

INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

**Fifteenth Intergovernmental Session of
the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC-XV)**

11–13 March 2025, Tokyo, Japan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with Rule of Procedure 48.3, [the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific](#) (WESTPAC), as a primary Subsidiary Body of the IOC, is required to report to a Governing Body on its sessions.

The IOC Assembly at its Thirty-third Session will be invited to consider this Executive Summary. For more detailed information on the Fifteenth Intergovernmental Session of [WESTPAC](#), please refer to its website at <https://ioc-westpac.org/event/westpac-xv/>

1. [The Fifteenth Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific](#) (WESTPAC-XV) was held onsite from 11 to 13 March 2025 in Tokyo, Japan with the Agenda given in [Annex I](#). The session was hosted by the Government of Japan through its Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). This statutory meeting gathered nearly 100 delegates from 13 Member States (*Australia, China, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, USA, Vietnam*) across the Western Pacific and its adjacent areas.
2. Yoshinori Horiuchi, Director-General, Research and Development Bureau, MEXT of Japan, addressed and officially opened the session. Yutaka Michida, Chairperson of the IOC/UNESCO, and Kentaro Ando, Chairperson of the Sub-Commission, delivered their remarks. Vidar Helgesen, IOC Executive Secretary & Assistant Director General of UNESCO delivered his video message highlighting the region's importance. The session set the stage for mainstream discussions on advancing ocean science and fostering international cooperation to address national and international challenges. This was further reinforced by a keynote from two Early Career Ocean Professionals, showcasing the power of artificial intelligence for ocean research and sustainability.
3. The rapidly-evolving global ocean landscape highlighted the urgent need for IOC, and even more so for its Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC), to enhance its delivery capacity to fulfil its mandate-particularly in applying ocean knowledge to management, sustainable development, marine environment protection, and evidence-based decision-making. The session convened national ocean agencies and marine scientific communities to foster the ocean science-policy interface, advance ocean science, enhance technical and institutional capacities, accelerate marine spatial planning, and develop ocean science-based solutions for the sustainable development of marine and coastal resources.
4. Member States reviewed the major developments that the Sub-Commission has made over the past intersessional period, including its leading role in the region in the UN Ocean Decade, deliberated its ongoing and potential contributions to the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

Agreement), established four new WESTPAC initiatives in response to the emerging ocean issues, and adopted its biennial Programme and Budget for 2026-2027 which serves as a guide for the activities that Member States would like to jointly promote and seek funding from various sources in support of their implementation.

5. As an integral part of the session, the [2nd Senior Government Officials Roundtable](#) (SGOs Roundtable) was held on 12 March 2025, to share experiences and perspectives of decision-makers on science-informed ocean management and conservation practices. Additionally, [the 2nd National Decade Committees \(NDCs\) Forum](#) was also organized to promote the sharing of experience among NDCs in the region.

6. While extending their deep appreciation to the WESTPAC Office for its exceptional efforts and indispensable role in ensuring the efficiency, dynamism, and responsiveness of the Sub-Commission, Member States voiced significant concern over the office's critically limited human resources, given that it currently relies on only one IOC professional post.

7. In addition to its core role of advancing the IOC's mandate and programs in the region, the WESTPAC Office has been assuming the function of the Ocean Decade Coordination Office (DCO) for the Western Pacific since 2021. Moreover, it has been entrusted with a crucial role in facilitating ocean-related coordination among UN agencies at the regional level across Asia and the Pacific. The current mismatch between the size of the WESTPAC Office and the unprecedented demands placed on it presents a significant risk. It threatens UNESCO and IOC's ability to establish itself as the leading agency for ocean research and the coordinating agency for the UN Decade in the region.

Major Advances over the Last Intersessional Period

8. Upholding the value of '*ocean science for society*', WESTPAC has made immense efforts over the last intersessional period in strengthening the science-policy interface, mobilizing multi-stakeholder engagement, catalyzing scientific solutions, and fostering international collaboration. Through these efforts, WESTPAC continues to empower IOC Member States in the region to advance sustainable development of ocean, marine and coastal resources.

9. The Sub-Commission has been co-designing and co-implementing a wide range of programmes, projects, and initiatives with IOC Member States in the region to address their priority interests while contributing to the IOC High-Level Objectives. These efforts focus on *ocean-based solutions to climate change, marine biodiversity and ecosystem health for the blue economy, and knowledge development for emerging ocean issues, with capacity development as a fundamental stepping stone.*

10. A total of **29** programmes, projects, and working groups have been implemented over the last intersessional period, including **one** regional network of Training and Research Centers on Marine Sciences (RTRCs) presently comprising **6** specialized Regional Training and Research Centers (RTRCs), **2** regional GOOS alliances (NEAR-GOOS and SEAGOOS), **8** working groups, and **16** programmes/projects including **5** WESTPAC-led UN Decade Actions. These initiatives cover critical areas such as *marine spatial planning, marine plastic pollution, the Kuroshio Current (CSK-2, with 14 projects), Asian marginal seas, ocean acidification, ocean deoxygenation, coral reef restoration and conservation, harmful algal blooms, remote sensing application, marine toxins and seafood safety, harmful jellyfish, gas hydrates and methane fluxes, small island research and development, blue carbon, citizen science, and traditional and local knowledge.*

11. Some of them have formed concrete regional components of the IOC and related global programmes and efforts, such as GOOS, IP-HAB, GOA-ON, GO2NE, and MSPglobal, as well as the IOC Capacity Development Strategy (2023-2030). The key accomplishments and efforts from the last intersessional period can be summarized below:

I. Strengthening ocean science-policy-society interface

12. In response to the call from the international community and rapidly evolving landscape of global ocean governance, ocean science must be responsive and solutions-driven to support Member States in achieving their national and international targets and commitments.

13. Situated in a developing region known for the world's richest marine biodiversity and a dense population highly dependent on the ocean for development, WESTPAC has been making tremendous efforts in *aligning ocean science with national and international agreements and policy frameworks*, bridging the significant gaps between scientific research and practical applications to marine and coastal resource conservation and management.

14. We continued to foster *robust international cooperation mechanisms* to enhance collaboration among Member States to strengthen the ocean science-policy interface. This includes promoting joint ocean research, advancing marine spatial planning, supporting science-based governance, and actively engaging relevant stakeholders in developing and implementing tangible solutions in the region. These efforts are exemplified by key initiatives such as the *Senior Government Officials Roundtable*, the *biennial WESTPAC Intergovernmental Session*, and the *triennial WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference*.

15. Moreover, the Sub-Commission has established a *dynamic co-design and co-development process* to stimulate international leadership and collective actions across the region. This process begins with regular calls for international initiatives aligned with our priority issues, bringing together experts from across the region to refine and advance these efforts.

II. Mobilizing support and actions for the UN Ocean Decade

16. WESTPAC has been leading the region, motivating and engaging experts, institutions, and countries into the Ocean Decade. Over the past two years, its notable efforts and accomplishments include:

17. [The 2nd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference & the 11th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference](#) was organized in Bangkok, Thailand, 22-25 April 2024, hosted by the Government of Thailand, through its Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and Department of Marine and Coastal Resources. The grand conference convened over **1200** onsite participants from various ocean communities across **40** countries- 45% of whom were female and 36% were ECOPs. The remarkable turnout set a new benchmark in the history of the Sub-Commission and the region.

18. Unfolded with a prestigious opening attended by the Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, the Conference featured **7** Keynotes, [25 Scientific Sessions](#) dedicated to sharing and disseminating the latest knowledge about ocean priority issues in the region, [13 Decade Action Workshops](#) to examine development progress and formulate action plans for endorsed Decade programmes and projects (Decade Actions), and [11 Decade Action Incubators](#) established to transform ideas into concrete Decade Actions, [a Special Forum](#) with the UNEP/GEF South China Sea SAP project on Science for local-level environmental management, ecosystem conservation and sustainable use in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, and **8** side events. The Conference culminated in the issuance of [the Early Career and Mid-Career Ocean Professionals Statement](#) (ECOPs and MCOPs Statement), and [the Bangkok Declaration](#).

19. Meanwhile, the Sub-Commission has been continuously advancing its initiated UN Ocean Decade Actions: The four Actions include: [UN21-Accelerate Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific](#); [UN22-Stem the tide of Asia's riverine plastic emission into the ocean](#); [UN23-Accelerating capacity development transformations in the Western Pacific - Regional Network of Training and Research Centers](#) (RTRCs) on Marine Science, and [UN24-Second Cooperative Study of Kuroshio and Adjacent Regions](#) – from its sciences to human wellbeing. In January 2025,

the Sub-Commission initiated a new UN Ocean Decade Action-[UN39: Ocean Solutions in the East Asian Seas](#), to advance multidisciplinary research on multiple stressors in the coastal ecosystem and their impacts. This action focuses on providing science-based solutions to benefit coastal communities, nature, and livelihoods, translating research into tangible actions.

III. Delivering knowledge and services to serve the needs of Member States to address ocean sustainability challenges

20. The IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) has been at the forefront of aligning ocean science with societal needs. Over the past intersessional period, great progress could be demonstrated in several key areas:

- Accelerating Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific: WESTPAC has taken major steps to advance MSP, including the establishment of an open-ended Group of Experts (GoEs) and organization of [the 1st WESTPAC MSP Expert Workshop](#) (14–15 November 2023). **6** MSP demonstration sites have been set up across five Member States, and over **150** ocean practitioners have participated in national capacity-building workshops in China and Thailand. Additionally, an Action Framework for Accelerating MSP in the region has been developed to accelerate MSP implementation.
- Advancing the 2nd Cooperative Study of Kuroshio and its Adjacent Regions (CSK-2): Substantive progress continued on the CSK-2 initiative with key meetings of its International Steering Group, including [the fourth meeting](#) (4–6 December 2023, Qingdao, China) and [the fifth meeting](#) (15 November 2024, Sendai, Japan). The [2nd CSK-2 Science Symposium](#) was also organized on 13–14 November 2024 in Sendai, Japan. Furthermore, a feasibility mission was conducted to establish a CSK-2 Support Office at the Laoshan Laboratory in Qingdao. To date, [14 projects have been endorsed](#) under the CSK-2 framework in line with [the CSK-2 Science Action Plan](#), laying a strong foundation for further advancement.
- Harnessing the potential of using environmental DNA to support marine biodiversity conservation and MPA management: [A training workshop on eDNA](#) was held from 27–29 November 2023, followed by a Decade Incubator on eDNA during the 11th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference in April 2024. The outputs of the initiative provide momentum to expand the application of eDNA techniques across the region, enhancing marine biodiversity monitoring and assessment capacity in support of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs).
- Combating riverine plastic emissions: [An international workshop was organized \(21–23 November 2023, Sanya, China\)](#) to foster partnerships, standardize methodologies, and identify pilot rivers for targeted action. In 2024, collaborative fieldwork was conducted at identified pilot rivers in Egypt, Thailand, and Vietnam to address plastic pollution.
- Raising public awareness on coral reef restoration: To inspire action for coral reef conservation, WESTPAC launched its [2024 Photo Competition on Coral Reef Restoration](#) (February–April 2024), showcasing the beauty of coral reef ecosystems and encouraging coral reef restoration efforts in the Western Pacific.

IV. Bolstering technical and institutional capacity for sustainable development of ocean, marine, and coastal resources

21. To support Member States in achieving the SDG 14 and contribute to implementing the IOC Capacity Development Strategy (2023-2030), WESTPAC upholds its guiding principles for capacity development: empowerment, adaptiveness, inclusiveness, and integration. It collaborates closely with Member States to co-design and co-develop capacity development

initiatives tailored to their specific needs, ensuring the sustainable development of ocean, seas, and coasts.

22. Over the past intersessional period, the Sub-Commission focused on the development of its led [UN Decade Action 23: “Accelerating capacity development transformation in the Western Pacific through the Regional Network of Training and Research Centers \(RTRCs\) on Marine Science.”](#) The Initiative of RTRCs has been recognized by Member States as a best practice for capacity development in the region.

23. The RTRC network is expanding steadily with more research institutions and universities joining and committing to contributing to capacity development in the region. Up to the year of 2024, six RTRCs have been established with specific focuses and commitments to the Western Pacific and its adjacent areas. The six RTRCs currently focus on *Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health* (National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia), *Coastal Contaminant Monitoring and Marine Innovation Technology* (City University of Hong Kong, China), *Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics* (East China Normal University, China), *Marine Toxins and Seafood Safety* (Institute of Oceanography, Vietnam), *Reef Restoration and MPAs* (Marine Science Institute, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines), and *Ocean Dynamics and Climate* (First Institute of Oceanography, China). In the past intersessional period, the activities conducted by RTRCs are as below:

- The RTRC on Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health (RTRC-MarBEST) organized the international training tailored for Archipelagic and Island States on Fish Taxonomy (November 2023, Jakarta, Indonesia), and conducted [an international training course on Remote Sensing-based Seagrass Blue Carbon Assessment](#) (23 September-4 October 2024, Jakarta, Indonesia);
- The RTRC on Coastal Contaminant Monitoring and Marine Innovation Technology (RTRC-Coastal COMMIT) conducted [its pilot scientific diving training](#) (20-24 May 2023, North Sulawesi, Indonesia), developed integrated scientific diving training programs, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in underwater habitat mapping and health monitoring of coral reef ecosystems. It is noteworthy that the RTRC-Coastal COMMIT team won the award at the 49th International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva 2024 for “Nearshore Benthic Habitat Mapping and Assessment Technique”;
- The RTRC on Plastic Marine Debris and Microplastics established its branch in Sanya, China, in November 2023, and developed a demonstration video on sampling methodology in October 2024;
- The RTRC on Reef Management and Restoration conducted [a training workshop on coral larval reseedling](#) (3-13 April 2023, Bolinao, Philippines);
- The RTRC on Marine Toxin and Seafood Safety (RTRC-MTSS) conducted the RTRC performance evaluation in September 2023, and organized a training workshop on identification of marine toxin and seafood safety in 2024;
- The RTRC on Ocean Dynamics and Climate (RTRC-ODC) conducted its 12th training course on Ocean Model and Data Assimilation in June 2023, and its 13th training course on Ocean and Ecosystem Models in July 2024.

Key Results from the 15th Intergovernmental Session (11-13 March 2025, Tokyo, Japan)

I. WESTPAC Strategic Development, including its Contribution to the UN Ocean Decade

- IOC and Future of Ocean, and IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management

24. **The Sub-Commission acknowledged** the vital importance of the current consultation--IOC and the Future of the Ocean, initiated by the IOC Executive Secretary to address the organization's long-term sustainability and expansion in response to the fast-evolving development in ocean science and action.

25. In this regard, **the Sub-Commission strongly encouraged** Member States in the region to actively participate in the consultation process to define the IOC's optimal role in supporting science-based sustainable ocean planning, enhancing ocean science support to implementation of UN environmental conventions and frameworks, and fostering the development of a sustainable ocean economy.

26. **The Sub-Commission took note of** the ongoing development of the draft IOC-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (SOPM, 2025–2030) and its implementation plan, and urged all Member States to provide their guidance and inputs as soon as the draft strategy and implementation plan become available. Both documents are expected to be submitted for consideration at the 33rd Session of the IOC Assembly in June 2025.

- BBNJ Agreement and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

27. **Member States emphasized** the critical importance of developing ocean science capacity for BBNJ implementation—particularly in developing regions—for the effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. Therefore, **the Sub-Commission decided** to establish an open-ended Intersessional Task Force on BBNJ Agreement, with its Terms of Reference contained in [Annex III](#), with a generic mandate to share information about the BBNJ developments, and further identify potential actions and/or opportunities for the Sub-Commission to support Member States in enhancing scientific knowledge, building capacity, and facilitating the transfer of ocean technology. Furthermore, **the Sub-Commission further invited** Indonesia to lead the Task Force during the next Intersessional period.

28. In relation to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), Member States recognized the close relevance of the Sub-Commission's efforts in marine biodiversity conservation to the achievement of the GBF goals and targets. Accordingly, **the Sub-Commission decided** to align, as much as possible, its biodiversity-related initiatives with the GBF goals and targets, scale up its efforts in actionable science - research that can be used to inform decision-making and policy, and pursue international funding opportunities to support Member States in the effective implementation of their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

- UN Ocean Decade and Decade Actions

29. **The Sub-Commission extended** its sincere gratitude to the Government of the Philippines for its generous offer to host and for the preparations made for the 12th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference & 3rd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference, tentatively scheduled for March-May 2027. **The Sub-Commission further decided** to establish an International Steering Committee to assist the host country in the preparations and organization of the Conference.

30. **The Sub-Commission noted** with great appreciation the significant progress and impacts of its UN Ocean Decade Actions. To provide a comprehensive portfolio of enabling actions to accelerate the MSP processes in the region, **the Sub-Commission adopted**, in principle, and

decided to proceed with, [the Action Framework for Accelerating Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific and its Adjacent Areas \(2025-2030\)](#). The Action Framework will be finalized by incorporating the valuable suggestions provided by Indonesia during the session.

31. In light of the growing engagement of broader communities in the CSK-2, and based on evaluation results, **the Sub-Commission endorsed** the establishment of a CSK-2 Support Office to be hosted by the Laoshan Laboratory in Qingdao. This office will support CSK-2 programme development and coordination. Additionally, **the Sub-Commission also encouraged** Member States and their institutions to consider hosting additional regional training and research centers that align with regional priority issues and their specialized areas.

- Senior Government Officials Roundtable (SGOs Roundtable)

32. **Member States expressed their support** for the Sub-Commission's initiative to establish the "Senior Government Officials Roundtable (SGOs Roundtable)" as a valuable mechanism for national competent agencies in the region to share their experience and perspectives on science-informed ocean management and conservation practices, identify new opportunities to advance cooperation, and further strengthening the ocean science-policy-society interface.

33. **The Sub-Commission expressed** its sincere appreciation to Japan for chairing the 2nd SGOs Roundtable and to all government officials for sharing their practices and perspectives. **The Sub-Commission applauded** the adoption of the Joint [SGOs Tokyo Statement](#) on Ocean Science Development and Cooperation for Sustainable Development in the Western Pacific and Adjacent Areas, which outlines concerted actions to harness the potential of ocean science to enhance climate resilience, combat marine pollution, conserve marine biodiversity, and restore degraded marine ecosystems. The SGOs Tokyo Statement is attached as [Annex II](#).

34. To further enhance the value of the SGOs Roundtable, **the Sub-Commission decided** to form an informal, open-ended Discussion Group on the SGOs Roundtable 2027 to facilitate preparations for the 3rd SGOs Roundtable, scheduled for early 2027. The Sub-Commission thanked China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia for their participation and willingness to contribute to the work of the Discussion Group.

II. WESTPAC Programme Enhancement and New Initiatives

35. Member States reaffirmed their continued support for the Sub-Commission's endeavors to "make ocean science more relevant," with particular emphasis on an inter-and trans-disciplinary approach and stakeholder engagement. The Sub-Commission resolved to continue its programme enhancement endeavors, to further improve the programme delivery, efficiency, and impacts.

36. Following comprehensive evaluations and recommendations, **the Sub-Commission decided** to terminate two projects: *Upwelling Studies* and *DNA Taxonomy and Recruitment Monitoring*, as well as two Working Groups: *Rapid Detection Techniques for Harmful Algal Blooms* and *Indo-Pacific Convergent Center*. Furthermore, **the Sub-Commission decided** to reactivate the Working Group on *Traditional and Local Knowledge*. Additionally, **the Sub-Commission recommended** the integration of its *Ocean Acidification project and Ocean Oxygen Network* as part of the UN Decade Action [UN 39: Ocean Solutions in the East Asian Seas](#), with the objective of advancing inter and trans-disciplinary research on multiple stressors in the coastal ecosystem and their impacts.

37. **The Sub-Commission emphasized** the importance of the SEAGOOS Ocean Forecasting System (OFS) project as a key framework for demonstrating the value of ocean forecasting and prediction systems to Southeast Asian countries, particularly in ocean management, disaster risk reduction and management, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this regard, **the Sub-Commission decided** that the OFS will continue under the

SEAGOOS framework and be further developed in synergy with relevant UN Decade Actions such as the UN Decade Programme- CoastPredict. Additionally, in light of the retirement of the SEAGOOS Coordinator, the Sub-Commission, in close consultation with Member States, will identify and designate a new SEAGOOS Coordinator who is committed to strengthening coordination and developing more SEAGOOS initiatives.

38. In light of the growing need expressed by Member States for ocean literacy and the lack of a strategic and holistic approach to its development in the region, **the Sub-Commission decided** to establish an Intersessional Task Force on Ocean Literacy to lead efforts in advancing ocean literacy in the region. The Terms of Reference of the Task Force were adopted as [Annex IV](#).

39. In response to emerging ecological, social, and economic concerns/challenges, **the Sub-Commission decided** to establish one programme, one project, and two working groups as below:

- *Programme: Prediction of Marine Ecosystem Changes in the Northwest Pacific Ocean (2025-2030)*. Given that global warming has been driving widespread ecosystem shifts, threatening biodiversity, fisheries and coastal communities, this programme aims to rapidly advance our understanding of climate, ocean, and ecosystem interactions in the Northwest Pacific Ocean through inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches to integrate ocean physics, ecology, and data science. The Sub-Commission appointed Toshio Suga from Tohoku University & JAMSTEC Advanced Institute for Marine Ecosystem Change (WPI-AIMEC), Japan, as the Principal Investigator (PI).
- *Project: Methane Fluxes and their Impacts on Climate and Ecosystem in the Indo-Pacific Region (2025-2029)*. Given that the methane fluxes in the “seabed-ocean-atmosphere” system and their impacts on climate and ecosystems remain a topic of significant debate, this project seeks to define, estimate, and elucidate the effects of methane sources, its fluxes and their impact on climate, ecosystems, and socio-economic development. The Sub-Commission appointed Renat Shakirov from V.I. Il'ichev Pacific Oceanological Institute, Russia, and Nengyou Wu from Qingdao Institute of Marine Geology, China Geology Survey, China to serve as the Co-PIs.
- *Working Group on Seagrass Research in the Indo-Western Pacific: Enhancing Regional Collaboration for Seagrass Ecosystem Conservation and Restoration (2025-2028)*. Given the research on seagrass ecosystems in the region has been considerably underdeveloped and has not been able to explain the recent massive seagrass die-offs, the Working Group aims to establish collaboration and knowledge-sharing among researchers to accelerate the study of seagrass ecosystems in the broader context of marine conservation efforts. The Sub-Commission appointed Udhi Eko Hernawan from BRIN, Indonesia and Tipamat Upanoi from Phuket Marine Biological Center, Thailand to serve as the WG Co-Chairs.
- *Working Group on Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration with an initial focus on mangroves (2025-2028)*. In light of the need to develop customized approaches for restoration efforts and the critical knowledge gaps in blue carbon ecosystem restoration, especially with regard to practical methodologies and monitoring, the WG seeks to promote the exchange of knowledge, expertise and best practices in blue carbon ecosystem restoration, and foster the engagement of both private and public sectors. The Sub-Commission appointed Guangcheng Chen from the Third Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources, China and Jing Wang from SEE Foundation, China to serve as the WG Co-Chairs.

III. WESTPAC Programme and Budget (2026 - 2027)

40. The Sub-Commission has been conducting most of its activities via extra-budgetary support from Member States in the region, either in kind or in cash. The draft Programme and Budget for 2026-2027, with a total budget estimate of USD 6.6 M, was prepared based on the preliminarily planned activities by the WESTPAC Office, programmes, projects, working groups, and Regional Training and Research Centers. The budget estimate was presented in three forms: (a) regular budget allotted from IOC; (b) in cash extra budget to be raised from Member States, and (c) in-kind contribution from Member States in support of WESTPAC programmes and activities.

41. Given the limited regular budget from the IOC, the Programme and Budget has been merely serving as a guide in practice on the activities that Member States would like to jointly promote and seek funding from various sources to support their implementation.

42. Over the past decade, until the end of 2023, the IOC Regular Budget allocated an average of USD 80-100 K per biennium to the Sub-Commission. Exceptionally, the regular budget increased to approximately USD 320 K for the 2024–2025 biennium following the United States' rejoining of UNESCO in July 2023 and an increase in the IOC budget from UNESCO. Based on this budget scale, a similar allocation of around \$320 K is expected for the 2026–2027 period. Consequently, as in previous years, the Sub-Commission will continue to rely primarily on extrabudgetary support from member states, either in cash or in-kind, to carry out most of its activities during 2026–2027.

43. **The Sub-Commission expressed** its great gratitude to the WESTPAC Office for its unwavering efforts in resource mobilization and programme development, and further urged all Member States to consider any possibility of providing and increasing their financial or human resource support either for programme delivery or for the operation of the Office.

44. **The Sub-Commission adopted** [the WESTPAC Programme and Budget for 2026-2027](#), with the understanding that it may be subject to further revisions and adjustments in light of the evolving circumstances of IOC and UNESCO, as well as the availability of extrabudgetary funding opportunities.

Election of WESTPAC Officers

45. **The Sub-Commission elected**, by acclamation, *Aileen Tan Shau Hwai* from Malaysia as Chairperson; *Vyacheslav Lobanov* from the Russian Federation, *Sung Hyun Nam* from Republic of Korea, and *Aletta Yñiguez* from the Philippines as Vice-Chairpersons of the Sub-Commission for the next intersessional period.

Date and place of the next session

46. **The Sub-Commission invited** the Government of the Philippines to consider hosting the 16th Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) in March-April 2027, in conjunction with the 12th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference & 3rd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference.

ANNEX I

AGENDA

1. Opening

- 1.1 Welcoming and Opening Remarks
- 1.2 Keynote

2. Organization of the Session

- 2.1 Adoption of the Agenda
- 2.2 Conduct of the Session

3. Statutory Reports

- 3.1 Statement of the Chairperson of the Sub-Commission
- 3.2 Report by the Head of WESTPAC Office on Intersessional Programme Development and Implementation, including the Operation of the WESTPAC Office and Decade Coordination Office
- 3.3 Recent Developments within UNESCO, IOC, and Their Relevance to WESTPAC
 - 3.3.1 IOC Executive Secretary's Report**
 - 3.3.2 IOC and the Future of Ocean**
 - 3.3.3 IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management**

4. Strategic Development

- 4.1 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)
- 4.2 The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)
- 4.3 The Sub-Commission's Engagement and Contribution to the UN Ocean Decade
 - 4.3.1 UN Ocean Decade Global Development**
 - 4.3.2 WESTPAC led Decade Actions and Decade Coordination Office**
 - *An Overview of the WESTPAC efforts*
 - **UN21:** *Accelerate Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific and its Adjacent Areas, including the MSP Regional Action Framework (2025-2030)*
 - **UN22:** *Stem the Tide of Asia's Riverine Plastic Emission into the Ocean*
 - **UN23:** *Accelerating Transformations in Capacity Development in the Western Pacific - Regional Network of Training and Research Centers (RTRCs) on Marine Science*
 - **UN24:** *Explore the Strongest Ocean Current in the Western Pacific: the 2nd Cooperative Study of Kuroshio and Adjacent Regions (CSK-2)*
 - **UN39:** *Ocean Solutions in the East Asian Seas*
 - *Results of the 2nd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference & 11th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference (22-25 April 2024, Bangkok, Thailand)*

- *Towards the 3rd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference & 12th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference (2027, the Philippines)*

4.3.3 Engagement with other Decade Actions, such as CoastPredict

4.4 Senior Government Officials Roundtable (SGOs Roundtable)

5. Review and Evaluation of Regional Programmes, Projects and Working Groups for April 2023 – March 2025

Note: Due to the time constraints, reporting will be consolidated and conducted according to thematic areas of action, as specified below. However, each programme, project and working groups will prepare the progress report in written form, which will be uploaded to the event webpage.

- 5.1 Ocean-Based Solutions to Climate Change (Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience)
- 5.2 Marine Biodiversity Conservation, Ocean Ecosystems and Human Health, and Blue Economy
- 5.3 Ocean Literacy and Capacity Development
- 5.4 Knowledge for Emerging Issues/Demands of Member States

6. Recommendation of the WESTPAC Advisory Group on the Future Development

7. Establishment of New Programme/Project/Working Group

8. WESTPAC Programme and Budget for the Period 2026-2027

9. Elections of the Officers of the Sub-Commission

10. Date and Place of the Next Session

11. Other Matters

12. Adoption of Action Points and Recommendations

13. Closure

ANNEX II

Senior Government Officials' Statement
***Ocean Science Development and Cooperation for Sustainable Development
in the Western Pacific and Adjacent Areas***
(Adopted on 12 March 2025)

1. We, the senior government officials from across the Western Pacific, convened at the [15th Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific](#) (WESTPAC) in Tokyo, Japan, on 12 March 2025, to **underscore** the critical importance of advancing ocean science¹ development and fostering cooperation for the sustainable development of our region.
2. **Recognizing** that the ocean, seas, and coastal areas in the Western Pacific and its adjacent areas are vital to the health, livelihoods, and prosperity of people in the region and beyond, as they constitute a major influence on regional and global climate, the epicenter of the world marine biodiversity, a significant contributor to the world's seafood supply, and major shipping routes in the world maritime transportation. **However**, they face significant threats from escalating human activities, including climate change, extreme weather and ocean events, pollution, biodiversity loss, irreparable harm to coral reef and other ecosystems, and resource depletion.
3. **Further recognizing** that ocean science and knowledge are essential for providing solutions to sustainable development and supporting the effective implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 14: Life Below Water and SDG 13: Climate Action, as well as other international agreements and frameworks, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), the recently adopted Agreement on Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), and the ongoing international negotiation on a global plastic treaty.
4. **Considering** the interconnectedness of our ocean and the shared responsibility of nations to protect marine resources, **we stress the urgent need** to strengthen ocean science development and cooperation in the region. Such efforts will underpin evidence-based policy and decision-making, foster innovation, leverage emerging technologies, and build capacity across our region.
5. The value of **"ocean science for society"** lies at the heart of our approach in the region. **We emphasize** that ocean science must serve as a powerful tool to address societal challenges, improve the livelihoods of coastal communities, accelerate informed decision and policy, and support inclusive, sustainable development. By aligning ocean science with societal needs, we aim to deepen the connection between scientific research and the well-being of our people.
6. **We reaffirm** the aspirations outlined in the [Jakarta Statement on the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development \(2021-2030\)](#), adopted by Senior Government Officials in 2023. That Statement outlines joint efforts to achieve 'the Science We Need for the Ocean We Want.'
7. **We acknowledge** the significant contributions of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) in advancing ocean science and cooperation across the region. WESTPAC

¹ The term 'ocean science' encompasses natural and social science disciplines, including interdisciplinary topics; the technology and infrastructure that supports ocean science; the application of ocean science for societal benefit, including knowledge transfer and applications in regions that are lacking science capacity; and the science-policy and science-innovation interfaces. It considers the land-sea, ocean-atmosphere, and ocean- cryosphere interactions. Ocean science recognizes, respects and embraces local and indigenous knowledge.

has been playing a pivotal role in fostering ocean science collaboration, capacity building, and the development of region-specific initiatives to address critical ocean challenges.

Call to Action

8. In response to these shared challenges and the pressing need to meet national and international commitments, we endeavor to advance ocean science development and cooperation in the region through the following actions:
9. **Strengthening international collaboration** among Member States in the region to promote joint ocean research, co-develop actionable or tailored solutions, achieve sustainable ocean planning and management, and enhance engagement with, as well as increase support to WESTPAC to ensure the effective implementation of regional ocean science development strategies and programs, including its led Ocean Decade Actions.
10. **Fostering ocean science-policy-society interface** through participatory processes, meaningful partnerships, and active engagement of the relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation of substantive ocean science solutions in the region, as exemplified by initiatives such as the Senior Government Officials Roundtable, the biennial WESTPAC Intergovernmental Session, and the triennial WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference.
11. **Building ocean research capacity** by sharing ocean technology and know-how, investing in capacity-building programs to train/empower scientists, technicians, and policymakers in ocean science, with a particular focus on emerging technologies such as remote sensing, ocean modeling, environmental DNA, and artificial intelligence; and supporting the Regional Training and Research Centers (RTRC) and their tailored programs and activities, i.e., centers of excellence, to serve as hubs for research, training, and innovation.
12. **Enhancing climate resilience** by conducting collaborative research on the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems, coastal communities, and ocean-related industries; and developing science-based solutions to enhance the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems, including nature-based approaches and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management.
13. **Combating marine pollution** by launching joint efforts to research, monitor, reduce, control, and prevent marine pollution from all sources, including plastic waste, emerging chemical contaminants, anthropogenic GHG emissions, and oil spills; and promoting innovation in waste management and circular economy practices to reduce land-based sources of marine pollution.
14. **Conserving marine biodiversity** by advancing research and monitoring to protect marine biodiversity, including identifying and managing ecologically significant areas; as well as supporting the establishment and effective management of marine protected areas (MPAs) and the development of other Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs) or Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in line with international frameworks, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the International Agreement on Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ).
15. **Restoring degraded marine ecosystems** by promoting collaborative research on effective restoration techniques, sharing knowledge of successful restoration practices; and advocating for the integration of ecosystem restoration into national and international policies and frameworks.
16. **Facilitating** the exchange and dissemination of ocean data, information, practical knowledge, and expertise to foster collaboration among sectors and disciplines, improve disaster risk preparedness and response, and enable evidence-based decision-making and policy development.
17. **Promoting ocean literacy** by supporting ocean educational and cultural programs, public awareness campaigns, and initiatives that enhance understanding of the ocean's role in

sustaining life on Earth; and facilitating collaboration with media, civil society, and the private sector to disseminate ocean science knowledge and build a shared commitment to ocean sustainability.

18. **Sharing** our achievements, good practices and lessons learned to contribute to addressing global challenges through active participation in and reporting at international ocean related conferences and meetings.
19. **We call upon** all stakeholders—governments, international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector—to join us in advancing these actions. Through collaborative efforts, we aim to harness the potential of ocean science to address pressing challenges, ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources for current and future generations.
20. **We extend our sincere appreciation** to the Government of Japan for hosting and chairing the Senior Government Officials Roundtable in Tokyo on 12 March 2025.

ANNEX III

Terms of Reference

Intersessional Task Force on BBNJ Agreement

1. Objective

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) is a legally binding treaty that will strengthen the international legal regime for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in the maritime areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The implementation of BBNJ Agreement relies heavily on ocean science. Strengthening ocean science capacity for BBNJ implementation—particularly in developing regions—will be essential for ensuring that the BBNJ Agreement leads to meaningful protection and sustainable use of marine resources beyond national jurisdiction.

The Intersessional Task Force is established to support Member States in developing and strengthening their ocean science capacity.

2. Terms of Reference

The Intersessional Task Force will be open-ended and composed of BBNJ experts recommended by Member States and relevant research communities. Members should have experience in the BBNJ process, with a good knowledge about BBNJ and its movements, a solid scientific background related to BBNJ provisions, and a commitment to promoting international cooperation.

The Task Force will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information on BBNJ developments at either national or international levels. It will also identify potential actions and/or opportunities for the Sub-Commission to support Member States in enhancing scientific knowledge, improving research capacity, and facilitating the transfer of ocean technology.

The Task Force will conduct its work mainly through correspondence and online meetings. In-person meetings may be organized if necessary.

ANNEX IV

Terms of Reference

Intersessional Task Force on Ocean Literacy

1. Objective

Ocean Literacy has gained increasing attention worldwide over the past decade. Ocean Literacy is defined as “the understanding of human influence on the ocean and the ocean influence on humans”. It not only provides a fundamental means to enhance ocean knowledge and raise public awareness, but also provides tools and a comprehensive approach to empower citizens and stakeholders to act in a more responsible manner for our ocean and its resources.

The Ocean Literacy Task Force is initiated to drive the development of ocean literacy in the Western Pacific and adjacent areas.

2. Terms of Reference

The Task Force will be open-ended. It will be composed of experts recommended by Member States and relevant communities, coming from diverse and relevant disciplines and interested parties reflecting the multi-stakeholders nature of ocean literacy, including government agencies, educational and research institutions, private sectors and foundations.

Experts will be selected based on their expertise, working experience in ocean literacy and a willingness to promote ocean literacy collectively, taking into account geographical and gender balance. The Task Force will elect its Chair and Vice-Chair.

The Task Force will provide strategic and actional recommendations on the scoping, coordination, and implementation of the Ocean Literacy portfolio of activities in the region, as well as develop, promote and support ocean literacy initiatives tailored to the region's cultural, economic, and ecological contexts. Specifically, it will

- Provide strategic recommendations or directions for advancing Ocean Literacy in the region;
- Identify, develop, coordinate and implement Ocean Literacy initiatives in the region, ensuring they are tailored to the needs of Member States in the region and aligned with the UN Ocean Decade goals;
- Engage with stakeholders at both international and national levels to identify opportunities for co-developing and mobilizing financial and in-kind support for Ocean Literacy initiative(s);
- Identification of synergies with relevant organizations and institutions interested in promoting Ocean Literacy, including among UNESCO Sectors, international organizations, educational/academic institutions, NGOs and private sector associations;
- Actively participate in the Task Force regular meetings, and interact with other Ocean Literacy communities;

The open-ended Task Force will be formed and become operational for the duration of the UN Ocean Decade, subject to regular review and extension as needed.

