



Marine Regions Forum Online Workshop
Supporting Blue Recovery Through Regional Cooperation
Summary Report

Date: 6 October 2021

Time: 14.00-17.30 CET

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

IDDR: Sébastien Treyer, Julien Rochette, Klaudija Cremers, and Morgane Bouvet

TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability: Alexander Müller and Luise von Pogrell

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. The ocean community, and especially those who depend upon marine resources for their livelihoods, have been affected and the various consequences of the crisis are still being felt by many of them. Around the world, States and intergovernmental organisations have launched emergency and recovery plans. Many stakeholders have called for these plans to include provisions for the ocean, to take advantage of its enormous contribution to sustainable development pathways. Have these calls been heard in the different marine regions? To what extent do COVID-19 responses build on a sustainable blue recovery? How sustainable are the ocean-related actions for recovery, especially those promoted at the regional level? What is the role of regional actors and organisations in facilitating cooperative responses?

The aim of this workshop was to explore possible pathways for a sustainable blue recovery from COVID-19. It brought together actors from different marine regions to (i) discuss existing initiatives for a blue recovery of marine regions; (ii) assess the sustainability of such initiatives and (iii) explore options for regions to transition from emergency measures to sustainable recovery plans.

The online workshop built on the [Marine Regions Forum 2019](#) and the [January 2021 online workshop](#) “Ocean governance and COVID-19 – Building resilience for marine regions”. It was organised 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 Swedish Ministry of the Environment, the European Commission and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

2. Presentations and discussions

2.1. Welcome and introduction

The workshop was opened by the moderators, **Sébastien Treyer**, IDDRI and **Alexander Müller**, TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability.

Sébastien Treyer welcomed the participants and presented the Marine Regions Forum. He introduced the workshop by first pointing at the increasing discussions on the importance of the ocean in recovery initiatives through the blue economy. This raised question on the alignment of such recovery initiatives with sustainability objectives, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. What is the role of regional actors and organisations in such recovery initiatives and in facilitating cooperative responses and how should they be positioned?

Alexander Müller continued the introduction by mentioning that the Marine Regions Forum was established to bring actors, stakeholders, and sectors together across and within marine regions to facilitate integrated ocean governance approaches. The reason of this workshop is to gather participants’ experiences in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to build dialogue to support global and regional processes. What recommendations can be provided between the national, regional, and particularly the global level to tackle the challenges ahead of us?



2.2. Opening statements

Raphaël Goulet, European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) provided introductory remarks. He stated that the regional approach is essential in developing a coherent policy framework for recovery, and regional cooperation is considered as a red thread in the EU ocean governance strategies. It is recognised that sea basin strategies provide a good example of best practices in bringing added value to coordinated goals and policy implementation, bringing together different stakeholders, and effectively translating ambition into action. With reference to tourism as one of the key maritime sectors severely hit by the pandemic, he highlighted the need to develop appropriate economic and governance responses.

Catarina Hedar, Swedish Agency of Water and Marine Management (SwAM) continued the introduction by highlighting the role of Sweden in regional cooperation. The government of Sweden is a frontrunner in regional ocean governance, with an active role in United Nations Regional Seas Programmes and regional sectoral organisations such as the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). The government of Sweden also closely collaborates with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) and the Nairobi Convention in the Western Indian Ocean region. Regional actors can play a vital role in blue recovery, and multi-stakeholder platforms such as the Marine Regions Forum are very important in building dialogue and exchange. She concluded by saying that the discussions of this workshop are opportune with COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, the UN Environmental Assembly 5.2, and the UN Ocean Decade.

2.3. Current initiatives for a blue recovery of marine regions

Olivier Auguin, European Office, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), gave an overview of the current situation in the Pacific. He stated that although recovery plans are being made, many states especially in the Pacific are still in a state of emergency. Mr. Auguin drew lessons learnt from the Pacific context, where regional challenges were aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis: the access to quality health services is limited, tourism is a risk for small-island populations due to the movement of the virus, and there has been a significant impact on mental health and domestic violence. He then pointed to the important structural constraints in the Pacific, such as the geographic remoteness and associated dependence on foreign investment, the relative absence of the private sector, as well as other ongoing crises faced in the region such as the consequences of climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has also seen a shift in perspectives, as the population is more aware of their reliance on ocean ecosystems for livelihoods and of the need of protecting them. In terms of recovery, the regional approach is highly important for the Pacific due to the small size of the countries and other structural constraints mentioned above. Mr. Auguin concluded by mentioning the importance of sufficient and long-term financial means for adequate and effective recovery plans.

Karen Sack, Ocean Unite, continued by emphasising the question of investment. Finance needs to enable blue acceleration without increasing harm; governments spending addressing COVID-19 impacts should balance economic growth and the environment. As coastal communities have been hit



particularly hard by the pandemic, it is essential to consider gender disparity in recovery initiatives and to find financial tools to bring such communities out of debt, and thereby, building resilience. How can we invest in nature-based solutions and empower local communities in doing so? Referring to the OECD report, Karen Sacks pointed out that the international community has been extending official development assistance (ODA) to help SIDS tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Multilateral institutions have provided less than two billion US dollar in development aids for in small island developing states (SIDS) in 2020, which is very low, considering it is essential to build resilience in these communities and that they are among the worst hit developing economies in economic and fiscal terms. While international development cooperation efforts to support sustainable ocean economies are increasing, ODA to promote sustainable ocean economies only accounts for less than 1% of global ODA. Regions can play a critical role if recovery and sustainability are aligned. She ended her introductory remarks by mentioning that one of the biggest issues for private sector finance is that projects directed towards ocean governance and marine conservation are too often small. Regional cooperation and transboundary efforts could be leveraged to increase the potential for projects to be combined and supported.

Panel discussion:

- **Olivier Auguin, SPC**

Olivier Auguin acknowledged that the question of investment and financing is important but that the question of human capacity cannot be overlooked. In the Pacific region alone, there is not enough human capacity to set up projects.

- **Piera Tortora, OECD Sustainable Ocean for All**

Piera Tortora presented the work of the OECD on the current initiatives for a blue recovery of marine regions. The organisation launched the Sustainable Ocean for All initiative, to enhance recovery in small island developing states and other developing countries. As part of this, they are tracking official development assistance (ODA) spending, to see how much goes into the ocean economy and how much into restoring the ocean. There has been an increase of initiatives around the blue economy in recent years, with demands of developing countries for investments in this field. Together with the World Economic Forum and Friends of Ocean Action, the OECD is implementing “Blue Recovery Hubs” which brings together expertise from across these three institutions to support developing countries develop recovery plans that can leverage ocean economy sectors sustainably and enhance the conservation and sustainable use of ocean resources. The first Blue Recovery Hub will be launched in October in Fiji, with financial support from the UK.

Alexander Müller concluded this session by saying that the crisis is not over, and that as regions are facing multiple crises, investments should take the multitude of crises into account, such as both climate change and COVID-19, into account.

2.4. Break-out group 1: Building a Sustainable Future for Marine and Coastal Tourism

Session hosts: **Julien Rochette, IDDRI** and **Jérémie Fosse, Eco-Union**



Input statement by **Helena Rey**, UNEP.

The questions discussed in this session include:

- What should tomorrow's marine tourism look like?
 - What are the conditions for upscaling sustainable tourism practices?
 - How can States and regional organisations support the diversification of national economies strongly dependent on tourism revenues? How to incentivize sustainable investments in blue tourism?
- What role can regional cooperation play in promoting new models?

Key messages that emerged from the discussions:

- The COVID-19 pandemic had severe negative impacts on tourism, including on employment; suspension of funding for the management of marine protected areas (MPAs) and an associated increase in illegal activities within the latter due to less monitoring, control and surveillance; disruption of supply chains; effects on health and an increase of single use plastics. On the other hand, temporary reduction of carbon emissions, a decrease of overall pollution, and the digitalisation of the supply chains. The pandemic highlighted the dependency and fragility of international tourism;
- Pathways towards recovery are very heterogeneous. There are important differences in recovery between countries and regions, with some countries with weak economies unable to promote more sustainable tourism practices;
- Opportunities for “building back better” in the tourism sector are multiple: promoting small-scale and community-based tourism, increasing domestic tourism when possible and for the industry to build a relationship based on trust with local communities. There are, however, important challenges ahead, such as addressing a lack of capacity (both technical and financial), weak infrastructures, the lack of monitoring and data analysis of tourism activities, and the overall ecological footprint of the industry;
- There is a need to align the tourism industry with the global sustainable development agendas, including sustainable development goals (SDGs), biodiversity conservation targets, the Paris Agreement and gender, social equity, and youth agendas. Climate resilience needs to be included in recovery strategies. Government policies generally seem to lack progressive tourism narratives;
- The design and implementation of recovery plans needs to be carefully monitored. Supporting the development of local observatories and local governance fora to assess the environmental and socio-economic impacts of tourism could support the tracking of such plans;
- More regional cooperation around coastal and marine tourism is needed. Although regional economic communities can provide a space for regional cooperation, the fact that the sector is nationally governed by ministries of economy and development rather than environment and social ministries makes it challenging. Regional institutions, with adequate funding and a clear mandate can perform well for tourism recovery;



- Large corporations, civil society and funders need to be included in the dialogue about recovery, which should not be left solely to governments. In that regard, multi-stakeholders platforms are needed to drive change;
- Lastly, cooperation and coordination amongst donors would help increase impacts on the ground.

2.5. Break-out group 2: Transitioning from Emergency to Recovery

Session co-hosts: Sebastian Unger (IASS) and Takehiro Nakamura (UNEP).

During this breakout group, three questions were explored by the participants:

1. What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and what role can marine regions play in addressing the challenges?
2. What actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to maximise co-benefits/create synergies for multiple sustainability objectives (e.g., improved livelihoods, biodiversity, and ocean health) in marine regions?
3. What are sustainable pathways and strategies for marine regions to strengthen their resilience and lower their vulnerabilities against possible future shocks?

David Obura provided an introductory statement to the breakout group pertaining to what impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the ocean and coastlines, regarding the socio-ecological systems as well as how these can be addressed by coordinated regional action. It was highlighted that different scales (biological and ecological) should be understood to address challenges faced in the nature-climate-people nexus. In this regard, the One Health approach can provide a framework; however, this should be placed in a local or national context for it to have a transformative potential. Regional processes can assist the nexus approach and facilitate a better understanding place-based nature-human connections. It was further highlighted that nature-based solutions should be prioritized in shared spaces, rather than in isolated spaces to foster co-benefits for local populations which depend on intact and resilient ecosystems, from fisheries to farming. It was further stated that interventions implemented to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic should be made with the consideration of not having unintended negative impacts on the ecological or social systems. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can provide a suitable overarching approach in this regard in that achieving one SDG target or goal, no harm or compromise is caused on another SDG. It was stressed that the global goals, such as the Paris Agreement and decisions made at the Conference of Parties (COPs), can only be achieved through local action, and the regional level can enable national action to move forward.

During the discussion on question 1, participants exchanged on the following:

- When considering recovery plans, scale matters and approaches should be tailored. Participants shared that some states are focusing on national recovery to rebuild their ocean sectors (e.g., coastal tourism) and that the benefits of regional cooperation for recovery are not well understood or articulated.
- Benefits of the regional level include their ability to act as intermediaries between large scale investments and local projects and help frame and shape requests to donors. The regional level could also bring in investment and coordinate these such as to avoid dis-investments of processes



that facilitate a transformation towards sustainability. Despite its benefits, regional cooperation still encounters difficulties. The impacts of the pandemic as well as the regulations put in place to curb the spread differ between states making it difficult to find holistic solutions that simultaneously consider the internal diversities of regions and their specific needs and conditions.

On question 2, the participants discussed the following topics:

- To address more than one sustainability objective, a multi-national as well as a cross-sectoral approach is needed. Many countries however lack funding and multi-stakeholder engagement capacities. Inclusive and open spaces are needed where different actors can meet, exchange, and learn from each other while blue recovery roadmaps or toolboxes for individual regions could also be designed as part of such a space. It is further important for the regional level to deliver on coordinated action for states to recognize the value of the regional level.
- Context, good standards, and examples around nature-based solutions should be presented to countries that are not yet progressing. Synergetic approaches through natural capital and economy could help to convince States of the importance of regional level action. Further, indicators beyond GDP are needed to assess action on blue recovery.
- It is important to remember that many marine regions, and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in particular, are still in the emergency phase and may not have the capacity to transition toward recovery yet.

On question 3, the participants exchanged on the following:

- Climatic factors influence the emergence and reemergence of infectious diseases, in addition to multiple human, biological, and ecological determinants. To decrease vulnerability, regional risk assessments should be conducted as well as by designing adequate national and regional responses to those risks. Although the impacts of shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic can be best assessed on the regional scale, the full backing and “go ahead” on the national level is needed to move forward with the engagement of measures. Effective regional coordination can help channeling resources and building up the local assets (healthy ecosystems, stable economic activities, social and governance capital) so that marine regions are able to actively withstand future shocks. Ecosystem restoration can be a pathway to community-led ecosystem-based adaptation. Lastly, novel financial coordination mechanisms should be explored and implemented, such as blending ODA and public-private sector investments.

Annex: Links shared by participants

- Paper on multinational coordination for conservation of marine species: [Multinational coordination required for conservation of over 90% of marine species - Roberson - 2021 - Global Change Biology - Wiley Online Library](#)
- Paper on the integration of biodiversity targets from local to global levels: [Paper – access links | CORDIO \(cordioea.net\)](#)
- Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme website: [Home | PEUMP](#)
- ESCAP led project “Closing the Loop” addressing the global issue of plastic waste: [Closing the Loop | ESCAP \(unescap.org\)](#)



3. Closing plenary

The key messages from break-out group discussion were reported back to plenary by the two sessions' hosts, **Jérémie Fosse** for group 1 and **Barbara Neumann** for group 2.

Participants raised the question of how regional cooperation can support and facilitate financing at local levels, and build partnerships amongst academia, civil society, and the private sector.

In closing, workshop moderator **Alexander Müller** emphasised that the implementation of global objectives needs to be achieved through a combination of national action and regional cooperation, particularly when dealing with transboundary topics. Moreover, the question of engagement of the private sector is crucial.

Closing statement

Leticia Carvalho, UNEP Marine and Freshwater Branch, highlighted the need for roadmaps towards recovery. Monitoring, building knowledge and best practices for investment is highly important in that regard, particularly to facilitate investments in marine regions by different stakeholders. In that regard, innovative partnerships should be mobilized efficiently, between civil society, small and medium enterprises, and regional and international organisations. Moreover, regional seas organisations can play an important role in bringing together relevant actors within the region.

Alexander Müller emphasised again the key role of regional cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic was a strong wake-up call, particularly in the tourism sector, and lessons need to be learnt from it. Roadmaps towards recovery need to be developed. Potential investors should be able to easily find information on where and how to invest and could be supported through such roadmaps. Without a change in funding for regional cooperation and development, the regions will not be able to fulfil their mission; the international community needs to invest. Collecting information and monitoring on-the-ground projects is crucial to scale-up best practices. There needs to be a space for dialogue and exchange between different stakeholders, and the Marine Regions Forum is an important platform in that regard. Mr. Müller invited the participants to engage in the preparatory process of the upcoming second Marine Regions Forum conference in the Western Indian Ocean in 2022/2023, that aims to support transformative ocean action in the region, foster exchanges between marine regions, as well as from the regional to global level.

Annex I: links shared by the participants

The Data Platform on Development Finance of the Sustainable Ocean Economy of the OECD; <https://oecd-main.shinyapps.io/ocean/>

OECD policy responses to COVID-19 in small-island developing States report: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-pandemic-towards-a-blue-recovery-in-small-island-developing-states-241271b7/>



Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, report from CEPAL: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/46502/S2000751_en.pdf

Concept note on sustainable tourism for the post-pandemic recovery, UNCTAD: https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/gsf2021_Concept_Note_and_Programme_Session4_en.pdf and the associated video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gan-GOYiQVU&t=254s>

Civil Society Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of the Shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+ C-SAP), 2018-2030, CANARI: <https://www.canari.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/csapbookletenglishfinal.pdf>

Eco-Union Blue Tourism Initiative: <https://www.ecounion.eu/en/portfolio/blue-tourism/>

Sustainable Tourism Initiative in the Black Sea: <https://www.t4bs.eu/>

Paper on multinational coordination for conservation of marine species: [Multinational coordination required for conservation of over 90% of marine species - Roberson - 2021 - Global Change Biology - Wiley Online Library](#)

Paper on the integration of biodiversity targets from local to global levels: [Paper – access links | CORDIO \(cordioea.net\)](#)

Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme website: [Home | PEUMP](#)

ESCAP led project “Closing the Loop” addressing the global issue of plastic waste: [Closing the Loop | ESCAP \(unescap.org\)](#)

Annex II: Agenda

Moderators: Sébastien Treyer, Executive Director, IDDRI, and Alexander Müller, Founder & Managing Director, TMG Think Tank for Sustainability

13h45-14h00 - Check-in of participants
14h00- -14h15 - Welcome and Introduction by Sébastien Treyer and Alexander Müller on behalf of IDDRI, IASS, and TMG
14h15-14h30 - Opening statements <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Raphaël Goulet, Head of Unit, Ocean Governance, Law of the Sea, Arctic Policy, DG MARE, European Commission○ Catarina Hedar, Head of International Affairs, Swedish Agency of Water and Marine Management (SwAM)
14h30-15h00 - Current initiatives for a blue recovery of marine regions



- **Olivier Auguin**, Head of the European Office, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
- **Karen Sack**, President & CEO, Ocean Unite

15h00-16h30 - Breakout groups

- **Group 1: Building a Sustainable Future for Marine and Coastal Tourism**

Session hosts: **Julien Rochette**, IDDRI and **Jérémie Fosse**, Eco Union

- **Group 2: Transitioning from Emergency to Recovery**

Session hosts: **Barbara Neumann** and **Sebastian Unger**, IASS, and **Takehiro Nakamura**, UNEP

16h30-16h45 - Break

16h45-17h30 - Closing session

- Key messages from breakout groups
- Key conclusions and take-away messages from the moderators
- Closing statement by **Leticia Carvalho**, Head, Marine and Freshwater Branch, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)