Submission to the twenty second session of the UN open-ended Informal Consultations on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP)

by the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

IMO

IMO is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for developing and adopting measures to improve the safety and security of international shipping and to prevent marine and atmospheric pollution from ships. IMO conventions, upon entry into force, cover all ships, regardless of the flag they fly, as ships of non-convention States entering the waters or ports of convention States are subject to the "no more favourable treatment principle", which is embedded in IMO treaties. In other words, this principle allows for a level playing-field so that ship operators cannot cut corners or compromise on safety, security and environmental performance. This approach is also a vehicle for innovation and efficiency within the shipping and maritime industries.

IMO currently has 175 Member States, and more than 130 observers from international organizations and NGOs representing all maritime interests. IMO has adopted over 50 treaties, the vast majority of which are in force and are globally binding. In addition, to supplement these treaties, numerous measures such as guidelines, guidance, recommended practices and codes have been agreed. Some of these are dealing directly with the protection of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

IMO and ocean observing

IMO, while not a direct commissioner of ocean observations, is a beneficiary and end-user of ocean observation data and information and recognizes the essential role it plays in the process of developing and adopting global regulations to ensure the safety, security and efficiency of ships and on the protection of the environment, both marine and atmospheric, from shipping operations.

IMO also hosts the Secretariat of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP), which is an advisory body, that provides authoritative, independent, interdisciplinary scientific advice to its ten sponsoring UN organizations (IAEA, IMO, FAO, UN, UNDP, UNESCO-IOC, UNEP, UNIDO, WMO, and ISA), to support the protection and sustainable use of the marine environment.

For parts of its scientific advice, IMO and the other UN organizations, rely on GESAMP to conduct and support marine environmental assessments, to undertake in-depth studies, analyses, and reviews of specific topics, and to identify emerging issues regarding the state of the marine environment. Ocean observation data and information is central to GESAMP undertaking this work and providing that scientific advice, this is particular evident in the following GESAMP working groups:

- GESAMP Working Group 38 (WG 38) on atmospheric input of chemicals to the oceans which addresses the impact of atmospheric deposition of both natural and anthropogenic substances, including the deposition of nitrogen, on ocean chemistry, biology, and biogeochemistry as well as climate; and

- GESAMP Working Group 45 (WG 45) on climate change and greenhouse gas related impacts on contaminants in the ocean, which aims to better understand the role that i) ocean warming and stratification, ii) change in the chemical composition of seawater, and iii) ocean acidification, will have on the distribution, transport and biogeochemical cycling of trace elements, radioactive isotopes, organic contaminants and nutrients.

Ocean observing - the way forward

Ocean observations are the key to understanding weather, climate, and the future state of marine ecosystems and resources and have developed significantly in recent years with advances in new technologies, in situ measurements, improved capabilities and an increasing number of ocean observing networks.

The data and information derived from these observations is essential to guide policy and progress towards internationally-agreed upon goals, for example in assessing progress of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 14 to, “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.

IMO supports the enhancement of existing observing systems towards a fully integrated global ocean observing system with increase access to ocean knowledge, across disciplines, that will support a wide range of societal and economic benefits related to safety, operational efficiency, and regulation of activities taking place on, in, and under the ocean.

The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development provides an opportunity to enhance capacity in ocean observations and develop a regime of international cooperation that fully monitors the ocean to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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