

Possible outcomes and building blocks of the fourth cycle of the Regular Process

A. Overview and rationale

The Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects (Regular Process), has significantly evolved since its inception, representing excellence in ocean science to inform decision-making. Its flagship product, the World Ocean Assessment (WOA), has informed policymakers by supporting the implementation of UN General Assembly resolutions on oceans and the law of sea and enhancing SDG14 initiatives through the provision of the best available ocean science. The WOA has also contributed to advancing the goals of the United Nations Conferences to Support the Implementation of SDG14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and has provided a mechanism for delivering the outputs achieved by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030). With 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), as well as the need for fulfilling the monitoring needs of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the significance of the Regular Process has become even more evident. It is in this context that a blueprint for the fourth cycle of the Regular Process is being proposed to further advance the Regular Process and generate more impactful outcomes for the ocean. This document contains an overview of expected outcomes of the fourth cycle of the Regular Process and possible building blocks.

B. Possible outcomes of the fourth cycle (2026-2030)

There are four elements for delivery of outputs and outcomes envisaged for the fourth cycle: (1) the fourth World Ocean Assessment(s) of the state of the marine environment; (2) outreach and engagement activities, including through the WOA digital platform; (3) support for and interaction with other ocean-related intergovernmental processes; and (4) capacity-building for strengthening the ocean science-policy interface.

1. The fourth World Ocean Assessment(s) will build on previous cycles and fill gaps and needs identified by Member States and the ocean community. Key considerations include:

- Assessment(s) content and structure including an evaluation, involving Member States, UN bodies and ocean community consultation, focused on whether the assessment should strictly provide an update to WOA III or incorporate new information delivery frameworks, new thematic elements and new ways of structuring content.
- Products associated with the assessment, including content summaries, tools for delivering information in innovative ways and novel mechanisms for enhancing inclusivity.
- Enhancement and advancement of digital platforms for delivering the assessment and associated products in support of outcome 2 listed above.
- Data and information delivery pipelines for supporting the assessment, including utilising collaborations and partnerships developed in outcome 3 listed above, to support information discovery, collation and delivery into the assessment.
- Regional information integration, inter alia, to increase synergy and alignment with other intergovernmental assessments.
- Streamlining processes associated with participation in the development and production of the assessment, including those that support gender, geographic, and disciplinary diversity.

2. Outreach and engagement activities will be expanded under the fourth cycle, primarily aimed at: 1) enhancing awareness of the Regular Process and its outputs; 2) dissemination of information from the WOAs; 3) facilitating participation in Regular Process activities including the WOAs; 4) increasing the impact of the Regular Process; and 5) ensuring the Regular Process is effective in meeting its mandate.

- Enhancing awareness: the Regular Process will seek to form strategic partnerships with global and regional organisations (e.g. IOC-UNESCO) to co-host events, workshops, and campaigns that raise awareness about the Regular Process and its outputs. This could include engaging with ocean message influencers and ocean advocates to amplify messaging through various traditional and social media channels.
- Dissemination of information from the WOAs:
 - WOA digital platform: this is a key technical element to operationalise the outreach and engagement outcome. See a separate box below for details.
 - Organisation of webinars: the webinars will aim to disseminate relevant information from the WOAs to ensure the relevancy of the Assessment for the various oceanic regions. The webinars may be conducted in collaboration with regional scientific or intergovernmental organisations to strengthen the Regular Process network in the regions. The recordings of the webinars will be placed on the Regular Process YouTube channel to create an online learning environment that will support the establishment of global ocean community of practice.
 - Launch event for WOAs: similar to the launch event of WOA II, the launch event for WOA III will aim to promote and disseminate the key findings in WOA III and introduce the WOA platform to stakeholders. The event can be held during one of the ocean-related events, such as the UN World Oceans Day or under the Ocean Decade Conference umbrella. The event may comprise keynote speeches by the UN Secretary General, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, or the UNGA President, followed by a fireside chat.
 - Creation of educational materials: development of self-paced online training courses and other educational resources could be explored, such as scientific posters and interactive modules, based on the findings of the WOAs. These materials should be designed for use by policymakers and the general public, with the goal of broadening the base of sustainable ocean users in the long term.
- Facilitating participation in Regular Process activities: the Regular Process will explore taking the initiative to organise stakeholder engagement workshops to gather input and feedback on the Regular Process activities. These workshops will help tailor the Regular Process to better meet the needs and expectations of different regions and sectors.
- Increasing the impact of the Regular Process: The Regular Process could seek high-level endorsements and testimonials from science and policy leaders globally on the relevance of the WOAs. Public endorsements from influential figures can significantly boost the visibility and impact of the Regular Process.
- Supporting the effective delivery of the Regular Process mandate: the Regular Process will aim to strengthen the integration of the WOA findings into other global and regional ocean assessments. This endeavour could include collaborating with relevant UN bodies (e.g. IOC-UNESCO, UNEP, FAO), regional frameworks and bodies, and scientific networks to align efforts and share best practices.

Technical support required for operationalising outreach and engagement: WOA digital platform

Key areas needed for the platform enhancement

User experience and accessibility: building upon the website improvements being made during the third cycle, the fourth Assessment(s) will need to be supported through a further enhanced digital platform to be more user-friendly and accessible, incorporating modern web design principles that cater to a wide range of users, including policymakers, scientists, and the general public. This could involve interactive data visualisations, dynamic mapping tools, and multimedia content (videos, infographics) that make ocean science data and analysis more engaging and easier to understand. Implementing an adaptive web design will ensure the platform is accessible on various devices, enhancing its reach and usability. The platform will be mobile-friendly and have an easy-to-navigate search engine to help end-users find specific information in the WOAs through their mobile devices.

Incorporating management tools of the Pool of Experts (POE): a POE management feature will need to be incorporated into the WOA digital platform to improve the overall data management efficiency of the rapidly expanding POE. This function will provide a talent management system that categorises POE data by expertise, research outputs, and contributions to previous WOAs. It will also incorporate a gender-disaggregated approach at every level. This system would enable the identification of the most suitable experts for specific knowledge needs of WOA chapters, optimising the use of existing resources and enhancing the quality of WOA outputs, and any other products of the Regular Process.

3. Support for and interaction with other ocean-related intergovernmental processes will be facilitated through collaborations and aligning synergistic activities with other ocean-related intergovernmental processes. Four pertinent aspects are highlighted for further consideration, with a view to strengthening connections, integrating information pipelines, fostering genuine collaborations, and ensuring support for the WOAs:

- Bolster the WOA's connection with processes such as the IPCC, IPBES, or GEO to support expert exchange and information exchange, and facilitate synergistic activities: organise joint meetings with representatives from IPCC, IPBES, GEO and other relevant processes, to discuss ongoing projects, share findings, and identify areas for collaboration. Pursuant to paragraph 316 of General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/69 which reaffirms the importance of ensuring that assessments from these processes support one another, to operationalise formalised engagement plans in the form of workshops or symposia with these relevant processes, dedicated funding in this area should be allocated for the fourth cycle. With the development of the WOA digital platform, the Regular Process secretariat could also explore the creation of interoperable databases to enable seamless data sharing between WOA and these organisations.
- Integrate and stabilise information delivery pipelines from the OECD, IOC-UNESCO, and FAO: explore the feasibility of establishing formal agreements (e.g., MOUs) with the OECD, IOC-UNESCO, and FAO to outline the necessary processes and responsibilities for data sharing and integration. This foundation could facilitate further knowledge exchange through joint technical training, where staff from the respective organisations are trained on how best to utilise and manage these information pipelines effectively.
- Facilitate genuine collaborations: organise joint workshops and conferences with the aforementioned intergovernmental organisations on the margins of major ocean-related international conferences. These could take the form of workshops, seminars, and panel discussions aimed at fostering collaboration and sharing knowledge. Those events would aim to produce joint scientific publications, such as reports, articles, and other outputs, highlighting collaborative efforts and shared findings towards the sustainable use of the ocean.
- Ensure support of the WOA by other processes: enhance efforts towards joint advocacy and outreach by conducting campaigns to raise awareness of the WOAs' key messages and findings on the latest ocean science, in collaboration with the aforementioned organisations and stakeholders. The Regular Process

secretariat will also cultivate strategic partnerships with these entities to garner relevant support and resources, thereby augmenting the impact of the WOAs.

In its fourth cycle, the Regular Process will further benefit from key discussions and align its activities with those of various UN agencies, programmes and bodies. UN-Oceans, for which the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) serves as the Focal Point, provides an inter-agency coordination mechanism that has been under-utilised in previous cycles in building connectivity across UN agencies with regard to the Regular Process and its activities. By more effectively utilising UN-Oceans, the Regular Process can more efficiently access inter-agency expertise, disseminate information and build collaborations with agencies to further the objectives of each cycle.

Key interactions of note that require strengthened engagement during the fourth cycle include:

- (i) IOC-UNESCO, particularly in relation to connecting the Global Ocean Science Report (GOSR) and State of the Ocean Report (StOR) and outputs from the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and IOC programmes to the Regular Process and vice versa. Information and data delivery pathways particularly via repositories managed by the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE) would strengthen information access pipelines needed to support the assessment.
- (ii) UNEP, particularly in relation to connecting outputs from the GEO and IPBES assessments and Global Environment Monitoring System for the Ocean and Coasts (GEMS Ocean) and building potential collaborative efforts on assessments including exchange of expertise. As the information and reporting pathways for supporting the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework are finalised, strengthened connections with UNEP could be utilised to explore how the Regular Process might best support reporting requirements and progress against goals and targets.
- (iii) The WMO and the UNFCCC, particularly in relation to connecting outputs from IPCC assessments and building potential collaborative efforts on assessments, including exchange of expertise. The IPCC agreed in 2024 on the set of assessment reports it will deliver in its seventh cycle, resulting in the development of these reports over a similar time frame to the fourth cycle. This provides an opportunity to align relevant content across the IPCC and Regular Process.
- (iv) The United Nations Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP) will be utilised to strengthen connections with the Regular Process to ensure that outputs from the Regular Process are effectively communicated and considered in the discussions and deliberations on ocean governance and policy. This collaboration could include side events and information sessions to align efforts and integrate findings into the broader UN ocean agenda.
- (v) The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will serve as an avenue to strengthen engagement of the Regular Process to align scientific guidance of the WOAs with implementation of the SDGs, particularly SDG14, under a broader framework of the Ocean Decade. This could involve presenting findings from the WOAs at HLPF meetings, participating in relevant side events, and contributing to the HLPF's review and follow-up processes on ocean-related targets.
- (vi) The United Nations Ocean Conferences (UNOC) present opportunities to ensure that their outcomes and commitments are further integrated into the Regular Process and its development of WOAs. This can be achieved by participating in the planning and review processes of the UNOCs, aligning assessment timelines and priorities with the conference agendas, and creating mechanisms for regular updates and feedback on the implementation of UNOC commitments.

4. Capacity-building will be tailored for strengthening the ocean science-policy interface. Capacity-building, as an integrated element of the programme of work of the Regular Process, requires a strategic review to enhance its effectiveness and relevance. As highlighted in the [2023 Regular Process capacity-building Symposium on Strengthening the Ocean Science-Policy Interface](#) held in Paris, in collaboration with IOC-UNESCO, undertaking capacity analyses for marine technology, ocean observation and data, and human and institutional capacities requires guidelines that factor in regional disparities in funding and resource utilisation, with assistance provided where necessary. Addressing these capacity gaps could be achieved through a series of cooperative Regular Process capacity-building trainings that leverage the experiences of relevant stakeholder organisations, such as IOC-UNESCO, to create synergy, while noting the differing needs of various oceanic regions to ensure an equitable sharing of benefits across these regions. There are two key aspects in designing an impactful capacity-building component:

- Develop region-specific capacity-building curricula informed by WOA III findings, ensuring customised and impactful learning experiences that respond to the needs of policymaking. WOA III will present sector-specific sustainability pathways that outline the tools, best practices, and information useful for entities at both regional and national levels to progress towards integrated ocean scenarios encompassing mid- to long-term goals towards 2050. The aforementioned curricula will provide an overview of the key changes in knowledge and understanding highlighted in WOA III and propose specific capacity-building areas with remaining gaps to be filled.
- Reflect lessons learned in capacity-building to inform the development of the fourth World Ocean assessment(s), aiming to identify and address ongoing support needs to ensure lasting impact. Capacity-building gaps to be highlighted in WOA III will encourage thorough reviews at global and regional needs, with a view to evaluating how global and regional processes can meet the identified needs for strengthening the science-policy interface for ocean governance. The development of the fourth World Ocean assessment(s) will build upon these insights to enhance coherence in the development of capacity-building programmes to support integrated ocean assessments, fostering global, regional partnerships and coordination for ocean science capacity-building.

C. Building blocks of the fourth cycle

Multistakeholder workshops/symposia

A series of multistakeholder workshops and symposia will be utilised to support the development of the fourth Assessment(s) to facilitate, inter alia: 1) collection of regional-level data and input for the process of addressing gaps identified in WOA III; 2) development of forward-looking ocean scenarios for evidence-based policymaking; 3) strengthening of complementarity and synergy between assessments with other ocean-related processes and bodies; and 4) capacity-building to enhance the ocean science-policy interface.

Coordinating Authors (CAs) meetings

In-person meetings of CAs of components of the fourth assessment(s) will be organised, with a view to facilitating the progress of the drafting process and minimising the risks of misunderstanding or miscommunication across the various actors involved in the fourth cycle. This will allow for the Group of Experts to provide on-site advice and guidance on pertinent issues that need to be addressed for making tangible progress in the development of the next assessment(s). It also provides the opportunity for co-development of connected content across chapters, thereby supporting greater integration of content and more holistic approaches to the presentation of content. These meetings are intended to be held at the beginning, mid-way and the end of the drafting process and combined with meetings of the Group of Experts.

Writing Team (WT) meetings

Lessons learned from the third cycle identified that particularly for those writing teams contributing to the chapters of section 5 (Sustainability Pathways) of the assessment, face to face meetings of writing teams would be of significant benefit to the development of the assessment. This was particularly the case where (i) multi-disciplinary teams needed to be gathered in order to progress components of chapters focused across governance, social, economic and environmental aspects of chapter topics; or (ii) online mechanisms for engaging expertise and progressing drafting were not appropriate (e.g. engagement of Indigenous and traditional knowledge owners). The fourth cycle will focus on supporting meetings of writing teams targeted at progressing drafting of components of the assessment. These will allow for the direct provision of guidance from relevant Group of Expert members to writing teams and facilitate “sprints” in the drafting process by writing teams.

WOA digital platform

As outlined in outcome (2) above, efforts to integrate aspects of digitalisation into the assessment will be bolstered under the fourth cycle. This will build upon the interactive, web-based format of the presentation of WOA III and will be implemented by the Regular Process secretariat through collaboration with governmental entities, non-governmental organisations, and individuals with relevant expertise in areas such as advice, platform design (both back-end and front-end), data hosting, programming, author support, content creation, and other technical support. This will encompass improved user experience, accessibility, and technology integration for POE management (see the POE segment below). The digital interface improvements made during the third cycle will be further built upon by incorporating modern web design principles that cater to a wide range of users, including policymakers, scientists, and the general public. Development of an easy-to-navigate search engine using the latest digital technology will allow rapid discovery of assessment content by end-users.

Pool of Experts (POE)

Feedback from the third cycle highlighted the value of innovation in introducing self-nomination procedures and continuous application cycles. Building upon this success, several key elements will be focused on during the fourth cycle:

- Greater interaction with other UN bodies when distributing calls for nominations
- Use of external databases to identify expertise
- Simplification of the nomination/onboarding processes (including the Regular Process website)
- Greater use of workshop in the nomination process
- Early engagement in the nomination process
- Utilisation of fellowships, internships and support structures for facilitating engagement

Operational aspects that are needed to support the above include developing and integrating document and data management tools into the WOA digital platform to facilitate seamless expert search functions, and delivery of information on experts (refer to the separate box above on the WOA digital platform).