

REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS OF THE REGULAR PROCESS TO THE 22ND MEETING OF THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP OF THE WHOLE ON THE REGULAR PROCESS

Reporting period: 1 August 2024 – 15 September 2025.

The activities of the Group of Experts (GOE) during the reporting period comprise the following elements, which are structured by outputs:

Output I: Assessment(s) of the state of the marine environment including socioeconomic aspects:

- (i) The GOE members supervised the writing process of the Assessment, in close collaboration with the Coordinating Authors in order to have the Zero Draft of the third World Ocean Assessment (WOA III) finalized by 1 November 2024.
- (ii) Before the first day of the GOE meeting held in Tokyo (13 November 2024), each of the 57 chapters of the Zero Draft of WOA III was reviewed by its corresponding lead and co-lead, as well as by another third GOE member.
- (iii) GOE Meeting held in Tokyo (13-19 November 2024):

All the GEO members in attendance (both in person and online) went over the reviews of each of the 57 chapters and subchapters of WOA III in plenary, in order to identify potential problems with their content and format. Three chapters had not yet been received. Comments were given on all the remaining chapters. However, 5 chapters were identified that needed an in-depth review. Deadlines and an action plan were established for the 3 pending chapters and for the 5 chapters that required an in-depth review.

The general structure of the overall summary was agreed upon, as well as the general guidelines for the writing of the introductions of sections 4 (Changes since WOA II) and 5 (Socio-ecological Systems), and subsections 5A (Ocean Sustainable Economy) and 5B (One Health). This agreement also applied to chapters containing subchapters (i.e.: S4C4 Biodiversity, S4C5 Habitats or S5A.C1 Food Systems and S5A.C3 Energy).

Working groups were established to discuss potential policy-relevant Summary from WOA III, implement their outlines, and start their development. A detailed timeline of actions was established.

The GOE reviewed the comments received from the external peer-reviewers on the Zero Draft of the WOA III, and consequently approved it as Draft 1.

Draft 1 of WOA III was sent by the secretariat to Member States, IGOs and NGOs for review in May with a deadline of 12 June. Comments were received from the following Member States: Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, the EU, Greece, Japan, Norway, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Türkiye, and the UK.

Discussion on lessons learnt from the third cycle are provided in the Annex below.

- (iv) The GOE supervised the review process of comments received from the Coordinating Authors and their writing teams in response to the comments made by States, IGOs and NGOs on Draft 1. The GOE urged them to complete the review in a timely manner and advised them on how to respond.
- (v) Prior to the GOE meeting held in Malmö, Sweden (28 July – 6 August 2025), the lead and co-leads reviewed the Coordinating Authors' responses to the comments received on Draft 1. The GOE identified critical comments and responses that were inappropriate.
- (vi) GOE Meeting held in Malmö, Sweden (28 July – 6 August 2025):

The GOE reviewed all the 1,300 responses submitted by the Coordinating Authors in response to the comments received from States, IGOs and NGOs on Draft 1 and provided input on those responses, when necessary.

Recognizing the importance of Chapter 1 (Overall Summary), the GOE dedicated considerable time discussing this section, making improvements where necessary, responding to all the comments received on this chapter. With this chapter, the GOE aimed to provide a coherent, policy-relevant overview of the Assessment without being policy-prescriptive. These efforts aim to strengthen the interface between ocean science and policy, supporting WOA III's main goal of informing and guiding decision-making processes at all levels.

After the Malmo meeting, a set of keynotes were developed for Chapter 1 (Overall Summary). In consultation with the secretariat, it was decided to include these keynotes at the beginning of each section, subsection, or chapter of the WOA III, as appropriate.

- (vii) The Group of Experts continues to hold monthly meetings to evaluate progress in these activities and identify and solve potential issues. These meetings enable the Group of Experts to determine
 - (i) if the timing of activities should be re-evaluated and whether activities need to be rescheduled and
 - (ii) what the consequences of rescheduling activities might be for the overall timetable of the assessment.

Output II: Regular Process support for and interaction with other ocean- related intergovernmental processes

One Ocean Science Congress (3-6 June 2025, Nice, France)

The GOE wrote the abstract that was presented by the Secretariat for Oral Presentation under the call of the One Ocean Science Conference. The proposal was accepted as a poster, and a

working group was formed to develop its content and design. The poster session took place at the Ballene, a pavilion far from the main congress location where the oral presentations were held. This fact limited the visibility of all the posters, including the one on the WOA. Nevertheless, the poster received attention, and the Congress was a good opportunity for the GOE members and the Secretariat to disseminate information about the Regular Process and the World Ocean Assessment, particularly during the many conversations held with conference attendees.

United Nations Ocean Conference (9-13 June 2025, Nice, France)

A total of 8 interventions were drafted by the GOE for the Ocean Action Panels (OAP) on:

- (i) OAP 1: Conserving, sustainably managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems including deep-sea ecosystems.
- (ii) OAP 2: Increasing ocean-related scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity building, marine technology and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health.
- (iii) OAP 4: Preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities.
- (iv) OAP 5: Fostering sustainable fisheries management including supporting small-scale fishers.
- (v) OAP 6: Advancing sustainable ocean-based economies, sustainable maritime transport and coastal community resilience leaving no one behind.
- (vi) OAP 7: Leveraging ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages
- (vii) OAP 8: Promoting and supporting all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional and sub regional level.
- (viii) OAP 9: Promoting the role of sustainable food from the ocean for poverty eradication and food security

Due to the high number of interventions by Member States, interventions were delivered in OAPs 2, 5, 7 and 9.

The Secretariat also organized a side event titled *“Ocean Science and Its Policy Interface: from Knowledge to Sustainable Ocean Solutions”*. The opening remarks were delivered by H.E. Ms. Elinor Hammar skjöld, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, followed by H.E. Ms. Kimberly Louis, Minister Counsellor, Deputy Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia & Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole of the General Assembly on the Regular Process.

The first panel on “Delivering the science we need” was moderated by Dr. Rafael González-Quirós, Joint Coordinator of the GOE, and it was composed by Mr. David Obura, IPBES Chair, Ms. Virginie Tassin Campanella, IHO nominated representative to the IHO – IAG Advisory Board on the Law of the Sea (ABLOS) and Founder and Attorney-at-law at VTA Tassin, and by Ms. Laura David, Professor and Marine Science Institute Director, University of the Philippines.

The second panel on “Strengthening the science-policy interface for a healthy ocean” was moderated by Mr. Francois Bailet, Senior Legal Officer, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS), Office of Legal Affairs, United Nations, and it was composed by Mr. Sebastian Unger, Director Marine Protection, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (Germany), Ms Charlina Vitcheva, Director-General of the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) at the

European Commission, Ms. Claire Jolly, Head of Unit in the Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), OECD, and Mr. Julian Barbière, Head, Marine Policy and Regional Implementation Section, IOC-UNESCO.

The side event attracted significant attention with a high number of participants.

Output III: Activities for the planning for the fourth Cycle of the Regular Process.

During the GOE meeting held in Tokyo the following aspects were discussed:

a) Development of the draft programme of work for the fourth cycle of the Regular Process and associated preliminary resource requirements documents.

The discussions focused on three key areas: (i) assessment on the state of the marine environment; (ii) support for ocean-related other intergovernmental processes and outreach towards them, and (iii) capacity building. Below are the relevant actions proposed by the GOE for each area of work.

- (i) Assessment on the state of the marine environment:
 - 1) Maximizing participation in **ocean-related intergovernmental meetings** (e.g. UNOC3, Ocean Decade events) for **raising awareness** on the Regular Process and its WOA through side events, main plenary interventions, videos and other activities;
 - 2) Enhancement of **digital tools** for WOA III (e.g. a digital platform for WOAs, publication with main publishers, such as Springer), Regular Process website improvement, and improved document management through SharePoint;
 - 3) **Resource mobilization** from interested donor countries for the Regular Process;
 - 4) Enhance **induction processes** for national focal points (**NFPs**), **GOE, CAs, WTs**, and increasing the number of NFPs nominations to cover the full UNGA membership;
 - 5) Strengthening the linkage between **regional workshop outputs and WOA IV**;
 - 6) Conducting **online regional workshops**;
 - 7) Exploring production of **joint knowledge products with IPBES/IPCC**, such as policy briefs, reports;
 - 8) Looking at the possibility of using broad terms to denote assessment related budget items to allow for maximum **budget flexibility**.
- (ii) Outreach and support for ocean-related other intergovernmental processes:
 - 1) Developing **audience/target specific messaging** for both academic and non-academic experts;
 - 2) Production of Regular Process **introduction videos and active use of social media** for RP/WOA promotion;
 - 3) Strengthen **communication channels with CAs and WTs**;
 - 4) Informing States on the **expertise gap in the POE**;
 - 5) Enhance **inclusivity** of the Regular Process by ensuring balanced participation/representation of experts from both developed and developing countries (e.g. **recognition conferred through DOI** is a stronger incentive than provision of remuneration).

(iii) Capacity building for the science-policy interface:

- 1) Request the AHWGW to consider **expansion of CB scope** to include technical/specific areas, e.g. UNCLOS;
- 2) Analyze the **current state of science policy interface (SPI)** in the Regular Process context at all levels and have it included as a **possible chapter** of WOA IV;
- 3) **Expand the pool** of Regular Process **engagement stakeholders**, e.g. early career researchers (ECRs);
- 4) Be more **target specific in developing CB activities** depending on audiences;
- 5) Connect with **existing CB programs** of other ocean-related intergovernmental processes to build upon and amplify, e.g. Ocean Teacher Global Academy (OTGA);
- 6) Utilization of **CB activities as a two-way** measure where the Regular Process **supports SPI** and also **gathers stakeholder feedback** on the Regular Process;
- 7) Increase the number of symposia focused on CB; and
- 8) Develop **quantifiable measures** to assess the CB programme **effectiveness**.

b) Evolution of processes associated with the next World Ocean Assessment

During the GOE meeting held in Tokyo (13-19 November 2024), Dr. Karen Evans, one of the Joint Coordinators, made a presentation to the GoE on some of the weaknesses and issues identified in the functioning of the GoE, first as a member and later as Joint Coordinator of the GoE. Unfortunately, the tight agenda of the meeting did not allow for the necessary time and adequate discussion of the arguments, reflections and proposals presented.

After the Japan meeting, these ideas were then presented in an initial document that was distributed and shared among the GoE members and the Secretariat. The document had two main components:

- (i) a list of identified gaps, problems and weaknesses in the functioning of the GoE, including possible solutions; and
- (ii) a proposal for a structural change in the functioning of the GoE for the next WoA.

After the GOE meeting held in Japan, two new Joint Coordinators (Dr Rafael González-Quiros of Spain and Dr Renato Quiñones of Chile) were nominated at the beginning of January 2025.

On 6 February 2025, an informal online meeting of the GoE members was convened by the Joint Coordinators with the support of the Secretariat to analyze and discuss improvements and modifications to the original document. Based on input from GoE members, the Joint Coordinators created a new document entitled "**A Proposal to Optimize the Work of the Group of Experts During the Regular Process**". In this context, on 9 April 2025 the Joint Coordinators, with the support of the secretariat, convened a second informal meeting. This informal meeting was held to facilitate a final round of discussion and finalization of the document. The document was then submitted to the GoE for final approval. After approval, the document was submitted to DOALOS as input for suggestions to improve the next Assessment.

c) Capacity-building and dissemination of Regular Process/WOA information and findings under the fourth cycle

During the GOE meeting held in Malmo, Sweden, the Secretariat presented a draft program of work for capacity-building and the dissemination of RP information and findings for the 4th cycle. The GOE discussed the proposals and endorsed each item as presented. The following broader comments were also noted:

- With respect to the regional workshops, it is important to ensure a balance of the participants from the host country and those of the participating countries.
- A public-facing component of the workshops has been shown to significantly increase the RP's and WOA's visibility and impact in regions and encourage ECOPS participation.
- It will be important to establish a link with ECOPS and clearly define the roles they could assume. For example, they could assist the Thematic Coordinators by gathering and compiling data, preparing publications and helping with communications products.
- The regional workshops and the Symposia should include dedicated sessions, possibly as side sessions, on specific topics that would benefit from more discussion and input from subject experts who might not otherwise be able to contribute to the preparation of the WOA. Examples include ITLK, science-policy practice, the blue economy, and finance.
- The UN system could contribute more to the preparation of the WOA by increasing the engagement of affiliated entities in organizing and delivering workshops and symposia. However, their roles should not extend to CAs.
- Sustainability pathways components could serve as “predictions” for communication purposes, thus enhancing the WOA's impact and visibility.

Annex

Lessons learnt on the 3rd cycle discussed by the GOE during the GOE meeting held in Tokyo.

- 1) There is a need for stronger in-person engagement with CAs;
- 2) Ensure that workshop outputs are incorporated more thoroughly into WOA IV;
- 3) Adopting a rating system for CAs to replace those who are underperforming;
- 4) There is a need for more time to be allocated to the drafting process of the WOAs;
- 5) The importance of a certain degree of continuity (40-50%) of the members of the GOE from one cycle to the next. The Regular Process is complex, and many lessons learnt are very valuable for the next cycle. Therefore, the continuity of a certain number of members from one cycle to the next is essential;
- 6) Stronger delivery on the science-policy interface is needed to support science-based policymaking without duplicating efforts with other intergovernmental ocean-related processes;
- 7) Early conclusion of Host Country Agreements (HCAs), wherever applicable.