

MARINE REGIONS FORUM 2019

ACHIEVING A HEALTHY OCEAN – REGIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE BEYOND 2020

Key messages¹

Key Messages at a Glance:

- (1) Address climate change, deoxygenation and ocean acidification in marine regions through ocean-based solutions and adaptive governance.
- (2) Adopt a strong and comprehensive agreement for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.
- (3) Develop coherent networks of effective and well-managed marine protected areas, including in ABNJ, which are coordinated at the regional level.
- (4) Combat all sources of marine pollution through regionally coordinated strategies across sectors and governance levels.
- (5) Make tourism compatible with a healthy ocean.
- (6) Accelerate action for achieving the ocean dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including SDG 14, through cooperative and coordinated regional ocean governance.
- (7) Scale up science-policy-society interfaces for marine regions and promote integration of all kinds of relevant knowledge in decision-making.
- (8) Develop a robust global post-2020 ocean governance framework supported by strengthened regional bodies.

More detailed information on each of these messages can be found on pages 2 through to 7.

¹Prepared by the organisers of the Marine Regions Forum 2019: Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) e.V., Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) and TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability (TMG)

Introduction

1. The Marine Regions Forum 2019 took place at a critical moment for the future of the ocean. The current crisis demands a radical shift in the way we treat the ocean, its precious wildlife, and its invaluable natural resources. We are witnessing continued loss of biodiversity, overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution, and many other serious impacts from human activities – all compounded by climate change, ocean deoxygenation and acidification. The 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services warns that 66% of the ocean is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts from human activities and the 2019 IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate highlights the impact that climate change is already having on our Blue Planet.
2. 2020 is the deadline for meeting four of the ten targets of the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goal for the ocean, SDG 14, but these targets will most likely not be reached. Existing governance frameworks are fragmented and have proven inadequate in addressing the challenges facing our ocean. Ocean governance should be strengthened by taking an ecosystem-based approach that aligns regulatory frameworks with interconnected natural and social systems. This demands urgent action at all levels, from the local to the global, and across boundaries and sectors. Marine regions are well-placed to ensure the engagement and action that is needed.
3. At the 2017 UN Ocean Conference² and the Our Ocean Conference³ respectively, the German Government and the European Commission committed to develop and host the Marine Regions Forum, together with the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), and TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability (TMG), with the aim of strengthening regional ocean governance for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

More than 200 participants from 50 countries attended the Marine Regions Forum 2019, representing the world's diverse marine regions. They identified and discussed effective approaches and solutions, including networks of marine protected areas (MPAs), ocean-based solutions for climate action, regional ocean governance strategies for SDG 14 implementation, and governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).
4. The Marine Regions Forum provides a new form of science-society-policy interface where decision-makers, scientists, civil society representatives and other actors meet outside formal governmental processes to engage in open exchanges and develop new solutions to sustainability challenges. The Marine Regions Forum thereby complements ongoing scientific and policy processes by bringing together the different kinds of knowledge needed to achieve ocean sustainability.
5. The ocean has never been higher on the international agenda. The “Blue” COP 25 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2019 drew attention to the impacts of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems and the potential for ocean-based solutions. The 2020 UN Ocean Conference will take stock of action taken to ensure ocean health. Negotiations for a legally-binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) are scheduled to be completed by 2020. The international community is considering options for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and a wide range of societal actors have committed to support ocean action. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) will spur renewed interest and investment in ocean science, and numerous regional processes and initiatives are dedicated to reversing the decline in ocean health.

²<https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/?id=18439>

³https://ourocean2017.org/sites/default/files/ooc-2017-list-of-commitments_en.pdf

6. The Marine Regions Forum 2019 concluded that cooperation, coordination and implementation in marine regions will be critical to address the immense challenges facing our global ocean and making progress in achieving global agreements. It was demonstrated that transparent and engaging dialogue processes across different sectors and relevant actors can help to guide the needed transformation. By tapping into the wealth of knowledge and experiences at the regional level, facilitating the sharing of good practices between different regions, and developing new approaches, the Marine Regions Forum helps to strengthen cooperation within regions, between regions and between the global and regional level.
7. The decisions taken and implemented now and in the next decade will be decisive for the future of the ocean. Accelerated implementation and a transparent process of monitoring and review needs to start now, with strengthened regional ocean governance frameworks playing a key role.

Key messages from the Marine Regions Forum 2019

8. Building on the discussions at the Marine Regions Forum 2019 and invited comments from participants following the event, the conference organisers IASS, IDDRI, and TMG have derived the following key messages:

(1) Address climate change, deoxygenation and ocean acidification in marine regions through ocean-based solutions and adaptive governance.

Policymakers should, at all scales, build on the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate and develop robust measures aimed to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts on the ocean. Examples include the implementation of nature-based solutions and the development of regional strategies to adapt to moving fish stocks. In this regard, regional and sectoral organisations have a key role to play in supporting ocean resilience to climate change by reducing other human pressures on the marine environment, especially by facilitating inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination. The upcoming UNFCCC COPs provide important opportunities for strengthening the integration of ocean-related issues into the climate discussions. In addition to ambitious land-based mitigation action, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) should include marine components, as this will be key to reducing climate impacts. This could be facilitated through regional arrangements or dedicated initiatives.

(2) Adopt a strong and comprehensive agreement for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

Areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) cover 43% of the surface of our planet; yet there is no comprehensive legal regime to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of its marine biodiversity. The adoption of a robust and comprehensive global legally-binding agreement for ABNJ is needed to sustain marine life and vital ocean services. A future global regime for biodiversity in ABNJ must be underpinned by a strong implementation framework that integrates all current and future aspects of ocean use and management, while ensuring cooperation and coordination across sectors and governance levels. This should be based on shared principles, objectives, and collaborative processes for science across sectors and governance levels. Regional arrangements

are particularly effective to engage and coordinate relevant stakeholders and facilitate the exchange of information and data. While decision-making might best be done at the global level through a Conference of the Parties under the new agreement, regional arrangements could play a key role in the implementation and coordination of globally-agreed measures, including monitoring, control, and surveillance.

Whilst there is considerable momentum towards an agreement for the conservation of biodiversity in ABNJ, the regime for deep seabed mining in the Area that is developing in parallel through the International Seabed Authority (ISA) has the potential to further increase pressure on the marine environment. It will be important to ensure consistence between the emerging regimes for the conservation of marine biodiversity in ABNJ and deep seabed mining as well as other sectoral uses, such as fisheries. Regional environmental management plans (REMPs) should be established as a precondition for possible deep seabed mining, developed through an inclusive and collaborative cross-sectoral approach that includes the transparent consultation of regional organisations and other stakeholders.

(3) Develop coherent networks of effective and well-managed marine protected areas, including in ABNJ, which are coordinated at the regional level.

The development of coherent networks of effective and well-managed marine protected areas (MPAs) and other area-based management tools (ABMTs) is critical to ensure the conservation and resilience of biodiversity and recovery of overexploited marine ecosystems. Marine regions are particularly well-placed to reflect ecosystems properties in the network design and ensure the protection of species throughout their whole life cycle, including for migratory species by considering their migratory pathways and habitats. In order to be effective, MPA networks need to cover considerable parts of the ocean. Scientists recommend that networks of MPAs, including zones that prohibit human uses, should cover between 30% and 50% of the world's ocean. These areas should be subject to effective management, and monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS).

Discussions on how to facilitate the systematic establishment of a coherent network of MPAs have not yet taken place at the United Nations negotiations for a treaty on ABNJ. This is a significant issue that warrants attention in future negotiations in order to fully employ MPAs to conserve marine biodiversity in ABNJ and to meet objectives agreed by the international community. Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) that have been identified through regional workshops under the CBD, as well as Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems identified under regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), could be used as a starting point to identify marine areas in need of protection. Regional approaches and capacities for coordinating ABMTs and establishing MPA networks should be strengthened to facilitate network coherence, appropriate MPA design, placement and size, and effective management, as well as monitoring and reporting against set targets.

(4) Combat all sources of marine pollution through regionally coordinated strategies across sectors and governance levels.

Marine pollution, including through litter, plastics, chemicals and nutrients, is a persistent challenge. Whereas chemical and nutrient pollution have been continuous problems in the past decades, other types of pollution, in particular plastic, have been identified as a recent, growing risk that requires urgent responses. Significantly reducing marine litter by 2025, as envisaged by target SDG 14.1, requires a concerted approach involving business, government, and civil society; yet current governance strategies provide a fragmented approach and regional strategies face a range of barriers.

Successful initiatives to implement regional marine litter action plans to reduce marine litter have targeted various levels of governance, focused on the full range of response options (prevention, mitigation, control, recovery) and engaged an array of different actors. In an effort to reduce plastic pollution, a cross-sectoral approach is crucial at all stages, from prevention of waste to waste management and clean up, and to awareness raising activities. To fight micro plastic pollution, specific focus needs to be given to integrated approaches, including improved waste water management. Opportunities for closer cooperation between sectors have become more common, especially as the global momentum around the negative impacts of marine litter has fostered a more receptive audience.

Regionally coordinated marine litter strategies should be developed and implemented with a view to facilitating circular economy and comprehensive waste-prevention approaches, in coordination with the sectors responsible. Global approaches, such as through a potential future legal instrument on marine litter, could compliment and be underpinned by existing, effective regional strategies. Regional collaboration, sharing lessons learnt, and identifying new solutions could support global governance and national action.

(5) Make tourism compatible with a healthy ocean.

Tourism is an important source of revenue and a mean of development but also a source of negative externalities, especially in coastal and marine areas and for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Tourism has been estimated to generate around 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions and can also have detrimental effects on the natural environment through waste production, energy and resource consumption, and the construction of built infrastructures, all of which contribute to biodiversity loss, land use change, and alteration of fragile ecosystems.

Tourism is also a blind spot in ocean governance, with limited collaboration among neighbouring states, despite shared interests. It is therefore crucial to integrate tourism more systematically into the agenda of regional organisations, to encourage the joint development of sustainability strategies among states sharing a marine ecosystem, and to drive the private sector towards sustainable practices.

Marine regions have a lot to learn from each other and the organization of regular exchanges would help to encourage sharing of expertise and practices on key sustainability issues, such as the growth of cruise tourism, the integration of local communities into decision-making, and the use of certification and eco labelling.

(6) Accelerate action for achieving the ocean dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including SDG 14, through cooperative and coordinated regional ocean governance.

The implementation of SDG 14 and other ocean-related SDGs requires “nexus thinking”. The regional level has proven to be successful in bringing together different sectors, whilst operating at an appropriate ecosystem scale and taking into account the priorities and needs of the range of actors and institutions. The regional level is a good starting point to bridge prevalent sectoral approaches in ocean governance, and to achieve consistency across sectors, targets, and indicators. In an effort to coordinate policymaking and measures, cooperative narratives for SDG implementation focusing on important ecosystems, such as coral reefs, or “common enemies”, such as algal blooms, should be developed.

Regional cooperation can play an important role in translating global ambitions and targets into regionally relevant, achievable, harmonised and quantitative agreements. To this end, tailor-made regional and cross-sectoral ocean governance strategies or action plans should be agreed upon to identify common objectives for coordinated action and to take into account interactions, including trade-offs and synergies between ocean-related SDGs. Given the slow progress in implementing SDG 14, dedicated accelerator approaches that help to speed up action for regional and national priorities should be developed and applied.

(7) Scale up science-policy-society interfaces for marine regions and promote integration of all kinds of relevant knowledge in decision-making.

Strengthening the science-policy-society interface is needed for robust and integrated decision-making. In order to successfully link knowledge production and decision-making, capacities and resources need to be enhanced, relevant stakeholders involved, and milestones and goals set in a co-creation process linked to the policy frameworks. Marine regions should take action and establish boundary organisations as key actors for science-policy-society practices, or support existing organisations to take on such a task, and ensure continuous dialogue and feedback between science, policy, and society.

Global assessments addressing ocean affairs should be developed through processes that facilitate the co-production of knowledge and include contributions from regional and national levels. Partnerships with regional organisations could facilitate new forms of assessments that take stock of regional perspectives. In order to support transformation to sustainable pathways, regional and global assessments should be supported by harmonised data and information systems, and be better aligned with policy frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and engage with the key actors.

The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development provides a unique opportunity to support both global and regional institutions by stimulating scientific cooperation and the delivery of policy-relevant knowledge. The Decade should be inclusive and ensure wide participation of regions and disciplines alike in order to meet its ambitious aims. The scientific community should use the opportunity to increase coordination and ensure that the produced knowledge is both relevant and visible to policymakers.

(8) Develop a robust global post-2020 ocean governance framework supported by strengthened regional bodies.

Decisions taken in the next ten years will be critical for the ocean. The global community will have to decide how to take forward ocean sustainability between 2020 and 2030, including in the ocean dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ, and the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Whilst updated and new sustainability goals are needed for the ocean, previous practice of setting ever-more ambitious targets for the distant future instead of achieving current targets must be avoided. New ocean-related goals should be underpinned and built upon a robust and implementation-focused post-2020 strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Strengthened frameworks for integrated ocean governance at the regional scale will be important building blocks. The 2020 UN Ocean Conference provides a unique opportunity to agree on such an action-oriented approach that should be based on shared objectives and targets, and brings together all relevant policy strands.

About

The Marine Regions Forum 2019 took place from 30 September to 2 October 2019 in Berlin, Germany under the banner “Achieving a healthy ocean – Regional ocean governance beyond 2020”. The Forum aimed to develop clear recommendations, catalyse actionable outputs, and build partnerships for strengthening regional ocean governance in support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 “Life Below Water” and other ocean-related targets of the 2030 Agenda. The key messages presented in this document have been developed by the conference organisers as a summary of the main conclusions from the conference to inform relevant ocean governance processes as well as governments, international organisations, researchers, civil society, and the private sector in their efforts to improve ocean health.

The Marine Regions Forum 2019 provided a unique space for open and productive exchange on pressing ocean issues, bringing together over 200 leading experts from 50 countries representing diverse marine regions and backgrounds, from academia and research, policy and decisionmaking, non-governmental organisations, industry, the arts, and media. As a multi-stakeholder and cross sectoral platform, the conference developed new pathways and actionable solutions for accelerating progress regarding prevailing ocean governance challenges that need to be overcome to achieve SDG 14. Discussions focussed on the role of regional governance approaches in particular and underpinned the importance of integrating knowledge and decision-making for sustainable ocean futures. The key messages outlined in this document can also be found in the Conference Report, which includes the comprehensive program of the Marine Regions Forum 2019. The Conference Report can be accessed here: www.marineregionsforum.org.

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