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**SUMMARY OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE UN DECADE OF OCEAN
SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO EVALUATION FINDINGS**

Summary

This document provides a summary of the findings and recommendations of the independent Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development that was conducted by UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service (ref. [IOS/EVS/PI/223 | IOC/INF-1545](#)). It also includes the IOC Executive Secretary's management response to the evaluation's findings and recommendations in annex 1 and a Statement from the Decade Advisory Board in annex 2 (English only).

The proposed decision(s) is referenced Draft Resolution A-33/[4.8] in the Action Paper (document IOC/A-33/2) for session.

Overview of the UN Ocean Decade

1. The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) was formally proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through its Resolution [A/RES/72/73](#) on 5 December 2017. The resolution invited UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) to prepare and coordinate the Decade's implementation plan, in consultation with Member States, UN system actors, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders. It emphasized that implementation should take place "within existing structures and available resources", indicating that the Decade was not intended to create new funding obligations for Member States, but rather to catalyse coordination, partnerships and action.
2. Originally proposed by UNESCO-IOC in 2016, the Decade emerged in response to limited global recognition of the role of ocean science in achieving the 2030 Agenda, despite the inclusion of SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Since its launch in January 2021, during a time marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and growing global environmental challenges, the Decade has evolved into a global initiative guided by the vision of "the science we need for the ocean we want". It adopts a broad, inclusive definition of ocean science that values diverse knowledge systems and is rooted in principles of equity, inclusivity, and diversity.
3. Building on this foundation, the Decade provides a collaborative framework designed to advance transformative ocean science by facilitating the co-design and delivery of science-based actions, strengthening capacity development, mobilising partnerships and resources and promoting the integration of ocean knowledge into policy and decision-making processes to advance sustainable ocean management. While the Decade is not a financing framework, its success depends on the mobilisation of financial and in-kind resources to support coordination and foster an enabling environment for access to funding and support for its Actions. This also requires the alignment of existing programmes and strengthened partnerships across the UN system, as well as among public, private, and multilateral actors.
4. The Decade operates through a multi-tiered governance and coordination structure led by the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) within UNESCO-IOC, with the support of global and decentralized structures including the Decade Advisory Board (DAB), UN-Oceans, Decade Coordination Offices (DCOs), Decade Collaborative Centres (DCCs), and National Decade Committees (NDCs). Its objectives are pursued through Decade Actions, which include programmes, projects, activities, and contributions across science, policy, capacity development and outreach.

Evaluation objectives and use

5. The Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Ocean Decade was requested by the UNESCO-IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in June 2024, marking a critical reflection point at the halfway stage of the initiative. Managed by UNESCO's Division for Internal Oversight Services (IOS), the evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness, relevance, and coherence of the Decade's implementation to date, and to inform strategic adjustments needed to achieve its intended outcomes over the remaining five years. As such, it serves dual purposes: first, to assess progress and emerging achievements; and second, to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the Decade's delivery, impact and sustainability. It covers key dimensions of the Decade, including governance and coordination, resource mobilisation, science and knowledge delivery, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, inclusivity, communication and outreach, and the Decade's contribution to advancing IOC's long-term vision and institutional evolution. It also identifies lessons learned and areas requiring strategic attention to ensure that the Decade remains responsive to emerging global challenges. The primary intended users of the evaluation are the DCU, IOC Governing Bodies, the DAB, UN-Oceans members and decentralized coordination structures. Secondary users include NDCs, Member States, and the broader community of Decade Action implementers.

Key elements of the evaluation methodology

6. The evaluation follows a utilization-focused, mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data for a comprehensive assessment. Key methods included a desk review, semi-structured interviews with 109 stakeholders, focus group discussions, case studies and an online survey with 1,205 responses, 72% of whom self-identified as active Decade participants. In total, 1,006 stakeholder consultations were conducted across 118 countries using a range of methods. Data collection was carried out in English, French, and Spanish, ensuring broad geographical, sectoral, and demographic representation, with particular attention to under-represented groups such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Indigenous voices, and Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs). The methodology also incorporated Social Network Analysis (SNA), bibliometric and policy influence analyses and a global media scan. The evaluation is structured around a Theory of Change (ToC) to map pathways from inputs to impact and to test key assumptions.

Main findings and conclusions

7. Drawing on a wide range of triangulated evidence sources, the following findings and conclusions highlight both the UN Ocean Decade's progress and achievements to date and key areas for improvement as it enters its second half.

Key achievements

8. The Ocean Decade [Vision 2030](#) report, published in October 2024, describes the Decade as the “largest coordinated global ocean science initiative ever undertaken”, having mobilized over 4,500 institutions and 20,000 individuals “to co-create and co-deliver the science and knowledge that is needed for decision making” for addressing the Ocean Decade Challenges. According to the report, the Decade Actions mobilized nearly USD 1 billion, though resource gaps remain a significant constraint.

9. The evaluation found that the UN Ocean Decade has demonstrated significant progress in its first half, building a solid foundation to deliver the outcomes envisioned through more inclusive, impactful and collaborative ocean science. The DCU was unanimously recognized by stakeholders for its leadership and efficiency, despite operating under severe resource constraints. Decentralized coordination structures have demonstrated promising approaches to regional and national engagement. At the same time, the DAB has been evolving to enhance its support and provide strategic guidance to the DCU.

10. The Decade has fostered strong cross-sector partnerships. Collaboration between the DCU and UNESCO Programme Sectors and Central Services, such as the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) Programme and the Gender Equality Division, has supported the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems, as well as the mainstreaming of gender. The Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) programme has been particularly effective in engaging young professionals in leadership, capacity development and global forums. Stakeholder engagement has remained strong, with contributors motivated by the opportunity to advance the Decade's objectives.

11. Resource mobilisation has shown steady progress, particularly through the Foundations Dialogue and the Ocean Decade Alliance, which have contributed to attracting support for Decade Actions and coordination efforts from philanthropic partners and Member States. The Ocean Matcher has emerged as a promising tool to connect Actions with potential funders. Private sector contributions have demonstrated good practice, with both in-kind and financial support from partners such as Fugro, Uniqlo, and Prada. Further opportunities for resource mobilisation have also materialized, notably through the European Commission–IOC Decade Cooperation Roadmap, which offers important avenues for both financial and in-kind support, including via Horizon Europe and the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean and Waters”.

12. Across 93 countries, 641 Actions¹ have been endorsed, with the majority focused on ecosystem protection and capacity development. The strategic pathway, defined for the second half of the Decade through the Vision 2030 process and its white papers, has supported participatory design efforts and provided tools to guide future Calls for Action. NDCs in several countries, such as Portugal, India, Benin, Belgium, and New Zealand, have successfully aligned Decade initiatives with national priorities. Contributions from ECOPs and NGOs have begun to pave the way for grassroots engagement and real-world impact.

13. The Decade has gained significant visibility through high-profile events such as the Lisbon and Barcelona Conferences, which stakeholders consistently highlighted as key moments for engagement. Beyond raising awareness, these events served as platforms for interaction between scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders, creating opportunities for shaping policies and aligning scientific outputs with national and global priorities. In parallel, continuous communication efforts, through digital outreach, webinars, ECOP-led campaigns, have broadened awareness, enhanced relatability and fostered dialogue across diverse audiences, including youth and marginalized communities.

14. Towards the end of its first half, the Decade started to show early outcomes through its various initiatives and Actions. For example, the Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme has raised over USD 450 million and reached millions of people through preparedness efforts. In education, initiatives such as the integration of marine science into school curricula in Chile have strengthened ocean literacy. Progress has also been made in advancing open data, interoperability, and ocean monitoring systems.

15. The Decade has played a key role in enhancing the strategic visibility and relevance of UNESCO-IOC on the global stage, by advancing interdisciplinary research and strengthening connections between ocean science and policy. It has helped position the organization not only as a convener of ocean science but also as a key driver of ocean knowledge systems, laying the groundwork for an expanded leadership role beyond 2030.

Key areas for improvement informing the recommendations

16. The Mid-Term Evaluation identified several interrelated areas for improvement that, if addressed, would enhance the Decade's ability to deliver on its vision. These areas, as highlighted by findings and conclusions drawn from a diverse and comprehensive body of evidence, reflect systemic and structural considerations requiring targeted attention to sustain the Decade's relevance and effectiveness despite resource scarcity and a challenging global context shaped by shifting national and regional priorities and mounting pressures on the multilateral system.

Governance and Coordination

17. While the DCU has shown strong leadership under considerable constraints, its capacity remains stretched, in part due to a complex and fragmented coordination framework. The intended decentralized UN support has not yet been fully implemented. There is an opportunity to strengthen coordination across levels and partners, while clarifying roles, simplifying processes, and improving alignment with regional and national structures.

18. Despite examples of good practice, partnerships between the DCU, IOC, and broader UNESCO structures require strengthening. Cooperation with UNESCO field offices and other UN entities remains limited, restricting the ability to provide targeted support to regions and Member States, particularly those with fewer resources. Moreover, 61% of the members of governance and coordination bodies are based in Europe and North America, with minimal representation from LDCs

¹ In this report, "Actions" refers to projects and programmes. The typology of Ocean Decade Actions can be found in Annex 1.

and SIDS, highlighting a geographic imbalance that may affect the inclusivity and responsiveness of governance structures.

19. Stakeholders called for more strategic engagement from the DAB, whose current structure and participation patterns are perceived to limit its overall effectiveness. There is strong consensus that the DAB could enhance its contribution by focusing more explicitly on strategic guidance, governance and coordination improvements, resource mobilisation, stronger science-policy interaction, and long-term legacy planning. Strengthened engagement between the DAB and decentralized mechanisms, along with enhanced UN presence and representation within the DAB, were identified as priorities to further improve the Decade's governance model and reinforce its identity as a UN initiative.

Resource Mobilisation

20. While the Decade has laid important groundwork in building partnerships and establishing mechanisms for funding, resource mobilisation remains a widely shared concern. Only 17% of surveyed stakeholders rated current efforts as effective. The evaluation identified the need for more coordinated fundraising strategies, expanded outreach to philanthropic and private sector actors, increased engagement with multilateral development banks (MDBs) and other international financial institutions (IFIs), as well as national science and innovation funding agencies and government departments, alongside greater attention to regional prioritization, particularly for LDCs and SIDS that require higher levels of support for engagement and implementation of Actions.

21. A range of interlinked barriers continues to limit the effectiveness of resource mobilisation. These include limited visibility of the Decade among potential funders, competing donor priorities that may not align with ocean science, and a need for stronger coordination of resource mobilisation efforts to support Decade implementation and its Actions.

22. More importantly, the evaluation identified that resource mobilisation efforts should be more clearly aligned with Member States' needs, challenges and priorities and better communicate the real-world value of ocean science, particularly its role in addressing pressing issues such as food security, coastal resilience, and community well-being. The evidence indicates that greater emphasis on the tangible impact of ocean science and knowledge, when underpinned by data and results from the Decade's achievements and Actions, has the potential to strengthen both the case for funding and buy-in from a wide range of financial and in-kind support providers.

Science and Knowledge Delivery

23. The evaluation highlighted a need for more balanced science and knowledge delivery across regions, institutions, and Ocean Decade Challenge areas. Of the 641 endorsed Actions, the majority (68%) originate from Europe and North America, with relatively limited representation from LDCs (1%), SIDS (3%), and other underrepresented regions. Participation from the private sector and UN agencies beyond UNESCO-IOC also remains modest. Furthermore, the distribution of Actions across the 10 Challenges is uneven, ranging from 318 Actions under "Challenge 2: Protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity" to just 98 under "Challenge 6: Increase community resilience to ocean and coastal risks".

24. While there is widespread recognition of the Decade's strongest contributions in raising global awareness of ocean issues, fostering collaboration in ocean science and expanding communication networks, areas such as the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems, mobilisation of resources for research and influence on national policy were seen as needing further progress. Stakeholder perceptions of overall progress remain mixed, particularly among those involved in coordination structures, long-term contributors engaged since the Decade's design or launch and the scientific community, many of whom rated progress as moderate, limited, or minimal. Several recurring challenges were identified as constraining progress, including resource mobilisation, stakeholder engagement, public visibility and alignment with national priorities.

25. Several challenges were identified in the submission and management of Decade Actions. Lengthy endorsement timelines and criteria perceived as unclear by some stakeholders, alongside a common misconception that endorsement guarantees funding, emerged as key concerns. Limited capacity to navigate the application process in LDCs, SIDS, and regions such as Africa and the Arab States contributes to regional imbalances and limits the ability to address ocean-related challenges through science and knowledge. On the management side, the absence of a mechanism linked with an effective database to identify overlaps, coupled with limited search and filtering functionality on the Decade website, hampers coordination and the development of synergies. While decentralized review and endorsement of Actions by pilot NDCs show promise, scaling remains constrained by capacity limitations in resource-scarce countries. Although some stakeholders attribute these and similar challenges to broader systemic issues in these contexts, evidence suggest that targeted interventions can initiate positive transformation and help address structural and systemic barriers, as illustrated by case studies included in the report. In addition, the underrepresentation of the social sciences, often limited to ocean literacy, reduces the potential for Actions to inform policy and generate wider societal impact.

26. As the Decade reaches its mid-point, expectations have grown for greater engagement of policymakers in using the science and knowledge generated by Decade Actions to inform national and international policies, policy debates and decision-making processes. Evidence gathered through multiple evaluation methods indicates that Decade-policy interactions remain uneven across regions, with a decline in policy-related outputs over time, reflecting a broader loss of momentum in this area. Contributing factors include limited co-design efforts for Actions, including underutilisation of DCU-provided resources for co-design, and a lack of accessible policy communication tools such as dashboards and policy briefs. While high-profile events, such as the Barcelona Conference, have successfully drawn the attention of policymakers, sustained engagement remains limited, particularly from underrepresented regions, again linked with capacity and resource challenges.

27. The evaluation highlighted the importance of ensuring that the science and knowledge generated through Decade Actions are not only produced but also effectively applied across innovation ecosystems and community-level solutions. To support this, evidence points to the need for a more structured approach to facilitate the transfer, scaling and contextualisation of these outputs. This need is especially relevant in LDCs, SIDS, and other underrepresented regions, where stakeholders face challenges in accessing and adapting relevant knowledge, innovations, tools, and technologies. Furthermore, ECOPs, though actively engaged, have limited avenues to apply the skills developed through the Decade in practical, solution-oriented settings. As the Decade moves into its second half, the evaluation identified a timely opportunity to enhance the accessibility and practical use of outputs supporting innovation, applied impact, and long-term value across regions and sectors through more structured approaches to knowledge and technology transfer.

UN-Oceans and Broader UN Engagement

28. Engagement from UN entities beyond UNESCO and IOC during the first half of the Decade has been limited, presenting an important opportunity to broaden involvement across the UN system in the second half. The evidence points to communication constraints that have created uncertainty around how to engage with the Decade and its Actions. Strengthening regular communication through UN-Oceans and other relevant UN platforms was identified as a promising opportunity to clarify expectations, facilitate coordination and encourage more contributions by aligning ongoing and planned ocean-related efforts with the Decade framework. The findings indicate that improving visibility and expanding participation of UN agencies would reinforce the Decade's identity as a collective UN initiative and help maximise its reach and overall impact.

29. Looking to the second half of the Decade, climate change, marine pollution, and deep-sea mining have emerged in the evaluation as priority areas requiring heightened attention. Effectively addressing these and other pressing challenges will demand stronger UN-wide collaboration, especially in a context of increasing conflicts, shrinking resources and declining attention to sustainability issues. Strengthening coordination with relevant UN agencies, as well as mechanisms such as the UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UNRCOs), the UN Global Compact, Issue-Based

Coalitions, and the Interagency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the SDGs, alongside closer alignment with other UN Decades, emerged as critical to expanding the Decade's reach and reinforcing its implementation. These partnerships also offer strategic entry points at the national level, including ministries of finance, education, science, agriculture, and energy, helping to align efforts with broader development agendas and resource allocations, while embedding ocean priorities more deeply into cross-sectoral initiatives, policies and policy measures.

Inclusivity, Diversity and Equity

30. The evaluation found that efforts to promote inclusivity, diversity, and equity are gaining traction, with youth engagement, particularly through ECOP-led initiatives, seen as a positive example. However, stakeholder feedback and survey results point to disparities across different groups, including SIDS, LDCs, women, Indigenous peoples, and developing countries. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to broaden and deepen inclusion across all dimensions of Decade engagement.

31. Despite positive momentum, several factors continue to limit the full participation of underrepresented groups. These include constrained resources, limited outreach to non-English-speaking communities and a concentration of leadership of various activities and Decade structures within institutions in higher-income countries. Stakeholders also noted the need for targeted training, mentorship, and empowerment initiatives to support more equitable engagement.

Communication and Outreach

32. The evidence highlighted that stakeholders most commonly learned about the Decade through informal channels such as professional networks and personal contacts, underscoring the strength of peer-to-peer communication. In contrast, formal channels, such as the Decade website, newsletters and social media, had comparatively lower visibility among those not yet engaged with the Decade. Industry associations and professional bodies were among the least-cited sources by evaluation participants, suggesting a valuable opportunity to expand the Decade's reach to more diverse and currently underrepresented stakeholder groups.

33. Underrepresented groups, such as LDCs, SIDS, youth, developing countries, Indigenous peoples, and women, stand to benefit most from enhanced communication and outreach under the Decade. While digital platforms and social media have helped expand reach, language barriers, uneven digital access and financial or skills-related constraints continue to limit engagement from these groups. In response, stakeholders emphasized the value of locally accessible channels, including community radio, influencers, artists, and philanthropic organizations, particularly in non-English-speaking and underserved regions. Evaluation findings indicate that diversifying formats and platforms can help foster local ownership and broaden the Decade's impact at the grassroots level.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

34. As the Decade enters its second half, there is a clear opportunity to evolve the current Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework into a more strategic, results-based MEL system not only to track progress and demonstrate outcomes and impact but also to support critical initiatives such as resource mobilization and policy engagement by providing credible, data-driven insights. A strengthened MEL system could facilitate adaptive learning, guide strategic decisions, and reinforce stakeholder accountability. While the existing framework has been effective in tracking operational outputs, evidence suggests it offers limited insight into progress toward the Decade's broader goals and would benefit from mechanisms that better capture results at scale.

35. The evidence demonstrates the value of enhancing transparency in the M&E process and establishing stronger feedback loops to sustain stakeholder engagement and support shared learning. Clarifying the Decade's main activities and intended results through a Theory of Change and refining indicators to better capture outcomes emerged as a need to further strengthen its strategic value.

Positioning IOC Beyond 2030

36. Building on the momentum generated by the Decade, UNESCO-IOC is well positioned to assume a broader strategic role aligned with global development agendas, creating an opportunity to transform its core programmes and reinforce its leadership in ocean science beyond 2030. Evidence indicates that realising this potential will depend on addressing key challenges, including resource constraints, uneven regional participation, and the need for strengthened governance and coordination. Findings also highlighted the importance of expanding engagement with other UN agencies, advancing platforms such as the International Platform on Ocean Sustainability (IPOS) and integrating diverse knowledge systems to inform more inclusive and impactful ocean strategies.

Main recommendations

Basis and context for the recommendations

37. The evaluation confirms that the vision and outcomes of the UN Ocean Decade have resonated deeply across sectors, mobilising thousands of stakeholders and generating momentum that has far exceeded initial expectations. This widespread engagement has elevated the Decade's visibility and ambition on the global stage. At the same time, it has revealed a challenge in aligning the scale of this ambition with the current capacity, resources, governance arrangements and coordination mechanisms in place to deliver on it.

38. The findings point to a critical moment in the Decade's trajectory: an inflexion point where renewed focus, adapted strategies and strengthened institutional frameworks are required to meet the scale and urgency of emerging ocean challenges. This need is further underscored by a shifting global context marked by diminishing attention to sustainable development, constrained resources, exacerbated by funding cuts from major donors, such as the United States, which has historically provided significant support to ocean-related initiatives, and mounting geopolitical tensions. These external pressures, while complicating the path forward, reinforce the relevance and necessity of the Decade as a unifying framework to safeguard the ocean and the communities and ecosystems it supports.

39. Despite these constraints, the Decade has already achieved significant progress in advancing a more inclusive and impactful ocean science agenda. The collaborative spirit, commitment and aspiration demonstrated across stakeholder groups provide a strong foundation for deeper transformation in the second half. The recommendations that follow are grounded in the evidence gathered during the evaluation and reflect both the key lessons of the first five years and the ambitions for the Decade's legacy beyond 2030.

40. With 2025 marking a strategic midpoint, this is a timely opportunity to strengthen delivery mechanisms, deepen engagement, and position the Decade to deliver lasting impact.

41. The recommendations do not call for specific financial contributions from Member States. Instead, they are grounded in the recognition that, through the prioritisation of ongoing activities, the streamlining of operational workload and the leveraging of partnerships, collaboration and support within IOC, UNESCO, UN-Oceans members, other UN entities, NGOs, and public and private actors, as well as using affordable digital tools and platforms, implementation is both realistic and achievable within existing resource environments.

Main recommendations

42. The following list provides the main recommendations, with detailed suggested options for their implementation offered for consideration in the final section of this report.

1. Streamline and strengthen the governance and coordination framework for the Ocean Decade to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and support progress toward its intended outcomes in the second half.

2. Strengthen UN system-wide collaboration and alignment to support the achievement of the Decade's outcomes and reinforce its identity as a collective UN initiative, enhancing its global reach and impact.
3. Put in place a comprehensive resource mobilization framework to ensure sustainable funding for the coordination of the Decade and to strengthen the enabling environment for funding and supporting Decade Actions.
4. Strengthen national and regional engagement, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS, and other under-represented regions, to facilitate more equitable participation and alignment with local and regional priorities.
5. Enhance the mainstreaming of inclusivity, diversity, and equity to ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalised and under-represented groups, are meaningfully included and benefit from the Decade.
6. Strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the UN Ocean Decade Actions to enhance alignment with global and national priorities, promote innovation, support knowledge use and ensure practical application for tangible benefits to Member States and the ecosystem.
7. Enhance the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to transform it into a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system.
8. Systematically leverage the Decade to shape UNESCO-IOC's post-2030 agenda and amplify the impact of its programmes.

ANNEX 1 – MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Overall Management Response	
<p>The IOC thanks the UNESCO Internal Oversight Service (IOS) for leading the evaluation process. IOC notes the extensive consultation that was undertaken to inform the evaluation process and thanks the evaluation team and all individuals and organizations who participated in this process. The mid-term evaluation falls at a critical time in the Ocean Decade. After five years of implementation, the Ocean Decade has achieved significant success across a range of areas. It has enhanced global awareness of the role of ocean science and knowledge in sustainable development, catalyzed the emergence of close to 60 major global programmes, successfully trialed innovative new approaches to resource mobilisation, and supported the establishment of thematic and regional coordination hubs to support the generation and use of science and knowledge to inform decision making. Member States have actively adopted and supported the vision of the Ocean Decade, aligned their national science priorities around the Decade objectives and engaged in national initiatives including through the establishment of National Decade Committees, development and funding of Decade Actions and hosting of events, conferences and meetings to advance the Decade mission.</p> <p>The IOC highlights that it is imperative to make use of the second half of the Ocean Decade to consolidate the significant achievements to date and seek synergies between current Decade activities in order to achieve higher impact and fulfil the Decade vision and mission by 2030. It agrees with the conclusion of the evaluation that the mid-point of implementation is a critical moment to take stock and set future priorities for the delivery of the Decade for its second half that are tailored to address these challenges. Inevitably challenges remain in the implementation of the Decade, many of which are identified in the evaluation. The potential for recommendations and associated responses to contribute to the post-2030 impact of the Decade has been a key filter through which the management response has been developed.</p> <p>The IOC recognizes that the Decade operates within a dynamic and complex global landscape and simultaneously is influenced by and needs to address systemic and persistent challenges related to issues such as availability of resources for ocean science and ocean science infrastructure, geographical inequities in resources and capacity, the time taken for science to inform decision making and policy, and above all, rapidly changing ocean ecosystems and geopolitical environments. While the Ocean Decade is contributing to larger efforts to redress such challenges and can indeed use its unique characteristics to increase this contribution through fostering of broader networks within and outside of Member States, none of these issues can be addressed by the Decade alone. IOC believes that the mid-point of the Decade is also a moment to redefine and communicate the unique niche and added value of the Decade both to contribute to engagement and resource mobilisation efforts, but also to clarify, and in some cases reset, expectations of stakeholders on the benefits of engaging in the Decade.</p> <p>The IOC highlights that strengthened coordination is needed to enhance consolidated delivery in the last half of the Decade, and that this requires increased resources at a particularly complex period for resource mobilisation. The IOC agrees with the overall finding from the evaluation that strengthened coordination will result in increased impact, but in considering the feasibility of the suggested actions identified by the evaluation team, the IOC has sought to achieve a balance between the expected impact of actions and the existing, or likely future, availability of resources. The areas of action identified below will form the foundation for an ambitious, coherent and impactful package of work for the next half of the Decade. They will require additional resources but have been developed to take account of the prevailing financing and investment landscape and aim to represent a targeted and ambitious, yet realistic ask, to Member States and partners to support implementation of the priority needs of the Decade globally and in regions.</p>	
Recommendations	Management Response
Recommendation 1: Streamline and strengthen the governance and coordination framework for the Ocean Decade to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation and support progress toward its intended outcomes in the second half.	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>As a UN-wide initiative, governance of the Decade at the highest level sits with the UNGA and reporting is carried out through the UN SG's annual reporting to the UNGA. Via its UNGA-mandated role as the coordinating agency for the Decade, IOC reports to its Member States through the Executive Council and the Assembly. The Decade Advisory Board is a technical advisory body to the IOC Secretariat and Governing Bodies. The Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) within the IOC Secretariat has been administratively established but is not independently staffed. The Director position was formally established in 42C/5 (2024) and is</p>

	<p>currently under recruitment. The function of Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator are currently filled by IOC's Marine Policy and Regional Coordination staff. The DCU is the central coordination hub for the Decade and is supported by a network of IOC and non-IOC led thematic and regional coordination hubs.</p> <p>The scale, complexity, rapid growth and organic nature of the Decade means that strong governance and coordination are essential and the existing structures require continued strengthening and increased resourcing across all levels to achieve the ambitions of the next half of implementation.</p> <p>The Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Decade Advisory Board require revision to increase the focus on the strategic role of this group which comprises expert individual members and UN agency representatives. A proposal for these revised TORs has been developed with the current Board and is being presented to the 33rd session of the IOC Assembly. Formal establishment of the DCU within IOC, completion of the recruitment process for a coordinator the Decade and formal recognition of the role of other senior staff in the Unit will assist in strengthened external and internal legitimacy and visibility for coordination at the central level.</p> <p>The DCU and IOC-led regional/thematic coordination structures have been operating with a skeleton staff and without significant new resources; this situation is unlikely to change. While an increase in human resource capacity within the DCU and within regional coordination structures would be ideal, and indeed necessary to achieve many of the following recommendations, it is not considered feasible to achieve this solely through secondments and loans of experts from within the UN system. As indicated in more detail below, without significant new contributions of financial and in-kind resources for human resources from 2026 onwards, activities of the DCU and the IOC-led decentralised coordination structures will need to be scaled back; a situation which would be entirely at odds with the ambition of consolidated impact during the remaining five years of the Decade and which would compromise the achievements of the past five years.</p> <p>Discussions with Member States and UN and non-UN partners on resource mobilisation priorities will intensify, including exploration of novel resourcing options, to increase capacity within the DCU and regional structures.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Strengthen UN system-wide collaboration and alignment to support the achievement of the Decade's outcomes and reinforce its identity as a collective UN initiative, enhancing its global reach and impact.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>Full and active engagement of UN agencies in the Decade is essential to its success as a UN-wide initiative. To date a small group of UN agencies has demonstrated a strong commitment to the Decade through submission of Decade Actions, participation in the Decade Advisory Board, hosting of and participation in meetings and conferences, and engagement in expert working groups. However, the Decade has struggled to gain strong traction outside of this core group. Increased communication with UN agencies, including through engagement at leadership level, is necessary to more clearly articulate the benefits of engaging in the Decade including for contributing to the science-policy mandates of UN agencies. The proposed revision of the TORs of the Decade Advisory Board includes proposals to strengthen the role of UN agency members in the Board and will also contribute to achieving this recommendation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Put in place a comprehensive resource mobilization framework to ensure</p>	<p>Accepted in part.</p> <p>The UNGA mandate for the Decade identified the need to implement the Decade within existing resources. Resourcing remains the single most</p>

<p>sustainable funding for the coordination of the Decade and to strengthen the enabling environment for funding and supporting Decade Actions.</p>	<p>important issue hindering full and effective implementation of the Ocean Decade. This is true both for Decade coordination within the DCU and IOC-led regional and thematic coordination structures, and for the effective implementation of Decade Actions.</p> <p>Coordination activities are fully dependent on voluntary contributions from Member States and other partners. As implementation of the Decade reaches its mid-point, an increasingly complex funding landscape, combined with a degree of anticipated and natural donor fatigue, has resulted in a downward trend in resources for central and regional coordination. Projections for 2026 onwards reveal that a downscaling of the DCU and its coordination activities will be necessary without significant new contributions of financial and in-kind resources. Critical IOC-led regional and thematic coordination structures in Africa, the Tropical Americas and Caribbean and focusing on ocean observations are in a similar situation. The regional structures have never been fully operationalised and downscaling of the Observations DCO is foreseen despite the critical priority afforded to ocean observations in the Decade and in IOC programmatic work. Resource mobilisation efforts, while still addressing core operational work of the DCU, will be increasingly focused around a limited set of high-priority themes or regions that support other recommendations of the evaluation related to enhanced coordination of Decade actions for consolidated impact (Recommendation 6) and the opportunity to leverage the Decade to strengthen IOC programmatic work post-2030 (Recommendation 8) . This targeted approach structured around thematic or regional packages of actions will be more effective than the wide-ranging “comprehensive resource mobilisation framework” suggested in the evaluation report.</p> <p>Despite successes in innovative approaches including with the Ocean Decade Alliance, Foundations Dialogue and other partners for example, in the development of co-branded Calls for Decade Actions, there persists a strong degree of disappointment on the perceived ‘failure’ of the Decade to finance endorsed initiatives. There is a need to realign expectations and understanding of the role of the Decade in relation to resource mobilisation for Decade Actions i.e. that Decade aims to influence the financing and investment landscape and is not a financing mechanism <i>per se</i>. In parallel efforts will continue in the development and deployment of innovative partnerships to influence the global financing and investment landscape for ocean science.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Strengthen national and regional engagement, with a focus on LDCs, SIDS and other under-represented regions, to facilitate more equitable participation and alignment with local and regional priorities.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>Strengthened regional and national engagement in the Decade was recognised as a priority in The Barcelona Statement emerging from the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference. Support to regional taskforces and National Decade Committees is being furnished within the possibilities of available human resources and will continue. In addition, measures will be implemented to enhance interaction between the Decade Advisory Board, Decade Actions and national and regional Decade structures, and partners. Support to National Decade Committees will continue, within the constraints of available human resources, to strengthen links to Decade Actions as a means of linking the work of the Decade to support fulfilment of national commitments under global and regional UN conventions and frameworks (e.g. UNFCCC, CBD, and BBNJ). The Decade Capacity Development Facility and underlying IOC capacity development delivery mechanisms will be further leveraged to provide support to SIDS/LDCs stakeholders in co-design approaches, resource mobilisation, and engagement with private sector/philanthropy to generate self driven Decade actions.</p>

<p>Recommendation 5: Enhance the mainstreaming of inclusivity, diversity, and equity to ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalized and under-represented groups, are meaningfully included and benefit from the Decade.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>Inclusivity across genders, geographies and generations is a fundamental tenet of the Decade. Significant work has been undertaken to date and new initiative have been launched to enhance gender equity and youth inclusion as well as to facilitate leadership by and engagement of Indigenous and local knowledge holders in the Decade. These initiatives will be continued in coming years.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: Strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the UN Ocean Decade Actions to enhance alignment with global and national priorities, promote innovation, support knowledge use and ensure practical application for tangible benefits to Member States and the ecosystem.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>Consolidation of the diverse and ever-growing portfolio of Decade Actions is the single most pressing challenge for the second half of the Decade and one that requires a systematic, structured approach supported by adequate resources. Overall, there is a need to raise the ambition and demonstrated impact of the Decade in terms of influence on decision making at national, regional and global levels.</p> <p>To achieve this, improved and new processes will be developed to increase understanding by, accountability of, and reporting from Decade Actions on how they are collaborating and influencing decision making.</p> <p>A strengthened Call for Decade Actions process will be designed and implemented to ensure that new Decade Actions align with identified priority knowledge and policy gaps, that they have identified tangible pathways of impact to inform decision making, and they are actively collaborating with partners across the Decade ecosystem including other Decade Actions, decentralised coordination structures, and National Decade Committees.</p> <p>As indicated in the response to Recommendation 7, enhancement of the monitoring and evaluation framework will be achieved to allow better tracking of the impact of Decade Actions, including increased accountability for self-reporting on impact on decision making for sustainable development, albeit in recognition of a lag time between availability of science and knowledge and decision making.</p> <p>The 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and pre-Conference preparatory process will leverage the Vision 2030 process outcomes to define a framework to assess remaining implementation gaps through enhanced collaboration across the portfolio of Decade Programmes, and Decade ecosystem (regional, thematic, national). This work will be used to tailor future resource mobilisation efforts around a package of high priority themes and regions and identify the foundations of the consolidated post-2030 Decade legacy.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: Enhance the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to transform it into a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>A monitoring and evaluation framework exists for the Decade and has been implemented and continuously refined since the first data collection exercise in 2022. Future efforts will focus on: (i) tracking impact and progress at the level of the Ocean Decade Challenges based on the results of the Vision 2030 process, and (ii) evaluating the science-policy-society impact of the Decade including how scientific knowledge generated through the Decade is informing decision making across society.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: Systematically leverage the Decade to shape UNESCO-IOC's post-2030 agenda and amplify the impact of its programmes.</p>	<p>Accepted.</p> <p>A failure to leverage the Decade to shape the future IOC would represent a wasted opportunity. Since its proclamation, the Decade has successfully raised visibility and awareness of the role of IOC within the UN system, opened opportunities for new partnerships and resources,</p>

	<p>and led to the development of innovative and new areas of work for the IOC. Not all IOC-led work under the Decade will continue past 2030 but core initiatives in ocean observations, ocean data, sustainable ocean planning, capacity development, tsunami preparedness and ocean acidification have the potential to influence the future direction and resourcing of IOC programmatic work. Regional IOC-led coordination structures, if adequately resourced, have the potential to cement the role of IOC with regional partners. The identification of the IOC-led post-Decade legacy initiatives will also inform the development of a targeted and tailored approach to resource mobilisation around high priority themes or regions. Groups such as the Foundations Dialogue and Ocean Decade Alliance, will be future, long-term allies and supporters of IOC's work thanks to their exposure via the Decade. In the lead-up to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and in parallel to other initiatives in the IOC that are shaping strategic discussions with Member States on future IOC priorities, including the 'IOC and Future of the Ocean' process, tangible actions will be defined to ensure that existing or emerging core Decade initiatives and structures flourish past 2030 and lead to a strengthened IOC.</p>
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ANNEX 2 - STATEMENT FROM DECADE ADVISORY BOARD IN RELATION TO THE MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT

April 29, 2025

The Decade Advisory Board (DAB) for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development recognises the extensive efforts invested in the Mid-term Evaluation of the Ocean Decade and thanks the evaluation team for their significant efforts. This substantial undertaking incorporated a diverse range of perspectives from Decade stakeholders (e.g. scientists, practitioners and community members).

The significant volume of responses to the survey and interviews is a testament to the evaluation team's dedication and an unequivocal indicator of the Ocean Decade's success in engaging a broad and qualified audience. The Ocean Decades progress toward accomplishing its expected outcomes and overcoming the mapped scientific challenges, including the surpassing financial, communication, and institutional issues, was fully evidenced. This positive engagement and feedback reflect the determined efforts of the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU).

The evaluation process also brought a diversified array of recommendations to advance the execution of the OD Implementation Plan and achieve its expected outcomes. However, given the vast and varied stakeholder community, it is evident that there is some misalignment between the Decade's objectives and the expectations of some stakeholders. This misalignment is highlighted in the suggested actions and changes provided through the evaluation process.

In light of these observations, the Ocean DAB wishes to emphasize:

- Our support for the DCU to continue delivering the Decade at a high level, despite the persistent lack of adequate resources, both financial and personnel, and systemic challenges that impact the Decade.
- Our recognition of the achievements of the Decade thus far, the engaged community, and the potential for further accomplishments in the remaining five years. The ocean is vital to our lives and economies, and there is still much to be done. The Decade has the momentum to galvanize these efforts.

We note that many of the suggested actions for the second half of the Decade are unlikely to be achievable within the current resourcing levels. While some adjustments can and will be made, more substantive actions to better realize Ocean Decade outcomes cannot be implemented without additional financing and partnerships (including with other UN agencies). In this context, improving the engagement of youth and women - especially from SIDS and LDCs - through the work of National Decade Committees would ensure their voices and knowledge are valued. Now, more than ever, we need support to achieve the Decade's transformative objectives.

In closing, we extend our heartfelt thanks and recognition to the DCU team and the evaluation team for their tireless efforts. The work of both teams enhances the Decade's significance for stakeholders and contributes to creating the science we need for the ocean we want.

The Ocean DAB remains committed to supporting the Decade's initiatives and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. We believe that with continued dedication and increased support, the Decade can achieve its ambitious goals and make a lasting impact on ocean science, sustainability, and society.

Expert Members of the Advisory Board of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development:

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