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2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development

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2024 OCEAN DECADE CONFERENCE

BARCELONA STATEMENT

12 April 2024

Barcelona, Spain

In April 2024, over 1500 in-person participants and thousands of virtual participants gathered for the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference, which was hosted by Spain, and co-organized by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC/UNESCO) in close collaboration with the Region of Catalonia and the Barcelona City Council.

Reflective of the spirit of diversity of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, this first in-person gathering of the Ocean Decade community convened geographically and generationally diverse representatives from the scientific community, governments, NGOs and civil society, philanthropy, industry, and United Nations entities.

The Conference recognized that it was taking place at a unique moment in the global ocean governance landscape with the recent emergence of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the formalization of the Ocean-Climate Dialogue in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the ongoing negotiation of the plastics treaty.

The Conference noted that the Ocean Decade, which is being coordinated by IOC/UNESCO on behalf of the United Nations system has, since its debut in January 2021, become the largest global ocean science initiative ever undertaken. The Conference applauded the significant achievements of the Ocean Decade, which has catalysed the emergence of over 50 global ocean science programmes in which transdisciplinary, international teams from across all sectors of society are working to contribute to fulfilment of the ten Ocean Decade Challenges.

Conference discussions centred around the development of a common vision for the future priorities of the Ocean Decade, and thus the global ocean science agenda. These discussions were nourished by the results of the Vision 2030 process, including the Vision 2030 Outcomes Report.

The Conference discussed and identified the following future priorities for ocean knowledge and science generation and uptake that could be fulfilled via the Ocean Decade framework. These include the co-design and co-delivery of science and knowledge to:

- Understand global distribution and human health and ecosystem impacts of marine pollution across the land-sea continuum, including the identification of priority pollutants and consideration of emerging and unregulated pollutants.
- Enhance and scale-up marine and coastal ecosystem-based management approaches, including a focus on better understanding of and solutions for multiple stressors.
- Better understand deep-sea ecosystems, including vulnerability to climate change and new or emerging economic activities.
- Encourage sustainable, resilient, and equitable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture and facilitate sustainable management of industrial fisheries.
- Strengthen sustainable aquatic food production and innovation for new frontiers with a focus on developing countries and strengthened public-private partnerships.
- Underpin evidence-based Sustainable Ocean Plans at the national level and in relevant transboundary areas.
- Encourage sustainable and climate resilient ocean economy projects, prioritizing those that integrate environmental conservation with socio-economic benefits for local communities.
- Rapidly scale up climate mitigation including through marine renewable energy and management of coastal ecosystems.
- Allow timely understanding of the technical, ecological, and social feasibility, potential impacts of proposed marine carbon dioxide removal initiatives and contribute to future policy and regulation development.
- Underpin adaptive governance and management systems and decision support tools for the assessment of vulnerability and risk to coastal communities and marine industries.
- Develop economic models, policies, and innovative financial instruments to diversify and accelerate investment in ocean science, including for enhanced digital representation of the ocean and sustained and sustainable ocean observing and infrastructure.
- Inform knowledge drawn from transdisciplinary social science and ocean literacy research on human-ocean connection, behavior change, and cultural engagement that can be integrated into Ocean Decade digital infrastructure and used to map and measure the impact of ocean literacy initiatives.
- Increase engagement with the health sector and better understand connections between ocean health and human health.

The Conference discussed and identified priority ocean science infrastructure needs including for marine pollution monitoring, ocean observations, interoperable ocean data, and for the enhanced use of adapted, innovative technology to underpin the equitable generation, access, and use of observations, data, and knowledge across all Ocean Decade Challenges, and by all nations.

The Conference discussed and identified priority cross-cutting issues to ensure that the Ocean Decade is on track for success by 2030 including measures to:

- Strengthen the role of national, regional, and international policy frameworks as drivers of priority science and knowledge generation through the Ocean Decade to ensure relevance and uptake.

- Enhance the recognition and role of all knowledge systems in the Ocean Decade, including Indigenous and local knowledge.
- Create greater impact through increased action at the national level including support to a strengthened national science-policy-society interface and delivery of ocean science for priority national policy needs, with a strong focus on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries.
- Increase investment in capacity development, sharing, and coordination with a focus on SIDS, Least Developed Countries, and other under-represented groups including Early Career Ocean Professionals.
- Encourage more meaningful engagement of industry and the innovation sector including in the co-design and co-delivery of ocean science and capacity development initiatives.
- Significantly increase targeted, expanded, and sustained financing and resourcing for Decade Actions and Decade coordination structures.
- Continue to enhance diversity, inclusivity and equity in the Ocean Decade and systematically identify and remove barriers to generational, geographic, and gender diversity.
- Curate strong links between the scientific community and professional communicators to enhance awareness of the importance of ocean science for action across all sectors of society.
- Continue to expand efforts in ocean literacy to address all sectors of society including policy makers, resource managers, and industry.
- Further optimize Ocean Decade coordination for collective impact and ownership.

The Conference discussed the critical need to distil these identified priorities to regional and national contexts, with a specific focus on the needs of SIDS, Least Developed Countries and other under-represented groups, and to actively create opportunities for South-South exchange and collaboration.

A series of major announcements and commitments were made during the Conference which represent a substantive first step to achieving the above priorities including the:

- Launch of new Ocean Decade programmes on sustainable ocean planning, and on sustainable ocean management in Africa.
- Commitment by the Barcelona City Council and the Port of Barcelona to develop a Decade Collaborative Centre focusing on sustainable ocean economy.
- Launch of the Ocean Matcher Tool to enhance opportunities for philanthropic funding to Decade Actions.
- Launch of new funding opportunities for Africa through the Belmont Forum and SIDS through the Marine Institute, Ireland.
- Launch of the Cities with the Ocean Platform to enhance the use of science for policy and decision making by coastal cities, including the offer of Qingdao Municipality to host the first Ocean Decade Coastal Cities Conference in 2025.

The Conference recognized its pivotal role in kicking off a series of major international convenings, including the Immersed in Change Summit in Costa Rica and leading to the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France. The Conference highlighted that, by working collaboratively across this series of events, the global ocean science community has the possibility to catalyze previously unforeseen levels of action that will indelibly anchor the role of ocean science and knowledge in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To achieve this and fulfil the identified priorities, the Conference issued the following Call to Action to all societal actors, including government, philanthropy, UN entities, industry, and the scientific community to:

- Engage strongly in the Ocean Decade including through the proactive development of partnerships and collaboration for the co-design and co-delivery of transformative Decade Actions that translate the priorities identified during the Conference to tangible action.
- To significantly increase investment of in-kind and financial resources in ocean science, including the development of policies and innovative financial instruments, thus ensuring the sustainability of existing and future Decade Actions, structures, and processes that are collectively working to fill the priorities identified during the Conference.
- Seize all opportunities to raise awareness and visibility of the Conference outcomes and The Barcelona Statement as an essential guiding framework for global ocean science and knowledge priorities in the lead-up to the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference.

This Statement has been prepared by the Decade Coordination Unit, housed within UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in its role as coordinating agency of the Ocean Decade. It draws on the results of the Vision 2030 process and numerous consultations with partners in the lead-up to the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference and seeks to be a sincere reflection of the discussions during the Conference.

