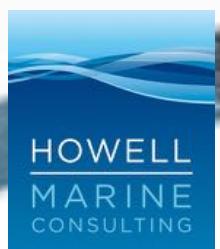


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Can Ocean-Climate ambitions be realised within the current international framework?

HMC | Howell Marine Consulting



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1. Executive Summary

There is an urgent need to better recognise and prioritise the critical role of the ocean in the context of climate change impacts and solutions on the international stage. Despite the strong and growing body of scientific evidence highlighting the critical need for action, there is still work to be done to set a clear path on how to strengthen ocean-climate action within the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), and other multilateral frameworks.

Gaps in existing international legislation must be addressed to realise ocean-climate ambition and the potential of ocean-based solutions to contribute to climate-resilient pathways and the Paris Agreement goals. Although progress is being made to enhance consideration of the ocean across UN agendas, the existing legislative landscape is fragmented and complex, as are the routes by which nations and organisations access cross-cutting support, such as finance, capacity building and technology, required to achieve a fair, equitable and inclusive future for all. Whilst systemic change can be slow, simplifying and centralising access to support and information, as well as streamlining obligations across agendas, would reduce the administrative burden on nations, particularly those with limited resources that are often the most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

COP26 offers a pivotal opportunity to capitalise on the current momentum to drive ocean-climate action and to realise the multiple benefits offered by ocean-based solutions to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity. It is vital that the international ocean-climate community leverage their collective political and diplomatic weight by coalescing around shared ocean-climate ambitions, as well as catalysing progress via international collaboration, national commitments and leadership.

2. Introduction

The ocean is integral to the regulation of our climate and has absorbed over 90% of excess atmospheric heat and more than a quarter of CO₂ emissions caused by human activities, acting as a critical buffer to climate change.¹ However, due to this critical role, the ocean is warming and becoming more acidic and in turn global mean sea levels are rising, oxygen levels in the ocean are decreasing, and there is an increase in extreme weather events. As a result, the ocean's ability to provide vital ecosystem services, such as food security, livelihoods, coastal protection, and continuing climate regulation and carbon sequestration, is being compromised.

In 2019, the findings of the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC)² highlighted the severe and wide-ranging consequences of climate change on the ocean and cryosphere. It emphasised the imperative need for urgent, coordinated and ambitious progress toward long-term greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions if the world is to minimise irreversible climate change impacts on ocean ecosystems and processes.

There is little doubt that the single most important action that can be taken on a global scale to halt the impacts of climate change on the ocean is rapid, sustained, economy-wide GHG reductions. However, there is growing recognition of the significant role the ocean can play in providing both mitigation and adaptation solutions to the current climate emergency. There has been increasing advocacy by the ocean-climate community (i.e., state and non-state actors), who are strongly engaged in efforts to drive ambition for ocean action in relation to climate change. In doing so they aim to shift the focus of the ocean-climate narrative and to progress beyond the perspective of the ocean as merely a victim of the far-reaching consequences of climate, to one that emphasises the very real potential of ocean-based solutions to climate change to provide adaptation and mitigation wins.

It is critical that international frameworks are fit for purpose to drive ocean-climate ambition and enable implementation of ocean-based solutions to climate change. To do this, ocean-climate considerations must be sufficiently represented and integrated within broader climate action.

1. IPCC, 2019: IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. Pörtner, H.O., Roberts, D.C., Masson-Delmotte, V., Zhai, P., Tignor, M., Poloczanska, E., Mintenbeck, K., Alegria, A., Nicolai, M., Okem, A., Petzold, J., Rama, B., Weyer, N.M. (eds.). In press
2. IPCC SROCC, 2019

Whilst the legislative, governance and policy interventions required to facilitate and regulate the implementation of ocean-based climate actions are enacted at a national and/or regional level (e.g., marine planning, protected areas, fisheries management, coastal development), the over-arching international framework must:

- **Provide consistent evidence-based imperatives, measures and guidelines to promote a coherent and collaborative international response toward realising ocean-climate ambition**
- **Create an enabling framework (including provision of the means of implementation) needed to equitably and sustainably facilitate transposition of international commitments to national governance and support implementation**
- **Be inclusive and representative, taking a ‘whole of society’ approach**

The strength of scientific evidence on the role of the ocean as both a buffer to climate change and as a victim of the impacts of climate change, and the vast potential it offers for mitigation and adaptation solutions, provides a compelling narrative on the need for the ocean’s role to be fully considered in an ambitious and urgent response to the climate emergency. To fully leverage that narrative, and to realise that potential as part of efforts to meet the Paris Agreement goals, requires consistent representation and articulation of ocean-climate considerations across the complex architecture of the UNFCCC, and prioritisation of where such efforts can be applied most effectively.

In the run up to the UN Climate Change Conference in the UK (COP26) this paper set outs to:

- **Identify the key priorities for ocean-climate ambition and action identified in international discussions and literature**
- **Explore where these key priorities are captured under the UNFCCC and the wider UN architecture**
- **Consider the available support for implementation to ensure that actions are fair, equitable, inclusive, representative and leave no-one behind**
- **Present key opportunities to advance ocean-climate action at the regional and national level**

3. Ocean under the UNFCCC

Consideration of the ocean within international climate negotiations has significantly increased in recent years. COP25 in 2019, known as the ‘the Blue COP’ due to its focus on the ocean, requested that the Chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) convene a dialogue on ‘the ocean and climate change to consider how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation in this context’. The request was largely due to considerable engagement and advocacy by the informal ‘Friends of Ocean and Climate’ group, which was initiated under the COP23 Ocean Pathway to encourage discussion between interested Parties and non-state actors towards increasing the role of the ocean under the UNFCCC. The Dialogue took place virtually in December 2020 and the SBSTA Chair published a summary note synthesizing the discussions, which highlighted the range of opportunities identified by participants to strengthen action for ocean-climate across the UNFCCC and other UN frameworks.³

The calls to improve the integration of ocean considerations and strengthen action on ocean-based solutions under the UNFCCC sits within a wider landscape of increasing international ocean ambition and a growing recognition of the intrinsic, yet often complex, links between the ocean, climate change and biodiversity agendas. Ocean action is also central to the potential synergies and multiple benefits that can be achieved by taking coherent action to address climate change and biodiversity loss together.

Key international ocean-related initiatives include, inter alia:

- **Calls for the inclusion of a ‘30by30’ target of 30% of the global ocean in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures (OECM) by 2030 to be included in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**
- **The on-going negotiations under UNCLOS towards a legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine areas biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)**
- **The Transformations commitments of the High-Level Panel for Sustainable Ocean Economies (HLP)**

4. Priorities for Ocean-Climate ambition

Effective advocacy that can actually drive progress on the ambition for ocean-climate action requires high-level agreement on shared priorities. This agreement in turn then provides a clarity of message that can achieve cut-through for the ocean when competing with the multitude of other climate priorities. The priorities within the UNFCCC Ocean-Climate Dialogue, as well as those of other international alliances (e.g., HLP, High-Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, Because the Ocean), provide an insight into the ambitions of the ocean-climate community. Once synthesized, this shows the broad international ambition and priorities for driving action on ocean-based solutions for mitigation and adaptation (Figure 1).

KEY PRIORITIES FOR OCEAN-CLIMATE ACTION



Figure 1 - Overview of the key ocean-based mitigation and adaptation solutions that underpin ocean-climate ambition. The lightest blue boxes indicate contributing factors (or in the case of CCS, potential contribution) that are out of scope of this paper.

It is important to recognise that, whilst there may be broad, high-level consensus on ambition for ocean-climate action, **specific prioritisation, approaches and needs are often highly localised and nuanced according to national and regional contexts.**

Whilst it is vital that national and regional interests are advocated and recognised at an international level there is a risk, due to a lack of an agreed ocean-climate narrative across international processes, that **high-level ocean-climate ambitions may not be effectively and consistently communicated by the ocean-climate community**. The strength and weight in speaking with one voice could be vital in catalysing high-level action and integration of ocean considerations into the wider climate landscape.

5. Ocean-Climate Action under the UN

Actions are needed to support adaptation and resilience in important ocean ecosystems, but the ocean also has a significant role to play in mitigation of climate change and the development of net-zero pathways. The international framework for climate change action and negotiation has an important role to play in driving forward such action, but this often takes a long time. International frameworks are generally reactive, in that they are borne out of a need for a coordinated international response to a global challenge, for example the UNFCCC arose in response to growing concern over the impacts of climate change to the environment and society.

As a result, these frameworks often evolve in issue-based silos, which can lead to fragmented approaches and complex systems. These systems do not help realise the linkages and synergies across ocean-relevant agendas in an efficient and accessible way. Indeed, the information note published by the UNFCCC SBSTA Chair ahead of the Ocean-Climate Dialogue in 2020⁵, details well over 30 different UN bodies, processes, funds and programmes that support action on ocean-climate, both within the UNFCCC and the wider UN architecture.

To effectively engage with this number of processes, and deliver on the respective obligations, creates a significant, and in some cases potentially unfeasible, demand on nation states' resource, in addition to the expertise, technology, information and financing needed. This situation is significantly exacerbated in the developing world, where action often has the largest impact.



5.1 Mitigation

If we are to minimise further irreversible climate change impacts on the ocean, the global priority must be rapid, sustained GhG emissions reductions. There are a number of ocean-based interventions that can contribute to these long-term, net-zero pathways. A report from the HLP⁶ found that five ocean-based mitigation actions, that are also noted in the Ocean-Climate Dialogue Summary Report⁷ and a report by Because the Ocean⁸ among others, could reduce the emissions gap necessary for a 1.5°C pathway by up to 21%:

- **Ocean-based renewable energy**
- **Ocean-based transport**
- **Protection and restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems, in particular blue carbon habitats**
- **Fisheries and aquaculture, including dietary shifts towards low-carbon ocean-based protein**
- **Carbon capture & sequestration (CCS) in the seabed**

Under the **UNFCCC**, Parties can include ocean-based mitigation measures and targets in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Information on GhG emissions is reported via national GhG inventories under the Convention and reporting requirements under the enhanced transparency framework of the Paris Agreement, including emissions from international bunker fuels⁹ (maritime shipping) and fishing vessels, and the sequestration or release of emissions from mangroves, seagrass and saltmarsh (often referred to as ‘blue carbon’).

The **International Maritime Organisation (IMO)** adopted its Initial Strategy on Reduction of GhG Emissions from Ships in 2018, which sets an ambition ‘to peak GHG emissions from international shipping as soon as possible and to reduce the total annual GhG emissions by at least 50% by 2050 compared to 2008 whilst pursuing efforts towards phasing them out’. Mandatory measures have been introduced to accelerate GhG emission reductions in ships under the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), via the Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI) for new ships, and the Ship Energy Efficiency Management Plan (SEEMP).

The **Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** has published guidance on measures that can be taken to reduce emissions from fisheries and aquaculture, including their technical papers Impacts of Climate Change on Fisheries and Aquaculture (2018)¹⁰ and Quantifying and Mitigating Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Global Aquaculture (2019).¹¹

6. Hoegh-Guldberg, O., et al. 2019. “The Ocean as a Solution to Climate Change: Five Opportunities for Action.” Report. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available online at <http://www.oceanpanel.org/climate>

7. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SBSTA_Ocean_Dialogue_SummaryReport.pdf

8. https://www.becauseocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Ocean_for_Climate_Because_the_Ocean.pdf

9. Whilst international bunker fuels can be included in GhG inventories, they are not included in national totals and, as a result, they are not subject to the limitation and reduction commitments of Annex I Parties under the Convention.

10. FAO, 2018. Impacts of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture. Barange, M., Bahri, T., Beveridge, M.C.M., Cochrane, K.L., Funge-Smith, S., and Poulaert, F. (eds.). FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper 627, Rome. 628 pp.

11. FAO, 2019. Quantifying and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions from global aquaculture. MacLeod, M., Hasan, M.R., Robb, D.H.F. & Mamun-Ur-Rashid, M. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 626. Rome.

5.2 Adaptation & resilience

Contributions to the UNFCCC Ocean-Climate Dialogue have shown there is a wealth of opportunity to deliver ocean-based actions vital for climate adaptation and resilience as part of wider long-term sustainable pathways to net-zero. These include marine and coastal nature-based solutions, which offer cost-effective, low-regret measures with multiple-benefits that contribute not only to climate action but also to the biodiversity agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

MPAs and OECMs such as sustainable, climate-resilient fisheries and aquaculture management and habitat restoration, can deliver invaluable contributions to the provision of:

- **Food and water security**
- **Sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction**
- **Coastal protection from erosion, flooding and extreme weather events**
- **The reduction of biodiversity loss**

Alleviating other anthropogenic pressures, such as over-exploitation, pollution and habitat destruction, supports ocean health and resilience, making the ocean better able to adapt to climate-driven changes. Disaster and risk reduction measures such as ocean-based early warning systems and consistent ocean monitoring, or financial solutions like parametric insurance, can help nations to prepare for and recover from climate shocks, improving socio-economic resilience. There are also potential mitigation benefits when protection and restoration activities effectively support blue carbon habitats.

Under the [UNFCCC](#), Parties can include ocean-based adaptation ambitions in their NDCs, but the key mechanism is the development of National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) which enable Parties to identify their medium- and long-term adaptation needs, as well as define the implementation strategies to address them.

The [Nairobi Work Programme \(NWP\)](#) on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change was established to close knowledge gaps and scale up climate change adaptation action, and includes a work area on the ocean, coastal areas and ecosystems. The NWP knowledge-to-action approach has seen the creation of an expert group on the ocean under the NWP, the delivery of NWP 13th Focal Point Forum at COP25 and the publication of a Policy Brief on the Ocean (2020).¹²

Work to strengthen international collaboration and expertise towards the reduction of loss and damage from climate impacts, including extreme weather and slow onset events, is delivered under the [Warsaw International Mechanism \(WIM\)](#) for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts.

Another Rio Convention, the [CBD](#), offers perhaps the most significant cross-cutting synergies and potential co-benefits with ocean-climate ambition, particularly given the potential of nature-based solutions for adaptation, ocean resilience, and mitigation via the protection of blue carbon habitats. Under the CBD, Parties must submit National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and report on implementation and effectiveness of measures. At a regional level, the [UNEP Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans](#) provide supra-national agreements to address a broad spectrum of ocean challenges through which climate change related adaptation can be considered. It is vital that climate considerations are mainstreamed through these key delivery mechanisms.

12. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NWP%20policy%20brief%20on%20the%20ocean.pdf>

For fisheries and aquaculture, alongside the existing **Agreement on Port State Measures** under the **FAO** to tackle illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** negotiations are seeking to agree a framework to eliminate fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overexploitation and enable IUU. For international fisheries, it largely falls to the **Regional Fisheries Management Organisations** (RFMOs) to define measures or targets to enhance climate action for both mitigation and adaptation at a supranational level.

The **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030**, coordinated by the **UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction** (UNDRR), sets out targets and priorities for action to prevent new disaster risks and reduce existing risks, as well as promoting the mainstreaming of disaster risk planning and management at a national level.

5.3 Challenges

The framework for developing and delivering ocean climate action is **fragmented with no central co-ordinating focal point for the ocean** - whilst many ocean-climate considerations are represented across this fragmented landscape, there remain **gaps in the existing legislative frameworks that must be addressed if clear and coherent measures are to be developed** that can motivate and mobilise action on the key ocean-based solutions to climate change.

There is a comprehensive range of technical guidance available to support Parties to fulfil their obligations and to help realise synergies across multiple agendas, **but access to these resources is as fragmented and complex as the legislative architecture itself**. For example, in addition to technical guidance from the UNFCCC¹³ on the development of NAPs, there are also supplementary guidelines on, inter alia, promoting synergies between NAPs and NBSAPs (published by CBD),¹⁴ integrating fisheries and aquaculture in NAPs (FAO),¹⁵ and promoting synergies between NAPs and disaster reduction (UNDRR),¹⁶ as well as a toolkit to support a gender-responsive approach to developing NAPs (UNFCCC). **The proliferation of guidance means that Parties must navigate a complex web of sources and resources to identify and access support to deliver on obligations.** When multiplied across all the Party obligations under the UNFCCC (e.g., NDCs; NAPs; Measurement, Verification and Reporting, etc.) and other international agreements, this creates a significant administrative and technical burden.

The burden of such a complex system of legislative obligations is particularly challenging for Parties with fewer resources at their disposal, but who are often most dependent on this support and disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Obligations across the legislative and regulatory framework must be simplified and streamlined to facilitate both resource and cost efficiencies. Such streamlining could also realise synergies and multiple benefits across agendas by centralising commitments, implementation and reporting, reducing duplication, gaps and conflicts of interest.

13. Least Developed Countries Expert Group, 2012. National Adaptation Plans. Technical guidelines for the national adaptation plan process. Bonn: UNFCCC secretariat. Bonn, Germany.

14. UNEP/CBD/COP/12/INF/29

15. https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Documents%20NAP/Supplements/FAO_Address%20Agriculture%2c%20Forestry%20and%20Fisherie%20in%20NAPs.pdf

16. UNDRR, 2021. Promoting Synergy and Alignment Between Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Context of National Adaptation Plans: A Supplement to the UNFCCC NAP Technical Guidelines. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

17. NAP Global Network & UNFCCC, 2019. Toolkit for a gender-responsive process to formulate and implement National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Dazé, A., and Church, C. (lead authors). Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development.

6. Cross-cutting support

The implementation of international commitments at a national and sub-national level, and efforts to adapt to the impact of climate change, are contingent on multiple factors. Alongside coherent legislative measures, international frameworks need to facilitate access to the necessary means of implementation (MOI), particularly for those countries with access to fewer resources and that are more vulnerable to climate change.

Under the UNFCCC, MOI are categorised under 3 pillars – finance, capacity building, and technology. These 3 pillars must be underpinned by access to the necessary science and data to inform evidence-based decision making, monitoring and reporting, and a participatory process that is representative and inclusive of the communities and sectors needed to contribute to successful implementation.

To achieve ocean-climate ambition in a way that is fair, equitable, representative and inclusive, routes to these enablers should be transparent and accessible, as well as being reflective of and responsive to the needs and priorities of those Parties that need them. This requires simplicity of individual processes to provide efficiency, as well as collaboration and cooperation between processes to ensure progress is effective and aligned with needs and priorities.

The Ocean-Climate Dialogue Information Note outlines a number of processes, funds and work programmes within the UNFCCC architecture that offer access to means of implementation to support least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) and promote representation of often marginalised voices. However, the framework of groups and work streams where the ocean is, or could be, reflected in considerations is often complex and siloed (see Figure 2), and therefore requires significant capacity to navigate and access the required support by delegations that are already stretched by a vast negotiations agenda.¹⁸

OVERVIEW OF THE KEY UNFCCC PROCESSES



Figure 1 - Overview of the key UNFCCC processes, funds and programmes that provide support (or where action could be strengthened) to Parties to integrate and implement ocean-climate solutions that contribute to the Agreement goals.

The increasing profile of the ocean in climate considerations is being reflected in current effort under existing UNFCCC workstreams, including but not restricted to:

- **The WIM Executive Committee and Technology Executive Committee (TEC) policy brief on Technologies for Averting, Minimising and Addressing Loss and Damage in the Coastal Zone (2020)¹⁹**
- **The Standing Committee on Finance's forum on finance for nature-based solutions (2021-22)**
- **The NWP expert group for ocean is working with partners on initial actions to address knowledge gaps in ocean-climate adaptation**
- **The Ocean and Coastal Zone Pathway under the Marrakech Partnership has published an Action Table (2020)²⁰ and Vision and Summary (2021)²¹ outlining the Pathway's ambitions to promote collaboration between governments and non-state actors to drive action across four ocean sectors; conservation, natural resource management/fisheries, shipping, & energy**

Much of this work is in its nascent stage, so will require time and resource to bear fruit which can then be translated into support for capacity building and knowledge sharing that, in turn, can drive action. It will demand significant engagement from the ocean-climate community, both Parties and non-state actors, to ensure that progress is delivered and is aligned to the needs and priorities that support ocean-climate ambition for mitigation and adaptation actions.

The TEC, in collaboration with IUCN and the NWP, held an event as part of the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September 2021 to address 'Ecosystems and Technology: Innovative approaches to strengthening coastal and ocean adaptation', with a second event on ecosystem-based approaches to support implementation of NDCs and NAPs to follow. This kind of communication and collaboration between processes will be vital if they are to drive streamlined, coherent progress on ocean-climate ambition and action across the UNFCCC.

Collaboration with the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB) provides an opportunity to enhance support for capacity building related to ocean-climate, across the PCCB's three key areas of focus:

- **Enhancing coherence and coordination of capacity-building with a focus on avoiding duplication of efforts, including through collaboration with bodies under and outside the Convention**
- **Identifying capacity gaps and needs, and recommending ways to address them**
- **Promoting awareness-raising, knowledge-and information-sharing and stakeholder engagement with bodies and relevant actors under and outside the Convention**

¹⁹https://unfccc.int/ttclear/misc_StaticFiles/gnwoerk_static/2020_coastalzones/b9e88f6fea374d8aa5cb44115_d201160/3863c9fabdf74ea49710189acbf6907a.pdf

²⁰https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Action_table%20_OCZ.pdf

²¹https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Vision%26Summary_OCZ_21.pdf

Alongside capacity building and technology transfer, finance is a fundamental requirement to facilitate implementation of ocean-based solutions to climate change. The process of accessing available climate finance is resource and time intensive, requires a sufficient level of expertise, and can take several years. Whilst the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) is tasked with providing technical support and guidance to LDCs for accessing finance via National Adaptation Plans of Action, the Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund, again, the number of different routes to access finance creates challenge through complexity.

Whilst there is a significant body of scientific research and evidence on ocean-climate, it is necessary that the knowledge base is open-source, accessible and that data is available at global, regional, national and local scales, to facilitate equitable implementation according to needs-based priorities. The Research and Systematic Observations (RSO) agenda works to promote and exchange research, data and systematic observations, including ocean, and there is a vast network of inter-governmental bodies, international organisations and research initiatives providing evidence and data relevant to ocean-climate.

These include, *inter alia*, UNEP, the FAO, the International Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, IPCC, IPBES, IUCN, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), and the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS). In addition, there is a wealth of non-governmental initiatives to further research and improve access to data. As with other areas of cross-cutting support, capitalising on existing resources, as well as identifying and escalating the prioritisation of gaps in evidence and data, is contingent on transparent routes for Parties to communicate needs and gaps, and a more centralised platform through which to navigate.

6.1 Challenges

The examples of existing, cross-cutting support under the UNFCCC included here are far from exhaustive, but still serve to highlight the complexity and scale of the landscape that needs to be navigated by Parties, both to access support but also influence future development of these pathways and mechanisms to ensure they are aligned to ocean-climate ambition and reflective of priorities. Streamlining and simplifying routes to access support would go some way to alleviating the resource and capacity demands placed on Parties by this complexity and promote equitable and inclusive progress on the implementation of ocean-based solutions to climate change for mitigation and adaptation.

To ensure that the knowledge and rights of the full range of ocean stakeholders are integrated into decision making and progress, it is incumbent on the conveners of discussions and workstreams related to ocean-climate to ensure that those groups are represented. This should include reciprocal collaboration with the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG), and initiatives under the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) agenda.

7. Opportunities to strengthen Ocean-Climate action

Through the UNFCCC Ocean-Climate Dialogue process, Parties and non-state actors have proposed a number of potential ways forward to strengthen ocean-climate action under the UNFCCC, from better mainstreaming of ocean considerations across existing UNFCCC processes to a mandate for a new ocean work programme. There is broad support for improved coordination and collaboration between existing workstreams and constituted bodies to help break down silos and ensure that effort towards driving ocean-climate action is coherent and aligned with ambition, non-duplicative, and that synergies and gaps can better be identified and addressed.

However, finding a way to effectively integrate a cross-cutting issue such as ocean into the complex UNFCCC architecture is challenging, not least because of the need to overcome divergent views if consensus is to be reached on how such integration can be achieved, and the time required to agree and effect systemic change.

In their submission to SBSTA ahead of the Dialogue, Costa Rica, who have advocated for the consideration of a new work programme, acknowledged that this option would require '*more complicated negotiations*'²². Negotiations and supporting diplomatic efforts take time, in addition to any period of necessary administration to implement resulting mandates that require some level of systemic change. Time that, as demonstrated by recent IPCC reports, is in short supply if we are to meet a 1.5° pathway.

In the meantime, there is broad consensus amongst Parties that efforts should continue on optimising opportunities to enhance the integration of ocean considerations into existing processes. There are actions that can be taken now to address some of the challenges already highlighted.

22. <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202004061714---Costa%20Rica%20%20Ocean%20Dialogue%20Submission%20UNFCCC.pdf>

7.1 A single, coherent narrative for international Ocean-Climate ambition

Following the momentum generated by the Dialogue and as informal discussions continue towards consensus on an approach, valuable progress could be made if the international ocean-climate community are able to coalesce around a set of core aspirations of ‘what’ needs to be achieved in lieu of agreement on ‘how’ to strengthen ocean-climate action under the UNFCCC via new mandates.

The strength of scientific evidence on the role of the ocean as both a buffer to climate change and as a victim of the impacts of climate change, and the vast potential it offers for mitigation and adaptation solutions, provides a compelling narrative on the need for the ocean’s role to be fully considered in an ambitious and urgent response to the climate emergency. To fully leverage that narrative, and to realise that potential as part of efforts to meet the Paris Agreement goals, requires consistent representation and articulation of ocean-climate considerations across the complex architecture of the UNFCCC, and prioritisation of where such efforts can be applied most effectively.

Advocating ocean-climate priorities through existing processes such as the Research and Systematic Observations agenda, the NWP, the Marrakech Partnership, and the Standing Committee on Finance can cumulatively help to drive progress and action by signalling the prioritisation of ocean considerations across the climate agenda. Across the breadth of negotiations and processes under the UNFCCC, the **representation and integration of ocean considerations in discussions are contingent on a level of ocean literacy** on behalf of the delegates in the room and a prioritisation of ocean-climate issues within that workstream. This may not be an easy challenge to overcome for most nations, that at a government official level often work in highly specialised issue-based areas of expertise, and in a landscape of myriad competing priorities for the climate agenda.

Agreeing defined ambitions for tangible outcomes that drive progress to create a **high-level ocean-climate narrative which can be coherently and consistently advocated** at an international level could help to leverage the collective political and diplomatic weight of the ocean-climate community to drive progress and real-world ocean-climate action under the UNFCCC and the wider UN framework, and amongst governmental and non-state actors. This messaging could be further nuanced and employed at regional, national and subnational levels for greater specificity, and to support ocean-climate literacy across delegates and government officials operating at an international level.

Multilateral alliances such as the HLP, Because the Ocean, and the HAC, offer avenues to agree commitments on shared priorities, and the work taken by the Ocean and Coastal Zones Pathway to define ambitions under the Marrakech Partnership could provide a foundation for the development of a concise ocean-climate narrative.

7.2 Enhancing integration to realise synergies

The presence of ocean-climate considerations across the UN framework is fragmented across a number of agreements and processes, which can lead to operational silos, duplication of effort, gaps and conflicts across different agendas. To realise the synergies, benefits and cost-efficiencies that can be achieved from a coherent approach that reflects the linkages and interdependencies of ocean-based solutions across multiple agendas, it will be necessary to improve connectivity and alignment across the respective frameworks.

International advocacy for a target to protect 30% of the global ocean by 2030, as supported by members of the GOA, HAC, and HLP among other alliances, could lead to a strong target for ocean protection in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). A successful outcome to BBNJ negotiations could also create a mechanism to deliver ocean conservation and sustainable management in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Such agreements would demand supranational collaboration on designation, management and enforcement in international waters, but could present a significant opportunity to integrate climate considerations into future sustainable management of the ocean and provide a platform for improving coherence across the ocean, climate and biodiversity agendas in the future.

Enhancing inter-agency links and cooperation across the UN architecture could help to overcome siloed approaches and realise potential synergies. To do so, there needs to be a level of centralised oversight and responsibility for coordinating cooperation and collaboration. As highlighted in the Dialogue Summary Note²³, UN-Oceans, the inter-agency mechanism for enhancing coherence and coordination on ocean issues under the UN, is uniquely placed to steward such effort alongside initiatives such as UNEP's Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) Finance Principles and forthcoming SBE Transition Framework.

In the longer-term, consideration should be given to the potential for alignment (and possible integration) of administrative and reporting obligations across relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements, which could offer wins for improving synergies and reducing the burden on Parties across agendas.

7.3 Simplifying access to support

Implementing ocean-climate measures that deliver synergies and ocean-climate benefits across wider UN agendas can require complex trade-offs, reflecting national and regional decision making in the ocean space which needs to consider multiple sets of criteria, such as co-benefits, unintended consequences, feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability. Enabling synergistic progress across agendas in an equitable way for all Parties requires cross-cutting support for implementation, including access to finance, capacity building, technology transfer, and the requisite evidence and data.

To help Parties navigate, and take advantage of, the vast web of available routes to access existing support and shared knowledge, the development of a single platform [centralising resources, information and action relating to ocean-climate](#) under the UNFCCC, and wider UN, could be a positive step towards providing clarity for decision-makers on available support and streamlining the routes to access them by bringing links to them all into one, ocean-climate dedicated space. Under the UNFCCC, where the responsibility for coordinating that centralisation lay would need to be defined and may need to be agreed via a new mandate. Across the wider UN, again, UN-Oceans has the relevant oversight and membership needed to collate and maintain such a platform that incorporates multiple, ocean-relevant agendas.

[Streamlining and simplifying climate finance mechanisms](#) and processes could go a long way to improving access to the finance needed to realise ocean-climate ambition, and to alleviate the capacity and resource demands on Parties that need it most. Indeed, the Mid-Term Review of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (2019) called for reviews of existing financing mechanisms to ‘maximize accessibility, effectiveness, transparency, quality and impact, in the context of a complex funding environment which presents challenges for small island developing states’.²⁴

24. Mid-Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway High Level Political Declaration - <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/08/SAMOA-MTR-FINAL.pdf>

7.4 Driving coherent progress through international collaboration

Perhaps the most highly anticipated international initiative for the ocean is the [UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development](#) (2021-2030), which aims to provide ‘a common framework to ensure that ocean science can fully support countries’ actions to sustainably manage the Oceans and more particularly to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’. The ‘Ocean Decade’ provides an opportunity to overcome silos, drive coherence and realise synergies across ocean-related agendas through international collaborative effort to close evidence gaps and democratise access to data that will be critical to enhance progress on ocean-based solutions and decision making.

There is significant, high-level political support for the Decade (for example, the adoption of the Ocean Decade Navigation Plan by the G7 in 2021) but it will be crucial that initiatives and solutions are not developed in silos, to avoid perpetuating existing complexity and fragmentation of effort and resources. The same may be said for the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#) that will run in parallel to the Ocean Decade, aiming to accelerate global collaboration and action to prevent, halt and reverse ecosystem degradation by driving ambition, unlocking finance and promoting capacity building and engagement.

Under the UNFCCC, the [Race to Zero and Race to Resilience campaigns](#), led by the High-Level Champions for Global Climate Action, offer a springboard for the Marrakech Partnership’s Ocean and Coastal Zones Pathway to catalyse engagement and collaboration between governments and non-state actors across relevant sectors (i.e., conservation, fisheries, transport and energy) to mobilise real-world ocean-climate action.

Alongside other international and regional initiatives, such as the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA), the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON), the International Partnership on Blue Carbon (IPBC), the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups, and the International Partnership on MPAs, Biodiversity and Climate Change, there is a wealth of international cooperation and collaborative effort towards realising ocean-climate ambition and implementation of ocean-climate solutions.

Again, it will be incumbent on these initiatives to ensure inclusivity and representation, and that outcomes and solutions are accessible and address the needs and priorities of the nations, groups and communities that are most climate vulnerable.

7.5 Driving progress through national action

Much of the onus may fall at regional and national levels, particularly in the short term, to drive better integration of ocean-climate considerations under the UNFCCC and the realisation of potential synergies across relevant linked agendas. Effort at a national, and indeed non-state, level can strengthen ocean-climate action under the UNFCCC ‘from the bottom up’. Enhancing ocean ambition and commitments via NDCs and NAPs, and including ocean-related emissions in national reporting, ensures that ocean considerations and priorities are captured under the UNFCCC, including the Global Stocktake due to take place in 2023.

Some nations (e.g., Costa Rica, Chile, Belize, Seychelles) have included ambitious commitments to protect blue carbon ecosystems for mitigation and adaptation purposes in their NDCs. Discussions under the UNFCCC Ocean-Climate Dialogue highlighted a need for more support and improved technical guidance to facilitate the inclusion of blue carbon in national emissions accounting. Those nations at the vanguard of blue carbon approaches could provide vital support for capacity building by sharing knowledge and best practice in the future. These examples also serve to illustrate the important role of non-government organisations in supporting Parties to develop capacity and to identify and access the requisite data and information to implement blue carbon solutions. Organisations such as Pew Trusts, IUCN, WWF, The Nature Conservancy, and others, are playing integral roles in enabling national, and sub-national, progress on the ocean-climate agenda.

At a national level, pursuing the development of a Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) can help to identify and overcome some of the key challenges to realising a coherent, consistent approach to sustainable ocean management and delivery of ocean-climate ambition that is integrated with other ocean agendas. SBE strategies include identifying and addressing gaps across institutional capacity, access to long-term sustainable finance, and knowledge and innovation, whilst ensuring a representative and participatory approach to decision making towards a just transition.



8. Conclusion

The level of engagement with the UNFCCC Ocean-Climate Dialogue and the number of international alliances advocating for ocean action highlights the growing, shared ambition to deliver coherent ocean-based solutions that can help tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss together.

However, global crises demand a global response – one that is coherent, collaborative, and leaves no-one behind. Although ocean-climate considerations are represented across existing international legislative frameworks, steps must be taken to address gaps or shortfalls in measures and to overcome the fragmented, complex landscape in order to realise ocean-climate ambition, drive synergies across agendas and motivate action that is coherent across scales.

If progress is to be equitable and inclusive there is a need to reduce the national administrative and capacity burden created by this complex landscape. This requires streamlining, simplifying and centralising obligations and supporting guidance, as well as the routes and processes to access cross-cutting support.

These coordinating actions could help to realise synergies and links across agendas, as well as mobilising ocean-climate action. Change must be inclusive, advocate for shared ambitions across agendas and at different levels of governance, and be driven through collaboration between key bodies and groups such as:

- **UN bodies and agencies**
- **International programmes, processes and initiatives**
sectors and policy areas
- **Governments, industry, the scientific community**
and civil society
- **The international ocean-climate community**

COP26 offers a unique, and urgent, opportunity to continue discussions on strengthening ocean-climate action under the UNFCCC. Systemic change takes time and so it is vital that the international ocean-climate community are at the vanguard of progress on ocean-climate solutions, through joint advocacy of a shared ambition and narrative, driving progress via national action, and through collaboration at all levels.

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