



Workshop summary

Marine Regions Forum Online Workshop Ocean

Governance and COVID-19: Building resilience for marine regions

Date: 28 January 2021

Time: 14.00-17.30 CET

Hosts: Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS): Sebastian Unger, Barbara Neumann, Kim Schmidt, Laura Weiland

IDDRI: Sébastien Treyer, Julien Rochette, Klaudija Cremers, Glen Wright

TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability: Alexander Müller

Moderation: Alexander Müller and Sébastien Treyer

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1 Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted millions of people, causing significant loss of human life and unprecedented economic and social disruption. Those who depend upon the ocean for their livelihoods are no exception: all marine regions have been affected by this crisis, requiring urgent responses from international, regional and national actors. Marine regions and regional ocean governance may offer joint learnings about how to address some of the key impacts. Several initial impact assessments of the pandemic on the ocean economy and possible policy responses have already been published¹, but there have been few opportunities to share experiences and lessons learned from ongoing regional governance processes.

2 Introduction

The aim of this workshop is to explore possible pathways to navigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in marine regions. It brought together actors from different marine regions to (i) discuss the socio-economic and environmental impacts of COVID-19 in marine regions, (ii) explore options for immediate responses and longer-term recovery, and (iii) discuss impacts on regional cooperation and possible consequences for ocean governance.

This online workshop builds on the [Marine Regions Forum 2019](#), which gathered over 200 international ocean actors to exchange experiences on inter-regional collaboration and discuss new approaches to advance and strengthen regional ocean governance processes. It is organized by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI), and TMG-Think Tank for Sustainability (TMG), together with the German Environment Agency (UBA), the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the European Commission. The proposal to organize this workshop emerged at a related discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic with the [Advisory Board](#) of the Marine Regions Forum.

3 Presentations and discussion

3.1 Welcome and introduction

The workshop was opened by the moderators, **Sebastien Treyer** and **Alexander Müller**.

Sebastien Treyer welcomed the participants and highlighted that the workshop will discuss how the different marine regions are being impacted, what vulnerabilities are being exposed, and what opportunities exist to overcome the issues and foster a transformation towards sustainability. It was exemplified that some marine regions are highly specialised e.g. on tourism or small-scale

¹ Northrop, E.; Konar, M.; Frost, N.; Hollaway, E. (2020): *A Sustainable and Equitable Blue Recovery to the COVID-19 Crisis. Report for the High Level Panel for A Sustainable Ocean Economy*; UNCTAD (2020): *The Covid19 Pandemic and the Blue Economy: New challenges and prospects for recovery and resilience*; OECD (2020): *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19): Fisheries, aquaculture and COVID-19: Issues and policy responses*; FAO (2020), *How is COVID-19 Affecting the Fisheries and Aquaculture Food Systems*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.



fisheries, and that being highly specialised can surface vulnerabilities as they may be less resilient to systemic changes imposed by threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This in turn drives the need to identify opportunities for socio-economic diversification. It was concluded that coordination possibilities are needed at the regional scale and demonstrates the need for dialogue and exchange platforms, such as the Marine Regions Forum.

Alexander Müller continued the introductory remarks by firstly mentioning that marine regions face challenges but can also provide opportunities for transformative action. It was mentioned that the Marine Regions Forum aimed to support (not replace) international processes by providing a platform where experiences and lessons learned can be exchanged in order to better understand what is needed in and amongst marine regions. It was further stated that the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic require a similar approach: to understand the specific challenges and opportunities at hand and to identify how regional cooperation can support governmental and intergovernmental processes. Secondly, although the ocean is mentioned in documents pertaining to the One Health approach, zoonotic disease studies rarely mention the ocean. It is therefore important to mention marine regions when involved in public debates, as marine regions can provide opportunities for solutions and can support the much needed transition towards greater socio-economic and ecological resilience. Thirdly, as the COVID-19 pandemic is a global occurrence, just as the climate crisis, we need to understand and ask: how can we learn from the COVID-19 global pandemic in order to adapt to and mitigate the climate crisis?

3.2 Opening Statements

Lilian Busse, German Environment Agency (UBA), provided introductory remarks. Ms. Busse stated that 2020 was supposed to be a 'Super Year for the Ocean', but it instead became the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meetings such as the UN Ocean Conference have been postponed and other ocean governance processes have been put on hold. However, Ms. Busse explained that discussions are still being held online, such as the EU International Ocean Governance (IOG) Forum, and under the EU Portuguese presidency [January – June 2021], the topic of integrated maritime policy, sustainable blue economy, and ocean governance will be key priorities. The German Environment Agency (UBA) has published discussion and position papers on the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the following topics: 1) sustainable pathways out of the COVID-19 pandemic regarding financial measures and contains an action plan for Germany, 2) lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic including guiding principles for environmental and sustainable policy, and 3) international and environmental sustainability policy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (links found below). Ms. Busse reflected on UBA's cooperation with the HELCOM secretariat, stating that interactions such as through meetings and negotiations are challenging as in-person meetings are missing. From a technical perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has also hampered monitoring and controlling at sea, resulting in gaps in long-term monitoring data.

Veronika Veits, European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG Mare), explained how DG Mare has responded to the COVID-19 crisis. The EU has 1)



provided an *ad hoc* shock response by providing temporary emergency measures such as compensation for temporary losses and by establishing guidelines on the repatriation of seafarers, 2) set the ground for a sustainable recovery through the European Green Deal through a new Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy, and 3) launched the Next Generation EU initiative last year that aims to increase resilience, lead to zero pollution and 'leave no one behind'. Ms. Veits highlighted that regional ocean governance provides a crucial link between the global objectives and national governance. Ms. Veits commented that dialogue platforms like the Marine Regions Forum provide the needed space for exchange and the cross-fertilisation between sectors.

3.3 Setting the scene: the Ocean and the COVID-19 pandemic

Jane Lubchenco, Oregon State University and Co-Chair of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy Expert Group, provided a *Key note* on 'Sustainable and equitable blue recovery to the COVID-19 crisis'. Ms. Lubchenco presented the report published by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy on the aforementioned topic. The assessment for the report was done in June 2020 and highlighted the substantial and unprecedented deep impacts that the pandemic has had on the Ocean sector. The report provides three key conclusions: 1) the ocean sector has been disproportionately hit by COVID-19 economic impacts, 2) ocean sector recovery has mostly been absent in stimulus recovery plans, and 3) golden opportunities exist to stimulate immediate recovery and also enable much-needed action toward sustainable, resilient coastal and ocean ecosystems, communities, and economies. Ms. Lubchenco underlined five immediate opportunities mentioned in the report that can create jobs and bring economic relief, namely investing in 1) sewage and wastewater infrastructure for coastal communities, 2) coastal and marine ecosystem restoration and protection, 3) sustainable community-led non-fed mariculture, as well as incentivising 4) sustainable ocean-based renewable energy and 5) the transition to zero emission marine transport. She ended her speech by repeating the central narrative of the Panel: *the Ocean is not too big to fail, it is not too big to fix, but it is too big and too central to ignore.*

David Obura, Coastal Oceans Research and Development – Indian Ocean (CORDIO), provided regional reflections from the Western Indian Ocean as a follow-up from Ms. Lubchenco's presentation. Mr. Obura highlighted the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small-scale fishers in the region due to the reduced access to markets. Although there is a lack of statistics on the impacts on the local level, trends such as people migrating to rural areas are evident, which has resulted from the lack of jobs in the cities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Obura underlined that despite the many negative impacts, the postponements of meetings and international negotiations has given delegates more time to prepare for discussions. He also pointed out equality and equity concerns, given that the COVID-19 pandemic is not acting in isolation and that the African continent faces strong hardships as a result of the lockdowns.

Panel discussion:

- **Kerstin Stendahl**, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)



Ms. Stendahl stated that: "COVID-19 is not treating all the regions equally". Underlined from a governance perspective, the system is mostly postponing and delaying. Ms. Stendahl explained that collaborations are slowing down regarding governance mechanisms, as well as multilateral governance in general. This also means there is a certain sceptical view on whether confidentiality and diplomacy can be safeguarded and implemented. Ms. Stendahl also highlighted that we need to have a close look at the impact of COVID-19 on children and women from a gender mainstreaming point of view.

- **Chip Cunliffe**, AXA XL, Co-Chair Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance

Mr. Cunliffe pointed out that the need to bring investment into the Ocean space is very clear. There is a potential for economic growth in aquaculture, marine renewable energy, and maritime sectors and there is a real need to provide a financial value to marine regions through support from the finance industry. Mr. Cunliffe also pointed out the key role for the insurance industry, as seen by AXA developing risk models to integrate ecosystems and reduce the risk of IUU fishing activities.

Panel discussants commented that there are many good developments happening that could lead to a sustainable and equitable blue recovery.

Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, also provided a brief commentary, applauding the EU for including the sustainable blue economy as part of the European Green Deal and pleaded for making the ocean a central pillar of the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow.

Ms. Stendahl warned to not be too cynical when saying that the COVID-19 crisis comes with many opportunities given the strong human hardships. The financial flows need to be redirected and communities at the local level need to recognise that that Ocean is highly polluted and overexploited. Ms. Stendahl sees platforms such as the regional seas programmes as key platforms to reach consensus on these issues, but she admitted that such instruments struggle with funding because of new priorities.

3.4 Break-out group 1: COVID-19 socio-economic impacts and environmental consequences in marine regions

Session hosts: Barbara Neumann and Laura Weiland, IASS

Input statement by: **Maria Damanaki**, The Paradise International Foundation / SYSTEMIQ

The questions discussed in this session include:

1. On socio-economic and environmental impacts: What are the social and economic challenges facing marine regions due to COVID-19 and associated restrictions? How is the marine ecosystem being impacted (positive/negative)? What effects could these changes in the



environment have on socio-economics of marine regions? What impacts or effects are there for environmental management?

2. Responding to these challenges: Are there currently initiatives preparing global- or regional-scale collaborative (research) projects to achieve exactly this? In the context of what has been discussed, what are some practical recommendations for the short- to mid-term?

Key messages that emerged from the discussion:

On the main socio-economic and ecological challenges posed to marine regions (Question 1), the group noted:

- The environmental consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are still largely unknown given the lack of data. It is being assumed that the lockdowns related to curbing the pandemic have resulted in less pressure on the marine and coastal environments; however, there has also been a decrease in efforts to monitor and conserve the environment. What can be observed, though, is an increase of plastic pollution along coastlines and beaches, including from medical waste relating to the pandemic.
- The group discussed how different sectors are impacted in different ways, for example, livelihoods related to tourism, small-scale fisheries, and maritime affairs are the most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, while other sectors such as marine renewable energy are the least impacted. It was mentioned that small-scale fisheries are more heavily impacted than large industrial-scale fishing fleets, which is among others, due to the collapse of tourism and restaurants, which small-scale fisheries usually supply, or collapsed fishing trade with Asia. Compared to the large scale fisheries, small-scale fisheries lack access to the supply chain and can't compete with the packaging processes conducted by and available to industrial scale fisheries. Especially woman and young girls suffer strong hardships from the COVID-19 pandemic due to a shift in societal responsibilities to care for the unwell. Women are also a core driver of the small-scale fisheries value chain, so they are being directly impacted by the collapse of the sector. Interestingly, small tourism enterprises seem to be coping better than large tourism chains in some regions, for instance in coastal areas of the French Mediterranean.

On the question of possible responses to these challenges (Question 2), the group noted:

- Break-out group participants discussed that responses to the manifold of challenges could be implemented through: 1) private-public partnerships in order to leverage financial support, 2) creating the legal environment for 'good' investments, and 3) supporting innovation and science. It was emphasised that the money provided by States to curb the pandemic's effects should target economy, society, and the environment, and be used to create better solutions to prevailing issues such as sewage treatment, zero emission shipping or environmental restoration. So far, the ocean is not very present in these schemes, though.

3.5 Break-out group 2: Exploring options for immediate responses and longer-term recovery

Session hosts: Sebastian Unger, IASS and Glen Wright, IDDRI



Input statement by **Charlotte Karibuhoye**, MAVVA foundation

Questions discussed in this session include:

1. What are the main challenges faced in marine regions due to COVID-19, including social and economic as well as environmental?
2. How did States, maritime sectors and other relevant actors react to the current crisis? What is the state of play of recovery plans?
3. How could marine regions contribute to a "blue transformation" and drive the systemic change needed to build a sustainable ocean economy?
4. What actions should be taken to advance efforts for "building back better" at the scale of marine regions? What are the key actors and processes to be involved or engaged with?

Key messages that emerged from the discussion:

On the main challenges posed to marine regions and their immediate responses (Questions 1 and 2), the group noted:

- There have been wide-ranging impacts on many key sectors, including the complete collapse of many sectors in developing coastal communities. Fisheries have been particularly hard hit, resulting in social unrest in some areas. Where local communities have been involved the situation is often better and the management is more resilient.
- There is an opportunity to rebuild them sustainably; yet covid recovery plans have generally focused on jobs and the economy, with little reference to the ocean and ecosystem services.
- Ocean protection is often seen only through the lens of declining ocean ecosystems, but a healthy ocean also provides food security, transport, tourism, etc. and should rather be viewed as critical infrastructure.
- The pandemic has exposed underlying systemic issues, e.g. waste management and proliferation of plastic waste.
- Several regional organisations noted that they were able to move their regular meetings online and maintained their regular workflows.

On the question of supporting a sustainable long-term recovery (Questions 3 and 4), the group noted:

- In many parts of the world the main focus is on economic recovery, including the continuation of large scale and often unsustainable infrastructure projects. Only few countries have included projects related to biodiversity or climate change in their programmes. The potential of the ocean to contribute to a sustainable long-term recovery has not been widely recognized leaving a great opportunity so far largely untapped.
- High level commitments of States, e.g. under the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy or the High Ambition Alliance for Nature and People should be used to provide guidance for a sustainable "building back better" that in line with the 2030 Agenda and global biodiversity and climate targets.
- Regional cooperation will be essential to put in place and implement effective recovery plans, identify sustainable investment opportunities, providing technical support and linking and coordinating national efforts. There is also an opportunity for strategic assessments to be conducted at the regional level.



- There is a need to track investments and actions taken under recovery plans from a sustainability perspective.
- The need for specific proposals - projects/investments that can deliver multiple benefits while integrating and complementing climate and biodiversity action.
- Equity is critical and the recovery must consider the full range of impacts on communities.
- Regional collaboration should be used also to facilitate knowledge exchange and foster science-policy links in the context of the global pandemic.

3.6 Break-out group 3: Regional cooperation in the time of pandemic and possible consequences for ocean governance

Session hosts: Julien Rochette and Klaudija Cremers, IDDRI

Input statement by **Lorna Inniss**, Cartagena Convention Secretariat

Questions in focus:

1. What are the most impacted sectors in your region (e.g. tourism, fisheries, shipping)? What are the social and economic challenges faced in your region due to COVID-19?
2. What are the environmental consequences of the current crisis, e.g.: less pressures on ecosystems; environmental management issues (e.g. impacts on MPAs, monitoring, control and surveillance, and resource allocation);
3. What actions should be taken to compensate these impacts?

Key messages that emerged from the discussion (Questions 1 – 3):

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant differential impacts both between and within specific regions and therefore those impacts have to be considered when talking about recovery.
- The tourism sector, especially in island States that are particularly dependent on it, are highly affected by the crisis (such as through the loss of income, unemployment, social crisis). Governments tend to propose immediate, short-term answers without really including sustainability issues, especially those pertaining to the environment. Civil society as a whole must act as a watchdog for environmental issues, especially those related to SDG14 implementation.
- The group further discussed that there is a changing education landscape as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly in terms of ocean literacy. The group mentioned that there is a need to upscale capacity and development to address the capacity building training models that we have now, especially amongst stakeholders which are have less access to participate in capacity-building exercises.
- Recovery efforts should be supported by regional organisations. The financial gap must therefore be closed and the organizations strengthened. To that end, there is a need to leverage new and existing partnerships for innovative ways of financing for recovery. Integrated efforts of donors within regions are needed for maximum impact.



4 Closing plenary

The key messages from the break-out groups were reported back to plenary by the three discussants providing input statements to the group discussions:

Key messages from breakout groups:

- **Maria Damanaki**, The Paradise International Foundation / SYSTEMIQ, reported and reflected upon the discussions held in Group 1, noting:
 - The need to provide solutions that can meet various challenges simultaneously.
 - The pandemic has not affected sectors equally, so responses must be tailored to support those sectors most impacted.
 - (That) Equity and gender equality are critical.
 - The need for close cooperation, between national/regional/global actors, as well as with the private sector, e.g. through public-private partnerships.

- **Charlotte Karibuhoye**, MAVA foundation, concluded that:
 - The COVID-19 pandemic recovery plans have generally focused on jobs and the economy, with little reference to the ocean and ecosystem services. The ocean must be reframed as critical national infrastructure and put on the agenda wherever possible.
 - Regional cooperation will be key to effective recovery plans.
 - Equity is critical and responses need to consider full range of impacts on communities.

- **Lorna Inniss**, UN Environment Cartagena Convention Secretariat, emphasized that:
 - The Covid-19 pandemic is still in occurrence and we are not out of the midst of it.
 - Across and within marine regions, there is a level of competition for resources concerning the recovery plans.
 - It was noted that there is no one-size-fits-all given the differences in socio-economic and ecological characteristics of marine regions and coastal States, which should be taken into account when developing and implementing recovery plans.

In closing, workshop moderator **Alexander Müller** summarized that marine regions will have a key role to play in addressing the consequences of COVID 19 and moving towards a One Health approach – being the places where affected actors interact (socially and economically) but also from ecosystem perspective (resilience). Sustainable blue economy should be integral part of recovery processes. The rebuild of economic activities should be done in a way that it supports transformation towards a more equitable, more resilient and sustainable ocean economy, e.g. by investing in “no-regret” measures that help to meet regional environmental and sustainability targets (such as ecosystems restoration or NBS to combat climate change). Moreover, the global pandemic has reinforced the need for strengthening resilience of ocean systems, including adaptive and flexible governance systems. Cooperation and collaboration at meaningful scales are essential to ensure efficient, concerted and targeted action in this regard. Regional ocean governance plays a key role as a crucial link between global objectives and national competences, often at the ecosystem scale. Finally, Alexander Müller recalled that dialogue platforms like the Marine Region Forum (or CBD Sustainable Ocean Initiative)



are innovative tools that can provide the space needed for exchange and cooperation across sectors and boundaries. In the future they should support a sustainable and equitable blue recovery at the scale of marine region.

Closing statements

- **Heike Imhoff**, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety concluded that discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ocean governance is a challenging topic because the situation is still ongoing. Ms. Imhoff highlighted that bearing in mind the tremendous suffering that COVID-19 brought to the world, we have to be careful to talk about the crisis as an opportunity. At the same time it is clear that the recovery processes should be needed to make the needed change happen. According to Ms. Imhoff, the Marine Regions Forum has proven to be a great success to bring people together to link regions to the global level.
- **Jacob Hagberg**, Swedish Ministry of the Environment thanked everyone and announced that Sweden and the European Commission have agreed to support the next Marine Regions Forum. According to Mr. Hagberg, “there are already ideas flying to make it a successful meeting like the last [Marine Regions Forum in 2019]”.

Annex 1. Links shared by participants

- Ocean Panel website: <https://www.oceanpanel.org/bluerecovery> and <https://www.oceanpanel.org/climate>
- Systemic Global Compass: <https://www.systemiq.earth/system-change-compass/>
- Preventing the next pandemic - Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>
- FAO work on the impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture food systems is reported in the information paper “COFI/2020/Inf.3.2” prepared for COFI-34 (1-5 Feb 2021), available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ne814en/ne814en.pdf>
- UBA publications on the corona crisis:
 - <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/sustainable-pathways-out-of-the-corona-crisis>
 - <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/lessons-from-the-corona-crisis-new-guiding>
 - <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/publikationen/international-environmental-sustainability-policy>
- Blue Solidarity Economy in the Mediterranean - could be also interesting for other regional seas: <https://www.ecounion.eu/en/portfolio/economia-blava-solidaria-ebs/>



Annex 2. Agenda

<p>14.00-14.15 Welcome and introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by Sébastien Treyer and Alexander Müller on behalf of IASS, IDDRI and TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability
<p>14.15-14.30 Opening Statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lilian Busse, German Environment Agency (UBA) Veronika Veits, European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
<p>14.30-15.20 Setting the scene: the Ocean and the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jane Lubchenco, Oregon State University and Co-Chair of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy Expert Group David Obura, Coastal Oceans Research and Development – Indian Ocean (CORDIO) <p>Panel discussants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kerstin Stendahl, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Chip Cunliffe, AXA XL, Co-Chair Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance
<p>15.20-15.30 Break</p>
<p>15.30-16.45 Parallel break-out group sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 1: COVID-19 socio-economic impacts and environmental consequences in marine regions Session hosts: Barbara Neumann and Laura Weiand, IASS Group 2: Exploring options for immediate responses and longer-term recovery Session hosts: Sebastian Unger, IASS and Glen Wright, IDDRI Group 3: Regional cooperation in the time of pandemic and possible consequences for ocean governance Session hosts: Julien Rochette and Klaudija Cremers, IDDRI
<p>16:45-17.00 Break</p>
<p>17:00-17:30 Closing plenary</p> <p>Key messages from breakout groups by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maria Damanaki, The Paradise International Foundation / SYSTEMIQ Charlotte Karibuhoye, MAVA foundation Lorna Inniss, UN Environment Cartagena Convention Secretariat <p>Key conclusions by Alexander Müller</p> <p>Closing statements by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heike Imhoff, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety Jacob Hagberg, Swedish Ministry of the Environment