United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change

17 June 2021

Oceans and Law of the Sea

Contribution from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Abbreviations and acronyms

COP	Conference of the Parties
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	greenhouse gas
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOC	The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
Informal Consultative Process	The UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LDC	least developed country
NAP	national adaptation plan
NDC	nationally determined contribution
RAMSAR	The Convention on Wetlands
REDD+	reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation; conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (decision 1/CP.16, para. 70)
SBSTA	Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice
SCF	Standing Committee on Finance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	small island developing State(s)
SROCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere
UNEP	United Nations Environment
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Oceans	United Nations Oceans
WIM	Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage
WIM Executive Committee	Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretariat ("the secretariat") seeks to contribute to the United Nations General Assembly resolution 75/239 of 31 December 2020 for the report entitled "Oceans and the law of the sea" on developments and issues relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea. The contribution consists of a summary of developments from September 2020 to June 2021.

2. The ocean has long been our ally in addressing climate change and taken the brunt of the impact of human-made global heating. It has absorbed about 90% of the heat generated by rising greenhouse gas emissions trapped in the Earth's system and taken in 30% of carbon emissions. As outlined in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere (SROCC), this has caused systemic changes, including ocean warming, acidification, deoxygenation, cryosphere melt and sea level rise, with devastating impacts on ocean and coastal life and coastal communities' lives and livelihoods.

3. There is an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit the scale of climate change impacts on the ocean and cryosphere, and increase options for resilience from those impacts and risks that cannot be avoided such as sea level rise

4. The ocean must also be considered as part of the solutions for both mitigation and adaptation action on climate change:

(a) For mitigation this includes ocean related action including ocean-based renewable energy, reduction in emissions from ocean-based transport, protection and restoration of Coastal and marine ecosystems and dietary shifts towards low-carbon and resilient ocean-based and plant-based protein and other sources of nutrition, such as has been outlined by the HL Ocean Panel report.[1]

(b) For adaptation this includes ocean related action including reduction of vulnerabilities to sea level rise, extreme sea level events and coastal hazards, salinization and ocean acidification, and Nature-Based solutions which increase resilience, including protection and restoration of mangroves, coral reef systems and other ecosystems; and climate-resilient fishing and aquaculture[2].

5. The information provided in this letter is an overview of developments and action on ocean under the UNFCCC mandates and workstreams.

II. Party Commitments under UNFCCC and Paris Agreement

6. Article 2 of the Convention states that the objective of the Convention is "to achieve…stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system". The climate system is defined in Article 1.3 as "the totality of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere and geosphere and their interactions," which by definition includes the ocean and all life in it, the cryosphere and the ocean floor.

7. All Parties commit in Article 4.1(d) of the Convention to "promote sustainable management, and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases…including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems".

8. The Paris Agreement specifically mentions ocean ecosystems: Parties note the "importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth".[3]

[1] https://www.oceanpanel.org/climate.
[2] SBSTA Chair, Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue Information Note, available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/OD_InformationNote.pdf
[3] See preamble, available at http://www.unfccc.int/node/512.

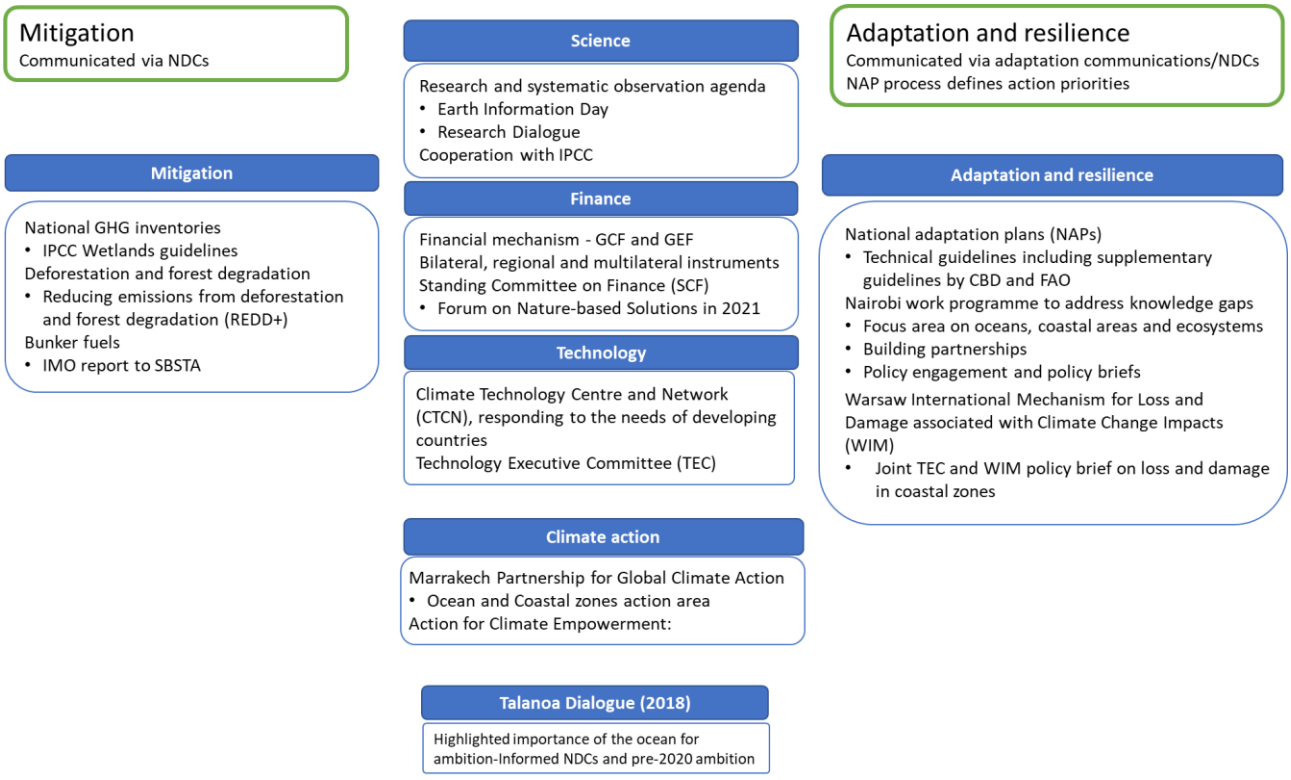
9. In the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) (submitted from 2015 to 2016), approximately 70 per cent of Parties have identified ocean-related vulnerabilities and commitments, to different extents, on mitigation and adaptation.[4]

10. As of 15 June 2021, the secretariat has received 65 revised/updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) from 92 Parties. Many of these NDCs highlight the impacts and risks of climate change on the ocean, as well as resilience measures being taken to respond to these impacts and risks.

III. Current activities under UNFCCC

11. Activities related to ocean and coastal-zone related action are considered by some activities under the UNFCCC but not yet in any joined-up approach (see figure 1)

Figure 1. Landscape of current support for ocean action under UNFCCC



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1. Mitigation

(a) National greenhouse gas inventories

12. Parties report information on GHG emissions to the secretariat through different communication vehicles. GHG inventory reports under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, as well as those to be provided under the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement, are guided by the IPCC guidelines for national GHG inventories. The SBSTA, at SBSTA 50,[5] noted the release of the *2019 Refinement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories*,[6] which provides updates to guidance

[4] The NDC submissions are available at https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/Home.aspx.
[5] FCCC/SBSTA/2019/2, para. 74.
[6] Refinement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories. Edited by E

on wetlands provided in volume 4, chapter 7 of the 2013 Supplement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories: Wetlands.[7]

(b) Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries

13. The COP has invited Parties, relevant organizations and stakeholders to support ongoing efforts, capacity-building, demonstration activities and the mobilization of resources relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and to share the outcomes of these efforts via the REDD+ web platform.[8] Mangrove forests can be included as part of national REDD+ strategies and processes in cases where mangroves are described under the National Forest Definition.[9]

(c) Bunker fuels

14. The COP invited the IMO to contribute to the work of the SBSTA, especially on the location and control of emissions from international bunker fuels.[10] Through the SBSTA, the IMO secretariat provides reports and information on work relevant to the SBSTA. Special expert meetings are also organized to address methodological issues relating to estimating, compiling and reporting GHG emissions data from maritime transport.[11]

2. Adaptation and resilience

(a) National adaptation plan process

15. The NAP process was established in Decision 1/CP.16 to enable Parties to identify medium and long-term adaptation needs, and develop and implement strategies and programmes to address those needs.[12] The NAP technical guidelines, developed by the Least Developed Countries Expert Group, offer guidance to Parties on the process to formulate and implement NAPs.[13] Some of the supplementary guidelines to the NAPs offer assistance to Parties in including ocean-related activities in NAPs. These include the Convention on Biological Diversity guidelines on linking NAPs and national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and the FAO guidelines on integrating genetic diversity into adaptation planning and on addressing agriculture, forestry and fisheries.[14]

16. As at 15 June 2021, the secretariat had received NAPs from 22 Parties, most of which include ocean-related interventions addressing issues such as ecosystem protection, sustainable aquaculture and fisheries, early warning systems and sea level rise.[15]

(b) Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change

17. The Nairobi work programme (NWP) on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change[16] includes a focus area on oceans, coastal areas and ecosystems, including mega deltas, coral reefs and mangroves, as mandated by SBSTA 48[17] and SBSTA 50.[18]

Calvo Buendia et al., IPCC, 2019, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/2019-refinement-to-the-2006-ipcc-guidelines-for-national-greenhouse-gas-inventories/.

[7] Supplement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories: Wetlands. Edited by Takahiko Hiraishi et al., IPCC, 2014, https://www.ipcc.ch/publication/2013-supplement-to-the-2006-ipcc-guidelines-for-national-greenhouse-gas-inventories-wetlands/.

[8] https://redd.unfccc.int/.

[9] Reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation; conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (Decision 1/CP.16, para. 70).

[10] Decision 4/CP.1.

[11] For more information on actions related to international bunker fuels, see http://www.unfccc.int/node/491.

[12] See http://www.unfccc.int/node/698.

[13] https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Guidelines/Pages/Technical-guidelines.aspx.

[14] See https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Guidelines/Pages/Supplements.aspx.

[15] The NAPs submitted are available at https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/News/Pages/national_adaptation_plans.aspx.

[16] See http://www.unfccc.int/node/693.

[17] FCCC/SBSTA/2018/4, para. 21(b).

[18] FCCC/SBSTA/2019/2, paras. 8 and 17.

Parties agreed that efforts under the Nairobi work programme should prioritize this focus area in 2019–2020, in collaboration with partners and relevant organizations.

18. Work under the priority thematic area of oceans, coastal areas and ecosystems[19] has focused on co-designing and implementing actions to support the LDCs and SIDS. The NWP expert group on oceans, which comprises representatives of 23 well-established organizations and institutions, including several United Nations entities and IGOs (e.g. the IPCC, UNEP, UNESCO), collaborates with the constituted bodies. The NWP policy brief on oceans is a recent highlight of their work.[20]

(c) Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts

19. Under the Convention, the work on loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change was initiated through Decision 1/CP.16, whereby Parties recognized the need to strengthen international cooperation and expertise in order to understand and reduce loss and damage, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events.[21] In this respect, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM)[22] and the WIM Executive Committee[23] were established in 2013.[24]

20. Under its current workplan, the WIM Executive Committee partnered with the Technology Executive Committee, with valuable contribution from international experts in these areas, to develop a joint policy brief on technologies for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage in coastal zones.[25] The brief aims to inform policy-makers and practitioners on technological solutions to assess and manage climate-related risks comprehensively in coastal zones.

3. Scientific

(a) IPCC

21. The COP has repeatedly expressed its appreciation and recognition of the work of the IPCC. COP 25 expressed its appreciation and gratitude to the IPCC and the scientific community for providing the SROCC as well as the Special Report on Climate Change and Land, which reflect the best available science, and encouraged Parties to continue to support the work of the IPCC. COP 25 also invited Parties to make use of the information contained in the IPCC Special Reports in their discussions under all relevant agenda items of the UNFCCC governing and subsidiary bodies.[26]

(b) Research and systematic observation

22. Under the research and systematic observation agenda item,[27] the SBSTA exchanges updates and needs, including on the ocean, with the scientific community,[28] through

[19] Further details on the NWP work on oceans are available at https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NWPStaging/Pages/oceans-page.aspx.

[20] UNFCCC. 2020. Policy brief on the ocean: Scaling up adaptation actions and co-operation to build climate resilience of the ocean, coastal areas and ecosystems. Bonn: UNFCCC. Available at https://unfccc.int/documents/266434.

[21] The slow onset events identified in this decision are sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, glacial retreat and related impacts, salinization, land and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity and desertification. See also http://www.unfccc.int/node/277.

[22] See http://www.unfccc.int/node/16493.

[23] See https://unfccc.int/wim-excom.

[24] Decision 2/CP.19.

[25] The policy brief is available at http://www.unfccc.int/node/231688.

[26] Decision 1/CP.25, paras. 5–7.

[27] See https://unfccc.int/node/105128.

[28] This includes IPCC, WMO, GCOS (to discuss progress made on the GCOS implementation plan), the Joint Committee on Earth Observation Satellites and the Coordination Group for Meteorological Satellites Working Group on Climate (to discuss progress made on their support for the GCOS implementation plan), IOC and UN-Oceans.

statements, reports and the annual mandated events: the Earth information day[29] and the meetings of the research dialogue.[30]

4. Finance

23. The Financial Mechanism facilitates the provision of financial assistance from Parties with more resources to those that have fewer and are more vulnerable to climate change.[31] The operating entities of the Financial Mechanism are the Global Environment Facility[32] and the Green Climate Fund.[33] Funding for climate change activities is also available through a wide range of bilateral, regional and multilateral channels.

24. The SCF assists the COP in relation to the Financial Mechanism through a range of activities, including regular forums for the communication and continued exchange of information among bodies and entities dealing with climate change finance in order to promote linkages and coherence.[34]

25. In 2020 the SCF opened a call for inputs for the SCF Forum, to be held in 2021, which will focus on nature-based solutions.[35] Preparatory work for the Forum is being co-facilitated by two SCF members: Mohamed Nasr (Egypt) and Fiona Gilbert (Australia).

5. Technology

26. The Technology Mechanism[36] consists of its policy arm, the Technology Executive Committee,[37] and its operational arm, the Climate Technology Centre and Network.[38]

27. The Climate Technology Centre and Network promotes the accelerated transfer of environmentally sound technologies for low-carbon and climate-resilient development at the request of developing countries. Many of those technologies are relevant to ocean-related issues and sectors, including: coastal zones, early warning and environmental assessment, marine fisheries, forestry (which includes mangroves) and renewable energy, as well as cross-cutting approaches and enablers.

28. The Technology Executive Committee, as highlighted in paragraph 26 above, has recently partnered with the WIM Executive Committee to develop a joint policy brief on technologies for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage in coastal zones.

6. Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action

29. The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action,[39] under the guidance of the high-level champions, aims to strengthen collaboration between governments and key stakeholders to immediately lower emissions and increase resilience to climate impacts. It has eight action areas, one of which is **oceans and coastal zones**.

30. Since COP 22, the ocean community, supported by the global climate action team and the high-level champions, has raised awareness of the importance of the interactions between oceans and climate.

7. Action for climate empowerment

31. The over-arching goal of the action for climate empowerment (ACE) work is to empower all members of society to engage in climate action, through education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international

[29] See https://unfccc.int/node/60972.
[30] See https://unfccc.int/node/227818.
[31] See http://www.unfccc.int/node/65952.
[32] See https://www.thegef.org/.
[33] See https://www.greenclimate.fund/.
[34] Decision 2/CP.17, section IV.
[35] See http://www.unfccc.int/node/231652.
[36] Decision 1/CP.16
[37] See https://unfccc.int/ttclear/tec.
[38] See https://www.ctc-n.org/.
[39] See https://unfccc.int/climate-action/marrakech-partnership-for-global-climate-action.

cooperation on these issues.[40] Ocean has been addressed under the work on ACE in several ways including, in 2019: at the Conference of Youth 15,[41] one of the topics was "Youth action for Oceans and Antarctica;" and one of the winners of the Global youth video competition was the Portuguese NGO "Ocean Alive."[42]

8. Talanoa Dialogue

32. The Talanoa Dialogue, initiated in 2018, was a facilitative dialogue designed to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the long-term goal referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Paris Agreement, and to inform the preparation of NDCs.[43]

33. A number of inputs to the Talanoa Dialogue[44] highlight the importance of oceans to ambition under the Paris Agreement. The COP invited Parties to consider the outcome, inputs and outputs of the Talanoa Dialogue in preparing their NDCs and in their efforts to enhance pre-2020 implementation and ambition.[45]

IV. Ocean and climate change dialogue to consider how to strengthen adaptation and mitigation action and ways forward

34. The ocean and climate change dialogue to consider how to strengthen adaptation and mitigation action was mandated at COP 25[46] and convened by the SBSTA Chair on 2 and 3 December 2020 during the UNFCCC Climate Dialogues 2020.[47]

35. In advance of the ocean dialogue, the SBSTA Chair provided an information note that summarized current ocean and climate change action under the Convention and the Paris Agreement, and within the wider UN system. Furthermore, the information note summarized the 47 submissions received by the UNFCCC secretariat from Parties and non-Party stakeholders to inform the ocean dialogue and proposed an approach to it.[48]

36. The information note provided in its annex 3 a brief overview of the United Nations system organizations, bodies, funds and programmes supporting action on ocean and climate change. This annex may be relevant as background and/or for use in the SG report.[49]

37. The SBSTA Chair ensured that the ocean dialogue was inclusive and participatory, with inputs from both Parties and non-Party stakeholders, including academia, subnational authorities, NGOs and youth organizations.

38. The ocean dialogue offered a vital space for enhancing and strengthening learning, action and synergies and served as a space for discussing options and ways forward in relation to strengthening ocean and climate adaptation and mitigation action under the UNFCCC, across the UN, at the national level and with regards to financial and other international cross-cutting support for action.

39. The options and opportunities identified are detailed in the SBSTA Chair's informal summary note from the event. Key messages from the dialogue are provided in the annex.

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[40] See https://unfccc.int/node/201712.
[41] See https://www.coy15.org/youth-action-oceans-and-antarctica.
[42] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eu0QtlmgRCc&feature=youtu.be.
[43] See Decision 1/CP.21, para. 20.
[44] For more information on the Talanoa Dialogue, see https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement/2018-talanoa-dialogue-platform
[45] Decision 1/CP.24, para. 37.
[46] Decision 1/CP.25, paras. 31 and 33–34.
[47] See https://unfccc.int/cd2020.
[48] Available at https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/OD_InformationNote.pdf.
[49] See Annex III of https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/OD_InformationNote.pdf.

V. Annex. Key messages from the Ocean and climate change dialogue to consider how to strengthen adaptation and mitigation action

The ocean is a fundamental part of the climate system and the global response to climate change.

Ocean action and climate action are intrinsically linked and must be strengthened through breaking down silos, integration and collaboration.

To date, the ocean has been a critical buffer against climate change but tipping points are being reached and ocean risk is increasing.

Science provides the basis for understanding the action needed and must be strengthened in parallel with action moving forward.

The ocean provides multiple untapped and powerful opportunities to mitigate and adapt to climate change, provided environmental and social safeguards are met.

Protecting and restoring nature is fundamental for resilience.

Action requires the participation of all voices.

Ways forward must incorporate strengthened action related to both process (under the UNFCCC and the UN) and practice (at the national level), as well as international financial support for strengthened action. In particular, future efforts should aim to:

A. Strengthen action under the UNFCCC

- Elevate and strengthen the profile and consideration of the ocean across existing UNFCCC processes
- Support action at the national level, including through ambitious NDCs
- Address gaps and needs in relation to ocean and climate knowledge and action under the UNFCCC process
- Include the ocean in the assessment of collective progress and in the global stocktake
- Catalyse action on and continue to include the ocean in activities under the UNFCCC, recognizing the ocean dialogue as a first step

B. Strengthen action across the United Nations

- Recognize and amplify synergies, complementarities and collective efforts across the UN
- Support mainstreaming of coherent action across biodiversity, ocean and climate change agendas
- Strengthen cooperation and linkages across relevant frameworks and agreements at the international and regional level
- Build ocean and climate change action as a cross-cutting element across the global regulatory framework
- Improve national coordination of action and reporting under processes and conventions across the UN system

C. Strengthen action at the national level

- Promote understanding that climate action equals ocean action and vice versa, especially in low-lying coastal areas and SIDS
- Invest in ocean science and monitoring
- Increase climate ambition inclusive of the ocean, including in NDCs and NAPs
- Develop and/or strengthen integrated national policies for ocean and climate action
- Strengthen leadership at the national, regional and local level

D. Strengthen finance and other cross-cutting support

- Align global finance to support ocean and climate action
- Mobilise understanding and resources to ensure climate investment includes ocean investment
- Invest in ocean and climate action that is at least biodiversity-neutral and, ideally, biodiversity-positive
- Overcome knowledge gaps to create coherent policies and invest in reforms at different geographical scales
- Facilitate engagement between the public and private sector
- Develop technical guidelines, criteria and/or practical guides for accessing finance
- Develop and implement approaches for innovative financing structures and instruments
- Increase cross-sectoral capacity-building