

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**  
(of UNESCO)

**INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

**INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM FOR OCEAN SUSTAINABILITY (IPOS)  
AND OPTIONS FOR FUTURE ROLE OF IOC**

Summary. This document presents a summary of the current concept for the International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), traces the history of engagement by the IOC Secretariat in its development and the potential link to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. It concludes with an analyses of different options for future engagement by IOC in IPOS, including resource implications.

A *Strategic overview towards IPOS* prepared by the Towards IPOS Consortium complements this information document (see [IOC/A-33/48.Inf.1](#)).

## 1. Summary of IPOS Concept

The concept of an International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS) was first proposed in 2022 by a small group of French research institutions. In 2024, the 'Towards IPOS' consortium was established with funding from the European Commission to further develop the IPOS concept including through consultations with Member States, scientific institutions, civil society, industry, and other partners. The current concept of IPOS resulting from that work is documented in the '[Towards IPOS Strategic Overview](#)'. Key elements of the concept related to operations, governance and budget as outlined in that document are summarized below.

**IPOS Scope and Operations:** IPOS is proposed as a global demand driven platform linking ocean knowledge, policy and society. IPOS has been developed to work at national and regional scales and will focus on supporting Member States to accelerate the fulfillment of their commitments under regional or global policy frameworks and agreements. To achieve this, IPOS has been developed to offer three types of demand-driven services that are responsive to the different timelines of decision makers.

- (i) **Action Requests** will deliver detailed knowledge synthesis and policy options in response to formal requests from Member States or groups of Member States. Ad-hoc expert working groups will be formed and work over a period of up to 12 months to respond to Action Requests and will draw from global assessment processes, peer reviewed literature, as well as Indigenous and local knowledge.
- (ii) **Rapid Responses** will target urgent requests for knowledge from Member States or groups of Member States and will be completed over a period of several weeks combining expert knowledge with an IPOS curated Artificial Intelligence tool.
- (iii) **Ocean Catalyst:** will convene hybrid working groups from academia, private sector, civil society, and policy makers to provide a space for dynamic exchange on ocean policy solutions the results of which will be documented in annual global and regional IPOS Insights Reports.

**IPOS Governance:** The current proposal for IPOS governance will be based on a decentralized and multi-stakeholder model. A geographically dispersed **Secretariat** with a central hub and up to five regional nodes will coordinate IPOS operations. A **Steering Committee** will provide oversight of operations and strategy, while **Strategic Partners** will have the opportunity to provide input to operations and strategy with a focus on enhancing complementarity and synergies with other initiatives and processes. A **Knowledge Committee** will assist with the technical and scientific aspects of IPOS services, while a **Global Knowledge Network** will provide a pool of IPOS experts and knowledge holders.

**IPOS Budget:** It is proposed to run a two-year test phase of IPOS to further refine the operational aspects of the concept and confirm the demand for the different types of services. Current modelling indicates a total budget of USD 2.4 million to run the two-year test phase of IPOS (i.e. USD 1.2 million / year). During this period, the objective is to test IPOS services in real life with volunteering member States, via two Action Requests, eight Rapid Responses and one Ocean Catalyst. 57% of this budget will be allocated to personnel costs, split between IPOS central office and Regional Nodes. The remaining costs include operational costs (e.g., experts compensation, events, translation), representing 15% of total budget, overheads (rent, equipment, audit, HR and legal), representing 17% of total budget, and finally investments, mainly into the bespoke IPOS AI tool development, representing 10% of total budget.

After this test phase, and only if the services and way of working of IPOS were not significantly changed, the total budget is expected to scale to around USD 10 million per year as IPOS becomes fully operational and expands globally.

## **2. IOC Secretariat Involvement in Towards IPOS Concept & Links to UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development**

Given the potentially strong alignment between the goals of IPOS and the mandate of the IOC, the Secretariat has been engaging in informal discussions with the Towards IPOS consortium since late 2024 to provide advice and suggestions on the concept. Engagement in the process has been carried out with the aim of avoiding duplication and enhancing synergies with the work of IOC, including via the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, in relation to the science-policy-society interface, and providing additional context and grounding for the development of a more robust concept. The IOC Secretariat has maintained a position that IPOS is an evolving concept and that the current proposal, including the proposed services and governance arrangements, presented by the 'Towards IPOS' consortium should continue to be tested and refined to optimize impact, efficiency, and sustainability.

The Ocean Decade has a strong focus on ensuring science – policy – society connections and following the outcomes of the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference and the findings of the Mid-Term Evaluation the second half of implementation of the Decade will have an increased focus on the use and uptake of science and knowledge generated by Decade Actions.

To support the continued evolution of IPOS, the IOC Secretariat has also provided advice to the Towards IPOS consortium on options to use the Ocean Decade framework as a means of running a test phase for the IPOS concept. This test phase would not aim for full operationalization of IPOS but would focus on testing the functionality of its core services.

Discussions between the Secretariat and the Towards IPOS consortium led to the presentation of a proposed IPOS Decade Collaborative Centre (led by the Ocean Sustainability Foundation, a lead partner in the Towards IPOS consortium) to the Decade Advisory Board in March 2025 for its advice and recommendations.

The Board expressed support for the goals of IPOS to strengthen the science policy interface and noted the alignment between these goals and the mandate of the IOC and the Ocean Decade. However, it highlighted two major issues that required further exploration before recommending endorsement as a DCC. The first was the need to avoid pre-empting any review of IPOS by Member States as envisaged in the March 2025 version of the draft political declaration that was being negotiated in advance of the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference and that contained a subsequently deleted reference to Member State review of the feasibility of IPOS. In the adopted political declaration of the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference, Member States take note of the proposed IPOS. The second issue was the need to ensure that the initiative is fully funded up front, including the funding necessary for DCU coordination and engagement. According to the financial projections provided by the proponents of the IPOS initiative, resources secured and identified would cover up to 75% (TBC) of the operational costs of the DCC, and further contributions are being mobilized, which would essentially reduce potential risks and make the DCC viable to deliver during the test phase.

The Board strongly encouraged continued dialogue with the DCU and IOC on the abovementioned issues, as well as several technical issues, and expressed its support for further efforts in resource mobilisation.

## **3. Future Options for IOC Engagement**

The table below provides a comparative analysis undertaken by the Secretariat of different options for IOC engagement in future stages of IPOS, including resource implications. Under any of the options presented below the resource implications for IOC would need to be fully funded on extrabudgetary sources.

	<b>Description &amp; Comparative Analysis</b>	<b>Resource Implications for IOC</b>
Option 1 – Ocean Decade Collaborative Centre (DCC) independent of IOC (i.e. proposal as presented to the Decade Advisory Board in March 2025)	<p>Establishment of an independent DCC in the framework of the Ocean Decade led by the Ocean Sustainability Foundation (OSF). DCCs are mechanisms within the Decade framework that are hosted by a lead partner organization, and which operate as decentralized coordination and operational hubs to advance defined thematic and geographic priorities of the Decade.</p> <p>The DCC would work across the Decade ecosystem and with external partners to effectuate the planned IPOS activities. The DCC could be established for the remainder of the Decade or a shorter period to allow for a test phase.</p> <p>The advantages of this option include the ability to leverage the more agile framework of the Ocean Decade to test different aspects of IPOS. It would also provide an opportunity to explore how IPOS could enhance science-policy aspects of the Ocean Decade. The primary disadvantage is that this option would not allow for significant influence by IOC on the future evolution of IPOS to ensure its strong alignment with IOC's mandate and thus creates a risk of a establishment of a parallel and duplicative structure. Under this option, the lack of a formal role for IOC in the initiative would decrease possibilities to cover any staff time for engagement with the DCC, and could hinder fundraising for the initiative overall given the informal indications from some donors of their preference for formal IOC engagement.</p>	<p>Resource implications in terms of programmatic staff are likely to be limited as the DCC would be coordinated as part of the existing DCC/DCO network. Some ongoing engagement would be likely in refining and evaluating the concept during the test phase.</p> <p>Administrative staff resource implications could arise if partners wish to channel funds through IOC to the DCC and would need to be budgeted for through external contributions</p>
Option 2 – Ocean Decade Collaborative Centre with IOC co-lead	<p>This option is similar to the option above but would position IOC as a co-lead of the DCC with OSF. This option would have the same advantages as for Option 1 but would allow for a degree of formalised influence and engagement by IOC to assist in ensuring alignment of the IPOS concept with IOC's mandate and the work of the Ocean Decade on science-policy. A timebound DCC would allow for a fixed period of testing, refinement culminating in a technical and financial evaluation of feasibility of IPOS.</p>	<p>Under this option, it is envisaged that staff resources would be divided between IOC and the other co-lead(s). Key programmatic and administrative staff would be IOC positions (likely project appointments) to be fully funded through extra-budgetary resources, while support positions would sit within DCC co-lead organizations. A proportion of funding e.g. from Member States or intergovernmental organizations could be managed by IOC, most likely either as FIT projects or</p>

	<p>This option would also provide an opportunity for the use of some funds raised for IPOS to cover required IOC staff engagement in the initiative.</p>	<p>through contributions to the Special Account.</p>
<p>Option 3 – Ocean Decade Coordination Office (DCO) with IOC as lead</p>	<p>Decade Coordination Offices (DCOs) are similar in function and mandate to DCCs but are hosted by UN agencies.</p> <p>Under this option, IOC would take the lead in establishing and operating a DCO for a test phase of IPOS thus ensuring full engagement and direction of the evolution of the initiative. This option would allow for optimal alignment of IPOS with IOC and Ocean Decade priorities and allow detailed exploration and testing of the ways in which IPOS could eventually be embedded within the IOC on a more permanent basis, including consideration of governance, financial and technical aspects. Elements of the existing Decade governance structure (e.g. the Decade Advisory Board) could be strongly engaged in the process to provide advice on strategic alignment and the eventual longer-term options for IPOS.</p> <p>Specifically, this option would allow detailed analyses of which current or planned mandated IOC activities could fit within IPOS in the long-term and the appropriate IOC governance mechanism to be established.</p> <p>Finally, this option could also accelerate fundraising efforts for IPOS given that certain donors have informally indicated a preference to channel funds through IOC for IPOS activities.</p>	<p>Under this option, all programmatic and administrative staff would be IOC staff. All funding would be received and managed by IOC most likely either as FIT projects or through contributions to the Special Account.</p>
<p>Option 4 – Integration as new IOC programme / initiative</p>	<p>This option would involve the establishment of IPOS as a new programme of work within IOC. While in theory this would allow full and long-term alignment of IPOS with IOC's science-policy mandate it is considered that this option is premature for both technical and financial reasons. The concept of IPOS as it currently stands has not been fully tested, and financial sustainability and funding modalities beyond an initial test period are yet to be fully analysed and defined.</p>	<p>Under this option, all programmatic and administrative staff would be IOC staff. All funding would be received and managed by IOC most likely either as FIT projects or through contributions to the Special Account. An IOC governance mechanism would need to be defined to provide oversight to the implementation phase.</p>

#### **4. Conclusion**

The IOC Secretariat considers that Option 3 presented above is worthy of consideration by Member States at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the IOC Assembly. This option would allow IOC to be engaged and resourced to lead a two-year test phase of IPOS from 2025 – 2027 and steer the process of refining and testing the initiative, thus optimizing its capacity to leverage and contribute to both IOC programmatic work and the Ocean Decade. Reporting on progress of the test phase could be presented to the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC Executive Council in June 2026. Full funding for IOC involvement in the test phase would be a pre-requisite for advancing with this approach.

At the end of the test phase, an evaluation of the technical and financial feasibility of IPOS could be presented to the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC Assembly in June 2027 for a discussion by Member States on the future evolution of the initiative, including its eventual integration within IOC as a new programme or work (i.e. an evolution to Option 4 presented above) that incorporates where relevant existing or planned mandated activities including definition of mechanisms to ensure robust governance and sustainable financing.