* **DRAFT – 09/04/25**

**Under consideration by the IOC WG on SOPM**

**DRAFT IOC-WIDE STRATEGY ON SUSTAINABLE OCEAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

**(2025-2030)**

**Part I Introduction ~~and Context~~ (NO)**

**1. Context**

1. The **ocean** faces significant **pressures that are accelerating at unprecedented speed**. Habitat fragmentation and destruction, (FR) unsustainable resource use and marine pollution, particularly plastic waste, are reaching alarming levels, and climate change exacerbates threats with ocean warming, acidification and deoxygenation destabilizing marine ecosystems. These impacts drive significant changes and loss in marine biodiversity, threaten fisheries that support billions of people worldwide, and loom over critical blue carbon ecosystems.
2. Simultaneously, the **ocean economy is growing significantly**, outpacing global economic growth. This expansion is driven by key sectors like tourism, and shipping, alongside emerging industries such as marine biotechnology, aquaculture and renewable energy. Ocean-based industries are projected to contribute over USD$3 trillion annually to the global economy by 2030, with employment in these sectors growing faster than the global average. Three are an estimated 370-500 million Indigenous people worldwide[[1]](#footnote-1) (GESAMP) – people who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of ocean degradation and climate change (CR). For many, the ocean is of great social, spiritual, cultural and economic importance and the connection and need to protect and steward it for future generations deeply felt. (CA) ~~many of whom rely on the ocean their cultural practices~~.
3. **International agreements** ~~increasingly~~ that **guide global action for a sustainable ~~ocean~~** development and environmental conservation increasingly ~~and~~ rely on data and knowledge (FR). Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDG 14 sets ten targets for ocean conservation and sustainable use. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework sets out 4 goals for 2050 and 23 global targets for 2030, including the commitment to (CA) ~~protecting~~ conserving at least (Co-chairs) 30% of ~~marine and~~ terrestrial and inland water areas and of marine and coastal areas (CH) by 2030. The Agreement under the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction ~~on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction~~ (CH)(CA) (BBNJ Agreement) aims to strengthen ocean governance beyond national jurisdictions. Achieving the ~~UNFCCC~~ Paris Climate Agreement’s overarching goal ~~target~~ of pursuing efforts to limit temperature increase ~~limiting global warming~~ to 1.5°C above pre-industrial ~~times~~ levels is equally crucial for the future of ocean health and services. All these actions call for increased gathering and use of ocean data and knowledge to guide decision making at all scales. (FR)
4. The triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, combined with the ocean’s growing economic importance, and the need to include international commitments in national planning, underscores the imperative role that coordinated ocean planning and management must play. **Global momentum and practice are building for an evidence-based, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to ocean planning and management**, ensuring long-term health and productivity of marine environments and the climate, while fostering sustainable economic growth and societal well-being, with explicit consideration for equity, social justice, and the needs of marginalized communities. (CR)

**2. Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management**

1. Sustainable ocean planning and management (SOPM) is a **comprehensive, strategic and future-oriented framework** designed to guide decision-making for (FR) the overall sustainable use and conservation of a nation's entire ocean resources. By integrating ecosystem and economic considerations, societal benefits, and climate resilience, SOPM aims at preserving the (FR) long-term health of marine ecosystems and the natural services they provide while optimizing sustainable economic growth at all scales (from local to global) (FR). It further aims at incorporating adaptive management strategies to address climate change impacts and environmental variability. (CR)
2. The ocean is a complex, interconnected and dynamic system that is influenced by numerous factors simultaneously, including societies’ changing priorities. SOPM adds value to **existing ocean governance** frameworks which typically address only one specific components of managing this complexity. (FR) Marine spatial planning (MSP)[[2]](#footnote-2), for example, largely focuses on organizing human activities in time and space and minimizing conflicts. Integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) deals usually with coastal areas while fisheries or tourism management frameworks shape their respective sectors. While many efforts have been successful - and this IOC-SOPM Strategy will build on the strong foundation in MSP and ICZM (CA) - this **fragmented** ocean governance approach[[3]](#footnote-3) has ~~not delivered~~ so far failed to deliver (FR) the global ~~desired~~ ocean health ~~globally~~ required to face current environmental challenges. Moreover, (FR) the ocean’s economic and social potential tends to benefit only a few, ~~without much consideration~~ with little regard (FR) for its overall return to society as a whole, particularly in developing countries where equitable distribution of benefits is crucial. (CR)
3. SOPM expects to remedy this by serving (FR) as a **unifying 'umbrella' for ocean-related governance at all scales (FR)**, integrating existing and ~~new~~ future (FR) **management frameworks** (such as marine spatial plans, marine protected area management plans, integrated coastal, area and watershed management plans, sectoral plans such as for tourism, renewable energy, or fisheries management), **processes** (visioning monitoring  and goal-setting, stakeholder participation and consultation, evaluation, sustained financing), **policies** (such as development of a national blue economy or climate policies) and translation of commitments made through **international agreements** into a comprehensive, coherent whole, incorporating ~~traditional~~ indigenous (CA) ecological knowledge and community-based management approaches (CR). Figure 1 ~~illustrates the linkages between SOPM and existing planning and management frameworks.~~ illustrates the linkages between SOPM and various existing planning and management frameworks, highlighting examples of policies and tools that may differ from country to country. Not all countries have all of these elements, and in many cases, they are integrated and interconnected within broader governance systems (co-chairs)

*Figure 1: ~~SOPM serves as a unifying umbrella for ocean-related governance, integrating existing policy and management frameworks, processes, policies and international agreements~~*

*Figure 1: Linkages between SOPM and various existing planning and management frameworks with SOPM serving as a unifying umbrella for ocean related governance (co-chairs)*



*Credits: Marinez Scherer.*

1. **SOPM’s whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach** **allows** to integrate these various components, **making ~~the~~ ocean conservation and exploitation (FR) an integral part of a nation’s resource management** that is connected across sectors, administrative boundaries, jurisdictions and the land-sea interface, and aligned with international agreements. By bringing all aspects of the ocean and its governance together, SOPM allows to address challenges, and to act upon opportunities – thereby facilitating nations’ potential to secure an ocean that is protected, produces sustainably, and where nature and people prosper.
2. SOPM is most effective when **based on** **robust scientific and ~~traditional~~ indigenous (CA) knowledge** about the ~~protection~~ conservation (CA) needs and future dynamics of the underlying ecosystem and might hence require transboundary collaboration amongst nations, and with the United Nations (GESAMP), during both the planning and implementation phases. It also demands understanding of the connections between national SOPM processes and ocean management issues in watersheds, rivers, on land, and in areas beyond national jurisdiction. SOPM needs to be institutionalized, endorsed, financed and capacitated to ensure effective implementation, backed by strong political will and commitment from all levels of government (CR). It is best developed as a continuing and iterative process that is updated and improved through performance monitoring, evaluation, and results from new research, enabling adaptation to changing contexts.

**3. Target Audience**

1. The primary target audience for this IOC-SOPM Strategy are d**ecision-makers and professionals responsible for the planning and management of ocean areas** and their resources across IOC Member States. Planning and managing ocean areas sustainably requires a comprehensive understanding of the ocean’s physical, chemical, biological and geological systems. It is essential to use a multi-disciplinary approach that includes natural and social sciences, as well indigenous and local knowledge, and knowledge from end-users (CA), ~~bridge these natural science disciplines with socio-economic insights and local and indigenous knowledge,~~ ensuring that decisions will account for human activities, economic drivers and societal needs, and prioritize inclusion and respects of traditional knowledge (CR). Beyond understanding current conditions, decision-makers must be equipped with the ability to ~~accurately~~(NO) predict and forecast change, whether in environmental conditions, industries or society. Integrating these multiple layers of ~~scientific~~ information ~~with socio-economic insight~~ allows us to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, ~~ensuring~~ (FR) so that decisions taken today contribute to a sustainable ocean 10, 20, or even 50 years from now.
2. Most decision-makers and professionals responsible for the planning and management of ocean areas and its resources have scientific or technical training in one or several disciplines. ~~Few have been trained in all of them.~~ (CA) It is therefore a challenge to have the necessary overview. (NO) Translating complex science, data and interdisciplinary knowledge into actionable insights, facilitating the uptake of data, creating suitable knowledge products, and strengthening capacities can help address this ~~gap~~ challenge (NO). This can be done by leveraging open-source technologies and collaborative platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity building, particularly in resource-constrained settings. (CR)
3. The IOC-SOPM Strategy will also be of use to a wider audience (GESAMP). **Scientific institutions, NGOs, academia, and other stakeholders** at regional, national or multilateral levels working towards a sustainable ocean will benefit from an IOC-SOPM strategy that aims to align (FR) ocean knowledge with planning and management needs. Scientific institutions can use this strategy to guide research priorities that directly support policy and decision-making, NGOs can apply its insights to advance evidence-based policies while academia can leverage it to train the next generation of ocean professionals with interdisciplinary expertise. These are just a few examples, as the widespread sharing of easily understandable knowledge about ocean health can feed all levels of society. (FR)

**4. The Role of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)**

1. **IOC foundational mandate and legacy:** IOC’s dual mandate – to promote international cooperation in ocean research and capacity, while applying that knowledge for the improvement of management and decision-making – makes it uniquely positioned to help nations develop science- and knowledge-driven SOPM. As a trusted UN body for ocean science and capacity development, IOC builds on over 60 years of expertise in data coordination, training and technical guidance through its programmes, expert networks, and regional sub-commissions. Many of its initiatives already embody key SOPM principles, providing a strong foundation for IOC to advance its role in coordinating worldwide efforts in this regard, and thereby (FR) generate additional value for its Member States.
2. **Ocean data coordination and coastal risk preparedness:** The IOC generates authoritative knowledge on the state of the ocean and emerging challenges, particularly focusing on multiple stressors that are crucial for ecosystem-based management. Through its Tsunami Early Warning System and community preparedness work, IOC helps Member States enhance regional coordination, training, and risk management, ensuring that science-driven preparedness can be embedded into national ocean planning and management, especially at the land-sea interface. Through its Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), Ocean Data Information System (ODIS) and Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS), IOC plays a pivotal role in coordinating and collating ocean data and information, providing nations with access to real-time, historical, and predictive insights into ocean conditions, biodiversity and socio-ecological systems. Yet despite the vast amount of ocean data, still too little of it informs policy and decision-making. This is where IOC has untapped potential – to bridge the gap between science and action – and where the IOC-SOPM Strategy expects to advance Member States’ capabilities to navigate the complex realities of sustainable ocean management, helping to inform decisions.
3. **Capacity development and training in ocean planning and management (NO):** IOC supports nations in building the technical expertise needed for effective ocean management. Its leadership in MSP has helped over 126 Member States and territories develop marine (FR) spatial plans. By facilitating access to training, capacity development and exchange of good practices, particularly in developing nations, IOC strengthens the ability of decision-makers to implement sustainable and inclusive ocean strategies, ensuring active participation and empowerment of local communities in SOPM initiatives (CR). These existing global and regional networks of practitioners offer effective pathways to developcapacities on SOPM in all ocean basins. IOC’s training programmes and youth initiatives, such as the Ocean Teacher Global Academy (OTGA) and the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) network, help educate the next generation of ocean leaders and offer existing mechanisms through which IOC can support Member States in developing capacities for SOPM.
4. **Adaptability to regional contexts**: Recognizing that Member States face diverse socio-economic and environmental challenges and start from different baselines, IOC is well placed to ensure support to SOPM efforts is tailored to regional and national realities. Through its network of regional sub-commissions – IOCARIBE in the Caribbean, IOCAFRICA in Africa, WESTPAC in the Western Pacific, and IOCINDIO in the Indian Ocean – IOC can deliver localized expertise and facilitate intra- and inter-regional collaboration, as well as promoting South-South cooperation and knowledge exchange among developing countries facing similar ocean management challenges (CR). This enables IOC Member States to identify and address local and region-specific needs and opportunities while aligning with international commitments for a sustainably managed ocean.
5. **Global partnerships:** The IOC-SOPM Strategy aims to serve (FR) as a guiding framework to strengthen existing, and develop new, partnerships with key actors at all scales toward enhancing data access, expertise and innovation, and to bridging the gap between science and policy, ensuring equitable access to technology, financial resources, and capacity building opportunities for developing countries to effectively participate in global ocean initiatives (CR). Partnerships can encompass UN and non-entities, governmental and non-government agencies. (GESAMP) As the lead agency for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) (UN Ocean Decade), the IOC facilitates global ocean science and knowledge collaboration to advance ocean sustainability. A dedicated Sustainable Ocean Planning (SOP) Programme was developed in partnership with several international organizations and launched at the Barcelona UN Ocean Decade Conference in 2024. The implementation of IOC-SOPM Strategy is a key element of IOC’s contribution to the UN Ocean Decade SOP programme. At the same time, IOC can use this partnership as a vehicle to access and activate SOPM communities in leveraging implementation of its IOC-SOPM strategy.

**Part II The Strategy (NO)**

**1. Vision and Mission**

1. To assist Member States in their efforts to develop SOPM in a rapidly changing context, the vision of the IOC-SOPM Strategy is: (NO)

***“IOC Member States equipped to implement knowledge-based SOPM”***

1. The vision will be translated into reality through ~~the implementation of~~ the following **mission**: (NO)

***“Support decision-makers in implementing SOPM by facilitating the uptake of data, advancing knowledge products and strengthening capacities, by 2030”***

The IOC-SOPM Strategy expects to serve (FR) as a guiding and harmonizing framework for IOC’s programmes and regional sub-commissions, leveraging their expertise in ocean research, services, knowledge, training and capacity development to achieve the vision. By making full use of the IOC value chain to bridge the gap between science and decision-making, and by combining IOC’s strengths, collective capacities and partnership potential through the UN Ocean Decade and beyond,

1. The IOC-SOPM Strategy highlights IOC efforts to fulfill its dual mandate in ~~is placed in~~ the climate-ocean-biodiversity nexus and is grounded in an ecosystem-based approach that considers the functioning of the marine ecosystem (CH) as a whole (FR), which might not necessarily be aligned with existing administrative and political boundaries. It also demands integrating socio-economic considerations and livelihood dependencies of coastal communities into ecosystem-based management approaches (CR). ~~The IOC-SOPM Strategy provides a means to identify where, when and at what spatio-temporal scale, management and planning actions are appropriate, thereby guiding Member States in matching the resulting SOPM objectives in their national waters.~~ (CA)
2. The implementation of the IOC-SOPM Strategy’s mission will uphold and further strengthen the purpose of the IOC, with science, knowledge (CA) and research serving as the foundation upon which policy and decision-making processes of Member States are built. The IOC-SOPM Strategy sets out four main strategic objectives which will guide actions to achieve five expected outcomes ~~that will be obtained through a set of actions and that are guided by four strategic objectives.~~ (FR)

**2. Strategic Objectives**

1. Four strategic objectives will guide the implementation of the IOC-SOPM Strategy: ~~will be implemented through a series of actions (detailed in the separate Implementation Plan) that are guided by these the following (FR) four strategic objectives: (NO)~~
2. **Enhance integration and mainstreaming of SOPM approaches**

The IOC-SOPM strategy ~~will~~ expects to (NO) build on the strong foundation in MSP and ICAM that is already successful in various Member States, by leveraging existing frameworks, exchanging good practices, mainstreaming scientific findings relevant to SOPM, and delivering technical guidance across ecological and socio-economic dimensions. By facilitating knowledge exchange and adaptation to diverse national and regional contexts, the IOC-SOPM Strategy ~~will~~ seeks to (NO) help Member States ensure their SOPM approaches are science-based, inclusive of Indigenous and local knowledge, equitable and adaptable to evolving socio-economic priorities at all scales (FR).

1. **Increase visibility and facilitate use of improved observations, data and knowledge**

While hundreds of millions of data points are collected worldwide each year (FR), including through IOC’s networks and programs like GOOS and OBIS, and numerous local and Indigenous communities hold invaluable knowledge about the ocean, only a fraction is transformed into actionable insights suitable to decision-makers. By translating this wealth of data and knowledge into known and accessible information, decision-support tools and products, and by promoting their regular update and use, SOPM can be more effectively guided by ~~scientific, local and indigenous~~ evidence-based knowledge on the ocean’s state and change. (FR)

1. **Strengthen cross-sectoral and transboundary coordination and collaboration**

Strengthening cross-sectoral and transboundary collaboration is essential for effective SOPM, because functional links between (FR) as marine ~~ecosystems~~ habitats and communities ~~frequently function~~ often span (FR) across ~~wider~~ vast (FR) ocean basins, transcend administrative and political boundaries and jurisdictions, including at the land-sea interface, or ~~extent i~~n~~to~~ (FR) areas beyond national jurisdiction where different governance arrangements pertain. Therefore, (FR) an ecosystem-based approach frequently requires coordinated action among sectors and nations to address shared challenges or opportunities. Many economic activities – such as maritime transportation, renewable energy projects or fisheries – also operate across national boundaries, making cooperation critical when balancing ocean health with socio-economic development. Such cooperation requires the need to collaborate across nations, but also with UN and non-UN entities. (GESAMP)

1. **Expand capacity development**

Expanding capacity development is critical to ensure that decision-makers across IOC Member States – regardless of their resources, expertise or socio-economic context – are adequately equipped to develop knowledge-based SOPM. Amongst others, decision-makers need access to the latest scientific data and knowledge, good practices, and innovative tools to navigate the complexities of a sustainably managed global (FR) ocean. ~~This can be delivered by strengthening training programs, knowledge sharing platforms, and educational initiatives. Engaging Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) helps educate the next generation of ocean leaders and can secure long-term continuity in SOPM expertise across Member States.~~ (suggestion to move to IP) (FR)

**3. Expected Outcomes**

1. By implementing its mission, the IOC-SOPM Strategy expects to deliver five outcomes:
2. **Strengthened ocean planning and management policy approaches underpinned by science-based tools and evidence**

The IOC-SOPM Strategy expects to enhance the sustainability and equitability of (FR) SOPM policies at national levels (CA) worldwide (FR) by leveraging IOC’s scientific expertise and capacity development, and by promoting knowledge and good practice (FR) exchange across Member States. By integrating insights and emerging findings and information from IOC programmes and relevant partners, and coordinating the improvement of ocean data and knowledge coverage and format worldwide, (FR) the strategy will facilitate evidence-based ~~IOC Member States’ efforts to make its~~ decision-making among IOC Member States for a sustainable ocean ~~evidence-based~~ (CA). ~~The IOC-SOPM Strategy will build on existing SOPM guidance, such as those developed by the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy and inform future reviews of existing legislation where needed~~. (FR)

1. **Enhanced integration of ocean observation, data and knowledge in decision-making**

The IOC-SOPM Strategy seeks to support (NO) the enhanced integration of ocean observations, data and relevant scientific findings as well as local and indigenous (FR) knowledge into decision-making by facilitating exchange and coordination across the ocean data and monitoring (FR) and ocean management communities, including with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and (FR) the private sector. Leveraging the collective data infrastructure developed and used (FR) by IOC programmes, such as ~~the~~ ODIS and OBIS (FR), and exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for AI-driven predictive modelling and forecasting, ~~aims at~~ will (FR) further enhance ~~ing~~ the relevance and utility of ocean data in policy and management processes. The transformation of complex ocean (FR) data into information that is useful and relevant to decision-makers is central in this endeavor. It will further promote the visibility and uptake of data and information into SOPM. ~~Integration of traditional (CA) knowledge is key and complementary to science-based and AI-processed data and information.~~(FR)

1. **Elevated coherence and consistency across sectors, boundaries and the land-sea interface**

Recognizing the interconnected nature of ~~ocean~~ habitats and bioresources across ocean basins and depths, and the global scale of many (FR) ocean challenges, the IOC-SOPM Strategy ~~will~~ expects to (NO) promote inclusive approaches to cross-sectoral and transboundary collaboration at sea, as well as the land-sea interface. Building on the collaborative and holistic (FR) foundations of existing IOC programmes, and global initiatives where the IOC has a coordinating role such as under the UN Ocean Decade, the IOC-SOPM Strategy ~~will~~ expects to (NO) foster partnerships with diverse stakeholder communities (FR), including sectors such as energy, tourism, shipping and fisheries. Dialogue will be facilitated in view of identifying synergies, trade-offs, and win-win solutions in support of SOPM. A key focus will be on improved consideration and management of cumulative impacts that have effects across boundaries and jurisdictions.

1. **Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders**

The IOC-SOPM Strategy seeks to intensify capacity development efforts across all aspects of SOPM, from the gathering of relevant data and knowledge to their application for decision-making (FR). Priorities include developing and enhancing access to guidance and knowledge products, strengthening global and regional mechanisms (such as Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans) (CA), promoting the development of ocean research policies, increasing visibility and awareness, and boosting sustained resource mobilization. This will ~~outcome expects to~~ (FR) empower decision-makers, policymakers, right-holders, and stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective SOPM.

1. **Improved integration of climate change adaptation, mitigation and coastal resilience, and biodiversity conservation**

In response to the urgent need to address climate change impacts and marine biodiversity loss, the IOC-SOPM Strategy seeks to assist Member States in their efforts to integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as resilience and ecosystem restoration, in SOPM. This will involve coordinating with IOC's climate, biodiversity and coastal hazard-related initiatives to develop tools and guidelines that identify and incorporate resilience measures, generate scientific knowledge on the role of ocean ecosystems in climate issues, such as those related to blue carbon habitats and ecosystem services. The integration of biodiversity conservation and climate measures in SOPM will see development of guidance on biodiversity- and climate-inclusive approaches and its application.

**PART III Implementation, Evaluation of Progress and Adaptation**

1. The IOC-SOPM Strategy’s vision, mission, strategic objectives and expected outcomes will be ~~delivered~~ achieved (FR) through a biennial Implementation Plan. The initial 2025-2027 Implementation Plan details the actions, deliverables, timeframes, leading/cooperating partners, and budget requirements for the IOC-SOPM Strategy’s first biennium (see document “Implementation Plan”). The Plan will be implemented jointly with the different IOC programmes and regional sub-commissions, in close collaboration with the IOC Member States, and with the support of the UN Decade SOP Programme, and relevant IOC regional and international partners (FR). Implementation of the actions will be financed through a combination of existing IOC programme funding and new resources to be raised from donors both in the context of the UN Decade SOP Programme and beyond.
2. The IOC-SOPM Working Group will evaluate the IOC-SOPM Strategy’s progress on a bi-annual basis. The IOC-SOPM Working Group will meet twice a year to monitor the ~~and update~~ implementation of the plan - and update as needed (FR) - to address specific programme-related matters regarding SOPM, as well as emerging issues and needs among Member States and relevant regional and international organizations. The co-chairs of the IOC-SOPM Working Group~~, through its co-chairs,~~ (FR) will report to the IOC Member States through a standing ~~agenda~~ item on the agenda (FR) at the IOC General Assembly sessions. The Working Group meetings, and the guidance from Member States received at the IOC General Assembly, will ensure continuous oversight and refinement of the IOC-SOPM Strategy and its ~~(future)~~ successiveImplementation Plan~~(s)~~s (FR), thereby fostering its effectiveness and adaptability to evolving challenges and opportunities.
1. UNESCO : https://www.unesco.org/en/indigenous-peoples [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. IOC’s refers to MSP as a public process of analyzing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives: <https://www.mspglobal2030.org/> (CA) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fragmented governance of our one global ocean: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333342057_Fragmented_Governance_of_Our_One_Global_Ocean> (GESAMP) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)