

DOSI Participation Report: International symposium of the UN Regular Process on strengthening the ocean science-policy. 12-13 December 2023, IOC-UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France.

Overview

As part of the UN Regular Process and in view of preparations of the third edition of the World Ocean Assessment, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the UN Division of Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) organised a two-day international symposium on strengthening the ocean science-policy interface.

The symposium aimed to gather scientific and policy communities at all levels, including States and intergovernmental organisations with competence in the ocean science-policy interface, as well as relevant non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders, with expectations to deliver on the following outcomes:

- Increased awareness on the importance of the science-policy interface for ocean governance;
- Enhanced understanding and knowledge on the science-policy interface through dialogue among multiple stakeholders from all levels;
- Improved identification of regional and global lessons learned and priorities in reinforcing the science-policy interface;
- Strengthened awareness on the importance of compatibility and synergies between assessments at the global and regional levels within the framework of the [United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development \(2021–2030\)](#).

The full agenda can be viewed [here](#).

Key Takeaways

- 1) It was clear that the discussions were around science, policy AND society - an essential combination for optimal sustainable practices and outcomes.

- 2) The World Ocean Assessments (WOAs) identify knowledge gaps and the UN Decade for Ocean Science closes the gaps.
- 3) The WOAs bring a spotlight to the ocean and, alongside the UN Decade of Ocean Science, it is hoped that information therein will be useful for many policy processes such as the Plastics Treaty, BBNJ, UNFCCC, CBD, IPBES, etc. - connecting different pieces of the puzzle. WOAs also act to reinforce inclusiveness in science policy engagement, including via this symposium with representatives from across the globe. However, there is a need for improved communication about the WOAs more widely. It has been challenging to distil and capture information for non-specialist audiences. Natasha Berg has instigated and led a comms programme on social media and other avenues and this is gaining traction. It is important that communications experts are consulted from the outset in the formation of documents to policy makers as the work needs to resonate with all stakeholders - using diverse mediums and cultures. (We have also initiated this in DOSI). At national and local levels the WOAs also need to be visible with the messaging “how will this affect my family, community, country, etc?” The views of communicators are very important here in building connections between global and local levels. The WOA also promotes SDG14 - the least funded of the SDGs and yet critical for climate change action.
- 4) WOA III will look quite different from the two previous assessments. There will be a capacity-building element for developing ocean science-policy capacity by member states. This assessment will also use plain language so as to ensure it is accessible to a wide audience including decision makers. It will cover: What is the state of the ocean? What are the problems? What are the solutions (and realistic in a short period of time)? It will be a concise update with links to further information and data. Information was delivered around the nomination process to the Pool of Experts and opportunities for contributing.
- 5) Discussions ensued around how best to integrate science-policy given that wise policy decisions are rooted in science and knowledge - with a need to ensure ever stronger engagement between us all for optimum policy decisions. There was a clear message to scientists to share their knowledge and expertise (in close collaboration with policy makers to understand the need) to ensure optimal policy and management results. Also

for policy to drive science by asking specific questions of scientists. For example, it is clear that offshore wind is expanding and hence the need for impact assessments to inform management. Science is just one of a number of stakeholder inputs required and we must recognise the importance of 2-way feedback (ecosystem interactions among stakeholders). Regulations can drive science including in developing nations.

- 6) Scientists need to recognise that repetition of messaging for various policies at various times is key. We know this from examples in DOSI (e.g. climate text in BBNJ).
- 7) Ocean literacy (delivered by expert communicators) was a prominent theme throughout the symposium with presentations and discussion around the myriad ways to promote ocean issues (including WOA and UNOD) to demonstrate value to all citizens and to make research findings palatable for policy makers and citizens. Ocean literacy is not just the written word but also film, pictures, music, theatre, etc., so as to embrace that diversity too. We heard from social media influencers, eco activists, professional communications people and the IOC-UNESCO Ocean Literacy team. There were successful examples of citizen science approaches which aids ownership and through social media - engagement with daily lives is key. There was much discussion around the Ocean Teacher General Academy (OTGA) and examples of success on local levels. OTGA also trains people to understand ocean and policy, the challenges of managing oceans, and Decade challenges. Challenges for this learning include language constraints, travel expense and logistics. Nevertheless, almost 1500 people have attended courses since 2013 (53% women). Opening these up to SIDS will be their next challenge. Many agreed that ocean education from a very early age was critical for future engagement.
- 8) The importance of local knowledge to policy processes and regional engagement from the outset is a crucial way of generating interest and trust, adding value to the processes. There are a variety of ways of attaining this including local and regional citizen science programmes (successful examples were given for Australia and others).
- 9) Geopolitics often make it difficult to agree on global policies but the sharing of data is a good start and we should all actively advocate for this to support knowledge. It is critical that for sustainable ocean planning and management, all stakeholders need to be represented over all ocean conventions - to ensure understanding and ownership.

- 10)** Multiple panels of different stakeholders from policy, science, intergovernmental organisations and communications, from different nations and backgrounds, talked on regional examples of science and policy interactions (North Pacific, South Pacific, Indian Ocean, North Atlantic and South Atlantic). These insights were very useful to gain a feel for both the differences and similarities in the different regions, including challenges faced and successful interactions. Mechanisms and provisions set up to formalise science-policy interfaces in different regions were highlighted. In all regions, fragmentation of science-policy interfaces and endeavours abound so some important information can fall between the gaps, but there are opportunities to connect across regions (e.g., via Decade programmes such as Challenger 150) and BBNJ provides opportunities to address some of these issues, e.g., collaborative identification of ABMT.
- 11)** There was a strong call for empowering diverse voices into decision making processes. Christine Gaebel (DOSI BBNJ WG co-lead) highlighted DOSI initiatives for building policy literacy within DOSI, with confidence developed for scientists to enter into policy to share their knowledge. The WOA and UN Decade can drive forward new ways of looking at the ocean for many people - a tool to drive urgency and change. Levering global processes at the regional level can amplify their effectiveness in the long-term. Christine highlighted the Challenger 150 Decade programme with 12 science cruises endorsed by the programme in the region since 2021 which help drive collaboration and scientific research at a regional level. These panel presentations generated much discussion about ways forward for understanding and collaboration.
- 12)** A new [Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility](#) has been launched (building on IODE work) to share information and help develop capacity in ocean science and will also build other essential skills that individuals and institutions need to effectively work across the ocean science-policy nexus. This will be based around long-term holistic approaches and be a matchmaking exercise. Investment for the first 2 years of operations has been granted by Flanders Marine Institute, Belgium. The coordinator is Mary Frances Davidson (Iceland) who has extensive background in CD approaches - especially fisheries. The plan is to identify CD needs in the Decade programmes and establish a community of practice on CD within the network. *Investment in learning is never a waste.*

- 13) There was interesting mention of and discussion around the consideration of science expert fatigue. It is important to train scientists in policy. E.g., annual policy wish lists to universities (for students and beyond) with decision-maker co-supervisors. There was also mention that some governments may be wary of the motivation of scientists in their engagement in policy.

DOSI Member Participants: Maria Baker (representing DOSI), Christine Gaebel , Eva Ramirez-Llodra, Marcel Jaspars, Abbe Brown, Fuad Bateh, Pradeep Singh, Paul Snelgrove, Ina Tessnow-von Wysocki (representing themselves alongside DOSI and funded externally) from UK, Spain/Norway, Palestine, Malaysia/Germany, Canada and Germany.



From left to right: Christine Gaebel, Paul Snelgrove, Maria Baker, Marcel Jaspars, Abbe Brown, Pradeep Singh, Fuad Bateh, Eva Ramirez-Llodra, Ina Tessnow-von Wysocki

DOSI Actions

- This was a productive meeting for DOSI, not only to raise awareness of our work in this space with existing and new collaborators but also to enhance our overall understanding of regional issues with science-policy engagement and of the plans for the World Ocean Assessment III.

- DOSI and Challenger 150 were highlighted by Christine Gaebel in her responses to panel questions and also during discussions and networking during the 2 day symposium.
- DOSI was invited by the leads of the new International Panel for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS) to engage in an exclusive launch event for IPOS at L'Institut Océanographique de Monaco in Paris. As a result, further discussions around how DOSI can work with IPOS are scheduled for January 2024.
- New links were made with colleagues who are interested in joining DOSI - including 3 African colleagues who will join DOSI and the C150 African Network of Deep-Ocean Researchers (from Togo, Tanzania and Nigeria). Ad-hoc meetings were also held with delegates including the programme manager of the new UNOD Capacity Development Facility (Mary Frances Davidson), the UNESCO Ocean Literacy lead (Francesca Santoro).
- We will work to encourage further engagement from our DOSI network members in World Ocean Assessment III as they are still calling for members of the pool of experts - there are gaps to be filled in terms of representation of Africa and eastern Europe groups in particular but author engagement from global experts is also required. Call ends at the end of January 2024.
- We will explore opportunities for DOSI to further engage in OTGA for deep-ocean science and policy capacity development.