder Platforms, Decade Alliance members and proponents of Decade Actions. The Decade Coordination Unit and decentralized coordination structures will use the Forum to promote exchange, cooperation and synergies between stakeholder groups with common interests, including between National Decade Committees.

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<sup>1</sup> In time an automated system for registration of National Decade Committees will be included in the Global Stakeholder Forum which is currently being developed.

### **Primary contact point**

Once a National Decade Committee is established, a member of this committee should be designated as primary contact point to serve as the main contact for communication with the Decade Coordination Unit. The Unit will liaise with this contact point to share information on Decade implementation and to facilitate linkages with other National Decade Committees, and other structures of the Decade.

### **Terms of Reference (TOR)**

It is encouraged that National Decade Committees draft and adopt Terms of Reference (TOR) to serve as an overall framework to guide their work and operations. The TOR can be tailored to the national context and outline the criteria for membership, roles and responsibilities, frequency of meetings and general operations. These TOR would be drafted, discussed and agreed when national level members meet for the first time and reviewed and revised as required. Please refer to Ocean Decade website for examples of National Decade Committee TORs that could be used as a foundation for a TOR to be adapted and tailored as needed. National Decade Committees will need to identify the resources to support their operations.

## **2.2 Membership and representation**

### **Membership**

Since the Ocean Decade aims to transcend all ages, genders, cultures, geographies, sectors and disciplines, National Decade Committees are encouraged to engage diverse members representing the following types of stakeholders, noting this list is not exhaustive:

- ✓ Scientists, research institutes and universities
- ✓ Local and indigenous knowledge holders
- ✓ Early Career Ocean Professionals
- ✓ National representatives which sit in international and UN organizations with a focus on ocean affairs
- ✓ National and sub-national governments
- ✓ Philanthropic and corporate Foundations
- ✓ Business, industry and private sector
- ✓ NGOs and civil society
- ✓ Aquariums, zoos and museums
- ✓ Local coastal communities
- ✓ Educators
- ✓ Media organisations

Membership is open to any stakeholder regardless of whether they have an endorsed Decade Action. Each National Decade Committee will determine its own procedures for identifying members. The Ocean Decade website contains examples of the procedures adopted by existing National Decade Committees to identify and appoint members.

The number of members within a National Decade Committees is not fixed, i.e., there is no minimum or maximum number of members allowed, and this number will likely evolve and change as the decade

progresses. The structure of a National Decade Committee is also flexible and can be developed according to the number of members, anticipated commitments and complexity of activities to be conducted. For example, a Committee could be structured as a relatively small group of experts (15 individuals/organizations participating as members) or a larger group of individuals/organizations (General Assembly of 100 to 150 experts) which can organize more focused Working Groups around specific topics/themes (Decade Challenges, Decade Outcomes or national emerging issues).

Although children and youth will not participate directly as members of a National Decade Committee, Youth Advisory Councils are being set up by partners in some countries as a space and possible link to connect youth and children to National Decade Committees. More information on this initiative can be obtained from [oceandecade@unesco.org](mailto:oceandecade@unesco.org).

### **Representation**

In terms of representation at meetings and Decade related activities, National Decade Committees are encouraged to promote inclusive, equal and balanced representation across genders, generations, ethnic groups and different geographical areas. Thus, representation should not be fixed nor limited to specific individuals but be open and rotational so one or more national level members can be appointed as informal representatives based on the topic, expertise needed and purpose of the meeting or activity.

## **2.3 Roles and responsibilities**

The primary role of a National Decade Committee is to serve as a central hub which links and engages national level actors participating in the Ocean Decade. Unlike the more formal governance and coordination structures of the Ocean Decade, National Decade Committees are voluntary in nature. The Implementation Plan sets out the broad expectations for National Decade Committees which are described and expanded upon below. Within this framework, detailed mandates can be tailored according to national circumstances, and are at the discretion of the Committee and its members. Individual Committees are encouraged to learn from, and where appropriate, align efforts with those operating in other countries.

The following are some of the expected roles and responsibilities that National Decade Committees can fulfill.

### **Supporting national members in the co-design and co-delivery of Decade Actions**

National Decade Committees will play a critical role in supporting and contributing to the coordination of national level stakeholders as they come together to co-design and co-deliver Decade Actions. This support may involve:

- Facilitating the planning and implementation of national priorities for the Decade, for example, through the development of a national Decade Action Plan that can be translated by partners into Decade Actions.
- Assisting Decade coordination structures in planning, implementation and delivery of Decade Actions at the national level. This includes facilitating the co-design of initiatives between members in advance of Calls for Action and providing national input during the formulation of Decade Actions, including facilitation of co-design initiatives across groups of stakeholders and/or nations.
- Playing an active role in facilitating interaction and dialogue between members and within nations. This may be done in a variety of ways including for example organizing and facilitating webinars and meetings so that members can meet and discuss and exchange ideas, and/or maintaining an accessible database of Decade partners within the country.

- Coordinating linkages between officially endorsed Decade Actions to encourage collaboration during the implementation of complementary activities and initiatives.
- Facilitating access to data, products, science-policy advice or capacity development and ensuring outputs of activities implemented under the Ocean Decade are available to the community.
- Supporting the monitoring of Decade Actions in line with the Ocean Decade Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, for example, by providing access to technical resources or training on monitoring methods.
- Creating links between the national community and regional taskforces and groups that are convening actors across broader geographical areas.

While National Decade Committees cannot organise Calls for Decade Actions, it is envisaged that they can work with the Decade Coordination Unit to co-design Calls for Decade Actions relevant to their country. Committees do not have a decision-making role during the process for endorsement of Decade Actions, however, they will have access to information on submitted and endorsed Decade Actions to facilitate links between endorsed Decade Actions as they are being implemented.

### **Mobilizing resources and contributions**

Through their national connections and networks, National Decade Committees can play an important role in mobilizing resources for supporting the design and implementation of Decade Actions.

- Encouraging national level resource mobilization and logistical support for the implementation of national initiatives and Actions contributing to the Decade.
- Encouraging voluntary national contributions towards the costs of international coordination and endorsed Actions in response to resource needs identified by the Decade Coordination Unit.
- Facilitating the hosting of sub-regional, regional or international meetings related to the Decade

### **Engaging with National Decade Committees operating in other countries**

National Decade Committees are strongly encouraged to interact, collaborate and exchange ideas and information with the National Decade Committees operating in other countries as well as other regional or international structures and activities of the Decade. The Decade Coordination Unit and decentralized coordination structures will facilitate and support such exchanges and cooperation.

National Decade Committees established in countries with strong government support and access to resources are encouraged to mentor Committees operating in countries with limited capacity and resources.

The list of established National Decade Committees and operational contact points will be regularly updated on the Ocean Decade website and through the Global Stakeholder Forum when it becomes operational.

### **Communications, outreach and raising awareness**

National Decade Committees will be able to use the Global Stakeholder Forum to interact with other Decade stakeholders including thematic or geographic Communities of Practice, regional groups and other stakeholder groups. They can act as an information conduit from the Decade coordination structures and other partners to the national science and sustainable development community to promote awareness and interests. This includes sharing examples of successful co-design and co-delivery of activities to inspire action in others.

National Decade Committees can also carry out national level outreach and communication activities with broader audiences in accordance with the Ocean Decade Branding Guidelines. Beyond support for

global events and activities planned by the Decade Coordination Unit, the following are proposed measures that could be implemented at the national level to promote the Ocean Decade and engage national audiences around the Decade’s priorities and main objectives.

- Organizing and hosting national launch events to increase awareness of the Ocean Decade and bring together relevant ocean stakeholders - including UN entities, local authorities, private sector leaders and the NGO community.
- Organizing informational webinars showcasing the activities of members to inspire action in others.
- Translating Official Decade Documents, Reports and Publications into national language(s).
- Sharing stories and updates on the activities and progress of members through dedicated websites or webpages.
- Adapting and disseminating social media messages to national audiences, including systematic translation of content disseminated via the Ocean Decade accounts into national language(s).
- Organizing media engagement workshops / webinars with journalists and media representatives from national and international media outlets to explain the value proposition of the Ocean Decade and create a long-term relationship that in most cases may lead to improved coverage of Decade Actions.
- Supporting the roll-out of the “GenO” communications campaign which will be the main public facing communications campaign for the Ocean Decade.

The above list is flexible and other types of activities which support and promote the Ocean Decade from a communications and outreach perspective are possible and encouraged. The Decade Coordination Unit is available to provide additional information on opportunities and will support National Decade Committee efforts to align national activities with global planning and support national stakeholders in turning ideas into action.

## 2.4 Use of the Ocean Decade logo

Note that National Decade Committees must request use of the Decade logo for any specific activities that they organize.

Once registered as a recognized “Ocean Decade Stakeholder Engagement Network”, National Decade Committees may use the Ocean Decade logo in accordance with the [Brand Guidelines](#), noting the following key points:

- National Decade Committees may use the logo on their website, communications and other operational documents including letterhead or email signatures.
- The logo cannot be used for commercial purposes.
- Any Decade Action undertaken by a National Decade Committee must request use of the logo on a case-by-case basis via the appropriate mechanism, i.e., through Calls for Actions or by [requesting endorsement of Decade Activities](#). This includes any Decade program, project or activity (including conferences, seminars and workshops etc., but excluding operational meetings of Committees).
- National Decade Committees may not grant use of the logo to any third party for any reason or purpose.

- Use of the logo does not give the ability to National Decade Committees to endorse Decade Actions proposed by third parties, as this is not within their mandate.
- Use of the logo will be documented in annual reports.

## 2.5 Annual monitoring and reporting

National Decade Committees will be asked to submit annual reports to the Decade Coordination Unit.

The type of information to be included in the annual report includes:

- ✓ List of national members, i.e., name, location, contribution to the Ocean Decade, etc.
- ✓ Activities implemented to convene and coordinate members around Decade Actions.
- ✓ Joint activities with other National Decade Committees.
- ✓ Outreach and communication efforts.
- ✓ Events and workshops.

A template will be provided to National Decade Committees to guide the development of annual reports.

Interested in establishing a National Decade Committee?  
Look at some examples [here](#) or contact us at  
[oceandecade@unesco.org](mailto:oceandecade@unesco.org)

## United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)

Proclaimed in 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), provides a convening framework to develop the scientific knowledge and partnerships needed to catalyse transformative ocean science solutions for sustainable development, connecting people and our ocean. The Ocean Decade is coordinated by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

Established during the Preparatory Phase and to continue throughout implementation until 2030, the IOC's Ocean Decade Series will provide key documentation about this global initiative and aims to serve as a primary resource for stakeholders seeking to consult, monitor and assess progress towards the vision and mission of the Ocean Decade.



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