

IOC Circular Letter No 3039
(Available in English, French, Spanish)

IOC/VH/JB/AC/pbo
15 May 2025

To : Official National Coordinating Bodies for liaison with the IOC (IOC Member States)

C.c. : Permanent Delegates/Observers Missions to UNESCO and
National Commission for UNESCO of IOC Member States
Chair and Vice-Chairpersons of IOC
Officers of Major Subsidiary Bodies of IOC

**Subject: Information on the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference
including IOC Engagement and Events**

This Circular Letter is to update Member States on IOC's engagement at the [2025 United Nations Ocean Conference](#) that will take place from 9–13 June 2025 in Nice France. The Conference will be co-hosted by France and Costa Rica. The overarching theme of the Conference is “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”. The Conference aims to support further and urgent action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and identify further ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14 – Life under water.

IOC Priorities at the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference

IOC will have a strong presence at the Conference. The overall goal of IOC's presence is to advance ocean science and knowledge as a basis for action to achieve SDG 14 and the 2030 Agenda in line with our mandate and strategic priorities. IOC's engagement will generate action and partnerships to create sustained impact around the following priorities: (i) fulfill critical knowledge priorities through the Ocean Decade as identified in [The Barcelona Statement](#); (ii) increase sustained investment in ocean science activities and infrastructure for observations and data; (iii) accelerate sustainable ocean plans including support to Member States to develop and implement SOPs; (iv) generate data, knowledge and capacity to support implementation of commitments under BBNJ and GBF; (v) ensure collaborative action for disaster risk reduction and preparedness in the face of ocean hazards; (vi) accelerate efforts for 2030 goal for seabed mapping by unlocking existing data and generating new data; and (vii) build on successful ocean literacy approaches and expand activities to target a broad range of societal actors.

Conference Political Declaration

The draft 'Political Declaration for the Conference' has been released by Australia and Cabo Verde in their role as co-facilitators of the negotiation process. The draft declaration, which is expected to be adopted on the final

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day of the Conference, addresses many of IOC's priorities for the Conference. The draft declaration is attached to this Circular Letter.

Conference Programme and Ocean Action Panels

The [Conference Programme](#) can be found on the Conference website and is structured around plenary sessions and 10 thematic Ocean Action Panels. IOC has had a lead role in the development of [Ocean Action Panel 2 : Increasing ocean-related scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity building, marine technology and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health](#) and [Ocean Action Panel 7: Leveraging ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages](#). Background papers for all Ocean Action Panels [will be available](#) on the Conference website.

The Conference will be preceded by [three special events](#): the One Ocean Science Congress (3–6 June, Nice, France), the Ocean Rise and Resilience Summit (7 June, Nice, France), and the Blue Economy and Finance Forum (7–8 June, Monaco).

Conference Accreditation

Accreditation to the Conference is managed through UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Details can be found on the [Conference website](#). Please note that IOC is not responsible for accreditation of delegates to the Conference.

IOC Events

IOC is leading and partnering on a number of events to advance its priorities at the pre-Conference special events and during the Conference. These include official side events in the Conference Blue Zone and offsite events in the Green Zone and other locations around Nice. The full list of IOC events can be found [here](#) and the full list of events carried out in the framework of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development can be found [here](#). Please note that Blue Zone accreditation is required to access official side events. Registration for events in the Green Zone ('La Baleine') is via [this link](#). A [separate registration system](#) has been developed for offsite events that will be held at the Port of Nice as the host country is implementing additional security requirements.

Please contact Julian Barbrière (j.barbriere@unesco.org) or Alison Clausen (a.clausen@unesco.org) with any queries on the above.

[signature]

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Enclosure: Draft Political Declaration for the Conference: Our ocean, our future: united for urgent action (English only)

Our ocean, our future: united for urgent action

- 1 We, the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives, meeting in Nice from 9–13 June 2025 at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the participation of civil society and other relevant stakeholders, reaffirm our strong commitment to conserve and sustainably use our ocean, seas and marine resources.
- 2 We reaffirm the declaration entitled “Our ocean, our future, our responsibility”, adopted by the high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, held in Lisbon, from 27 June to 1 July 2022, and the declaration entitled “Our ocean, our future: call for action”, adopted by the Conference held in New York from 5 to 9 June 2017.
- 3 The ocean is fundamental to life on our planet and to our future, and we remain deeply alarmed by the global emergency it faces. The ocean and its ecosystems are adversely affected by climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet SDG 14 and the 2030 Agenda. A healthy, productive and resilient ocean is essential for a sustainable ocean-based economy, food security and nutrition, and underpins deep cultural and social connections. We must act with urgency to face this challenge with bold, ambitious, just and transformative action, and ensure all people, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, youth, people in vulnerable situations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are fully and meaningfully empowered and included in ocean-related decision-making as appropriate.
- 4 We emphasize that our actions to implement SDG 14 should be in accordance with, reinforce and not duplicate or undermine existing legal instruments, arrangements, processes, mechanisms or entities. We affirm the need to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of The Future We Want.
- 5 We welcome our decision to take ambitious action to protect, conserve, sustainably use and restore the ocean and its ecosystems as included in the Pact for the Future.

Conserving the ocean and its ecosystems

- 6 We stress the ocean plays an essential role in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, including through ocean-based adaptation and resilience. We are deeply concerned that the ability of the ocean and its ecosystems to act as a climate regulator and

to support adaptation has been weakened. The ocean and its ecosystems are adversely impacted by ocean acidification and climate change including ocean warming and the slowdown of ocean circulation, compounded by marine pollution, biodiversity loss, eutrophication and deoxygenation.

- 7 We underline the importance of interlinkages between the ocean, climate and biodiversity and call for enhanced and coordinated global action to minimise the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on the health of the ocean, its species and its ecosystems as well as coastal communities, including those who rely on the ocean for their food and livelihoods.
- 8 We emphasize the particular importance of implementing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change¹ and the Paris Agreement², including the goal to limit the temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change, and help ensure the health, productivity, sustainable use and resilience of the ocean and thus our future. We recall that Article 2.2 of the Paris Agreement states that it will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances. We also emphasize the need to adapt to the unavoidable effects of climate change. We welcome the decisions adopted during the 27th Session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, in particular the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, in particular the UAE Consensus and its first Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement (GST-1), and the 29th Session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, in particular on the New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance. We welcome the convening of the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue through the UN Climate Change Conferences.
- 9 We affirm the importance of full and effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Protocols, as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) including its ocean-related goals and targets as well as its mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and to place the global community on a path towards realizing the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, and recognize the role of conserving, restoring and sustainably using the ocean, seas and marine resources in achieving these objectives.

¹ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1771, No. 30822.

² Adopted under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, decision 1/CP.21.

- 10 As adopted at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and agreed upon as global targets under the KMGBF, we will ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded ecosystems are under effective restoration. In this regard, we will take effective legal, policy, administrative, and capacity-building measures at all levels, as appropriate, to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources and from digital sequence information on genetic resources, as well as traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources. These efforts should be in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity. These efforts should recognize and respect the integral role and rights of Indigenous Peoples, as established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, including over their indigenous and traditional territories where applicable, in line with section C of the KMGBF.
- 11 We affirm our commitment to continued cooperation to address climate change-related sea level rise and its effects, and acknowledge the ongoing work of the UN General Assembly to address sea-level rise, including through the convening of the High-Level Meeting on Sea Level Rise held in New York on 25 September 2024, and take note of the request by the UN General Assembly for the President of the General Assembly to organize a one-day high level plenary meeting at its 81st Session. We recognise climate change-related sea level rise disproportionately impacts Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and coastal communities, especially in developing countries, and acknowledge the urgent need for greater international cooperation and collective action to enhance their adaptive capacities and build resilience while mitigating climate change. We are determined to strengthen international cooperation to support those who are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.
- 12 We commend the leadership of SIDS in highlighting and aiming to address sea level rise, and recall the endorsement of the 2021 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea Level Rise, the 2023 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea Level Rise, the 2021 Alliance of Small Island States Leaders' Declaration, and the 2024 Alliance of Small Island States Leaders Declaration on Sea Level Rise and Statehood.

- 13 We note the work of the International Law Commission on the topic “Sea-level rise in relation to international law” and encourage States to share their views on the various aspects of this topic.
- 14 We recall the 2024 Advisory Opinion of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on the Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law.
- 15 We remain concerned by the high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, and its negative impacts on the environment and ecosystems and the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. We recognise the importance of addressing this global challenge, and thus reaffirm our commitment to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, which could include both binding and voluntary approaches, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full lifecycle of plastic, taking into account, among other things, the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as well as national circumstances and capabilities, in line with the mandate of UNEA resolution 5/14.
- 16 We reaffirm our shared commitment to accelerating action to prevent, significantly reduce and control marine pollution of all kinds. We support the work of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in addressing ship-sourced pollution, underwater radiated noise from ships and dumping in the marine environment. We encourage all competent international organisations, in particular the FAO, to address the issue of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear and its impact on habitats and marine species.
- 17 We reaffirm the need to adopt a source-to-sea approach and strengthen integrated coastal zone and ocean management, marine spatial planning, climate mitigation and adaptation as well as disaster risk reduction strategies to enhance the resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems and communities. We commit to nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches to protect, conserve and restore coastal ecosystems that act as natural buffers such as mangroves, seagrasses, kelp forests, salt marshes and coral reefs, while promoting sustainable livelihoods and conserving biodiversity. We stress the importance of scaled up and accelerated implementation of the Early Warnings for All initiative to ensure coastal communities vulnerable to hazardous weather, water or climate events have equitable access to timely, accurate, and actionable information and technology.
- 18 We reiterate the need to increase scientific knowledge on deep sea ecosystems and recognise the work of the International Seabed Authority in the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research in the Area. Noting the mandate of the International Seabed Authority, we welcome the progress of the work of the Authority

towards the development of robust rules, regulations and procedures for exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, and reiterate the importance of the ongoing elaboration and standardization by the Authority, pursuant to article 145 of UNCLOS, of rules, regulations and procedures to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment, for, inter alia, the protection and conservation of the natural resources of the Area and for the prevention of damage to the flora and fauna of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from activities in the Area.

Promoting sustainable ocean-based economies

- 19 We recognise the tremendous opportunities offered by sustainable ocean-based economies for States, especially developing countries and particularly SIDS and LDCs, to eradicate poverty and hunger, achieve economic growth and social development while safeguarding the health, resilience and productivity of marine and coastal ecosystems for present and future generations. We recognize international trade and environmental policies should be mutually supportive and WTO consistent. In this regard we reaffirm our commitment to supporting the implementation, as appropriate, of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS)—a renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity, and the Doha program of action for LDCs.
- 20 We recognise the fundamental role of management tools, such as sustainable ocean plans, in achieving sustainable ocean-based economies and the sustainable management of ocean areas under national jurisdiction. In this regard, we acknowledge the voluntary commitments of some coastal states to ensure 100 per cent of ocean areas under national jurisdictions are sustainably managed by 2030.
- 21 We are deeply troubled by the continuously degrading accumulated trends at the global level in the status of marine fish stocks due to unsustainable practices, challenges from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overcapacity and overfishing, climate change, ocean acidification, loss of biodiversity, pollution and aquatic ecosystems degradation, while noting variability between and within regions. We therefore call for decisive and collective action to ensure sustainable fisheries and aquaculture systems, including through, inter alia, enhancing transparency, the use of technology, enhancing science- and knowledge-based management, promoting, scaling up and replicating successes, and working together to end IUU fishing. As a key pillar of the ocean economy, fisheries and aquaculture provide livelihoods, economic opportunities, food security and nutrition to millions worldwide. We emphasize the urgent need to improve sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture to combat malnutrition and poverty, particularly for people in vulnerable situations, while ensuring the long-term health of marine ecosystems.

- 22 We encourage all States to promote participatory management schemes for small-scale fisheries in accordance with national laws, regulations and practices, as well as in line with the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.
- 23 We highlight the importance of efforts in regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) to establish sound management measures for sustainable fisheries and to contribute to global efforts to end IUU fishing. We encourage States, individually and through RFMOs and arrangements, to strengthen or establish rules and regulations on and promote the use of the best available technology, including, where appropriate, electronic monitoring systems to ensure effective monitoring, control and surveillance as well as compliance with relevant conservation and management measures.
- 24 We encourage World Trade Organization (WTO) Members to deposit their instruments of acceptance of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to enable its entry into force and implementation. We invite Members to advance and conclude negotiations as soon as possible and by its 14th Ministerial Conference on additional provisions on fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing to achieve a comprehensive fisheries subsidies agreement, and recognize that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing country Members and least developed country Members should be an integral part of these negotiations.
- 25 We recognise the critical role of maritime transport, maritime routes and marine infrastructure in the global economy, trade, food and energy security, as well as the significant challenges of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in this sector. We take note of the IMO adoption of the 2023 Strategy on Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ships and its ambition to reach net-zero emissions from international shipping by or around i.e. close to 2050.

Accelerating action

- 26 We note the adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) and call upon States and regional economic integration organizations that have not done so to consider signing and ratifying, approving or accepting the Agreement. We emphasize the importance of the early entry into force and effective implementation of the Agreement.
- 27 We call on States to promote awareness and education campaigns at local, national, regional and international levels to inform the public about the importance of maintaining a healthy ocean and resilient marine ecosystems. We commit to ensure that people,

especially children and youth, are empowered with the relevant knowledge and skills, through promoting and supporting quality education and lifelong learning for ocean literacy.

28 We emphasize the critical need for national ocean accounting and mapping of coastal and marine ecosystems, and of the ocean floor, as appropriate, to inform policy decisions, development planning, integrated coastal zone management, as well as conservation planning.

29 We encourage cooperation to strengthen regional initiatives, regional seas conventions and action plans, the UNEP Regional Seas Programme and, where appropriate, establish coordination mechanisms for the integrated management and sustainable development of coastal and marine areas, fostering biodiversity, ecological corridors, and promoting conservation, restoration and the sustainable use of marine resources at the local, national and regional levels.

30 Ocean action must be based on the best available science and knowledge, including, where available, traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems, while recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, in conserving, restoring and sustainably using the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. To that end we:

- a. Affirm the value of strengthening sharing of knowledge and expertise, including, where there is free, prior and informed consent, the knowledges, innovations, practices and technologies of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, traditional knowledge and local knowledge systems.
- b. Support new scientific research to address the multiple challenges facing the ocean including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, food security and nutrition, water management, energy transitions and disaster risk.
- c. Commit to further improving the scientific understanding of the ocean and supporting sustainable science- and knowledge-based measures, exchanges and collaboration to accelerate action, including through the UN Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, and its World Ocean Assessments, the United Nations Decades of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), and relevant assessments concerning ocean science and knowledge, such as those prepared under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.
- d. Support a strong science-policy interface to provide timely, credible and salient scientific and socioeconomic information to inform policies and actions. We note the

opportunity to promote the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the ocean by engaging decision-makers and fostering scientific inclusiveness through scientific research, and also note the proposal for an International Platform for Ocean Sustainability.

- e. Support the use of diverse and multilingual scientific knowledge from a variety of sources, from different regions and in different languages.
- f. Commit to strengthening coordinated international, regional, subregional and national scientific observation and data collection efforts, including as appropriate through the development of integrated information management, tools such as digital representation of the ocean, infrastructure and systems that provide access to reliable, timely and high-quality marine data.
- g. Enhance cooperation, including South-South and triangular cooperation, to strengthen mechanisms for collaboration, peer learning, knowledge-sharing and exchange of best practices within marine scientific research, and to support developing countries in addressing their constraints in access to technology, and analysing and using reliable data and statistics.
- h. Recognise the contributions of effective area-based management tools, such as effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, including through traditional marine tenure and community-based resource management, to support the health and resilience of the ocean and coastal ecosystems, their species, and the coastal communities that depend on them, and the need, where applicable, to invest in maintaining or enhancing their contributions.
- i. Recognise the important role of the sustainable blue bioeconomy in conserving, restoring and sustainably using the ocean.

31 We recognise that SDG 14 is one of the least funded SDGs and that accelerating ocean action globally requires significant and accessible finance and the fulfilment of existing commitments and obligations under relevant intergovernmental agreements. It also requires adequate and scaled up means of implementation for developing countries, in particular SIDS and LDCs, to address the funding gap of SDG 14. In this regard, we:

- a. Look forward to the convening of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Seville from 30 June to 3 July 2025.
- b. Call for greater mobilisation of resources from all sources and support the use of suitable financial instruments to accelerate ocean action and ensure the health and resilience of the ocean, noting the utilization of instruments would differ based on different national contexts.

- c. Strive to strengthen the provision of scaled up resources in developing countries, especially SIDS and LDCs, including public, grant-based and concessional finance and non-debt instruments, as well as other types of concessional finance including from Multilateral Development Banks in line with their mandates, and reiterate the central role of national policies, domestic resources and development strategies.
- d. Promote the sustainable ocean-based economy, including as an attractive investment opportunity through instruments such as blue bonds, blue loans and payment for ecosystem services, and encourage the active and meaningful involvement of the private sector, including banks, insurers and investors in the transition to sustainable ocean-based economies.
- e. Recognize the importance of increasing of scientific knowledge and development of research capacity of developing countries, in particular SIDS and LDCs, including through technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and capacity-building, to allow them to invest in conservation and restoration efforts and to sustainably use our ocean, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
- f. Underline the need to support coastal communities, in particular small-scale and artisanal fisheries and sustainable aquaculture producers, women and girls, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in developing and implementing locally driven adaptation measures, and stress the importance of enhancing their capacity to effectively engage, advocate, and manage marine resources in a sustainable manner.

32 We value the voluntary commitments made to implement SDG 14, including at UN Ocean Conferences, and encourage partnerships to expand initiatives and increase their impact. We acknowledge the inclusive nature of voluntary commitments and encourage appropriate review and follow-up on the progress on voluntary commitments.

33 We emphasize the importance of multilateral ocean governance and the integration of ocean-related issues into relevant multilateral efforts and fora, in line with their respective mandates, to ensure that ocean sustainability is effectively integrated and adequately addressed in the relevant discussions and agendas, particularly those directly linked to ocean health.

34 Conscious of the numerous challenges the ocean faces, we will remain ambitious and engaged, and look forward to future UN Ocean Conferences.