

INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

**REPORT OF THE IOC WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE OCEAN PLANNING AND
MANAGEMENT DURING THE INTERSESSIONAL PERIOD (2024–2025)**

Summary

By IOC Decision A-32/Dec.4.7, the Assembly in 2023 took note of the scope and process for developing the 'IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (SOPM)' for the period 2024–2030 (cf. [IOC/A-32/4.7.Doc\(1\)](#)). In 2024, a draft strategy was presented to Member States at the 57th session of the IOC Executive Council in document [IOC/EC-57/4.3.Doc\(1\)Rev.](#), which was based on the contributions of IOC Member States collected during two online consultations held in May 2024 and summarized in document [IOC/INF-1537](#).

Working document [IOC/A-33/4.1.Doc\(1\)](#) presents the 'revised draft of the IOC-wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (2025–2030) and its Implementation Plan' to the IOC Assembly at its 33rd session (June 2025).

This information document complements the above-mentioned document and presents the report of the IOC Working Group on SOPM that was established by the IOC Executive Council in 2024. The Working Group held two online consultation meetings in February and April 2025 and one in-person meeting in March 2025.

At its 32nd session, the **IOC Assembly** took first note of the **scope and process for developing the IOC-wide Strategy** on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (SOPM) for the period 2024–2030 through document IOC/A-32/4.7.Doc(1), and requested the IOC Secretariat to collect inputs from Member States, IOC programmes and technical bodies, and other relevant stakeholders, and to present a revised document to the IOC Executive Council at its 57th session in 2024.

The **draft IOC-SOPM Strategy** was **presented to the 57th session of the IOC Executive Council**, through document IOC/EC-57/4.3.Doc(1).Rev. The draft IOC-SOPM Strategy was based on input solicited through IOC Circular Letter [2968](#), and a survey that was developed and rolled out to better understand the existing landscape for SOPM and to identify needs of stakeholders regarding technical and scientific support. Inputs received were synthesized in document IOC/INF-1537 and its addendum and two online consultation meetings were organized with IOC Member States in May 2024.

The IOC Executive Council, through decision EC-57/4.3, instructed the establishment of the **IOC Working Group on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management** with the task, *inter alia*, to finalise the draft IOC-SOPM Strategy and Implementation Plan. The Working Group met three times, online on 6 February and 10 April 2025 and in person on 4–6 March 2025, and provided feedback through two additional consultation rounds. **The Working Group adopted the final draft of the IOC-SOPM Strategy and Implementation Plan on 18 April 2025.**

The SOPM Working Group is composed of experts appointed by Member States and representatives from IOC programmes and sub-regional commissions. It is chaired by Ms Marinez Scherer (Brazil) and Mr Gunnar Finke (Germany). New Terms of Reference for the Working Group are presented for adoption by the 33rd IOC Assembly session in annex to draft decision A-33/4.1 available in document [IOC/A-33/AP Prov.](#) The revised Terms of Reference aim at providing a mechanism to guide, review, and where necessary adapt, the implementation of the IOC-SOPM Strategy during the period 2025–2030.

The IOC-SOPM Strategy aligns with **IOC's foundational mandate** as described in the IOC Statutes, Article 2.1 (Purpose):

“To promote international cooperation and to coordinate programmes in research, services and capacity-building, in order to learn more about the nature and resources of the ocean and coastal areas and to apply that knowledge for the improvement of management, sustainable development, the protection of the marine environment, and the decision-making processes of its Member States”

The IOC-SOPM Strategy will continue to defend the objectives of the IOC, relying on science and research as the foundation for the political and decision-making processes of Member States. It will bridge the gap between the IOC's in-depth scientific work and its role as a provider of data and knowledge to support the policies and management of Member States.

The IOC-SOPM Strategy will act as a **guiding and harmonizing framework for IOC's work across its various programmes and initiatives** to enhance its collective capacities in addressing current and emerging ocean concerns. This harmonized approach aims to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and promote planning and management practices and methods, thereby reinforcing IOC's commitment to supporting its Member States strengthen coastal resilience and provide science- and knowledge-based support tools and data- and evidence-based solutions.

The strategy responds to the 2021 **IOS Evaluation of the IOC strategic positioning** [IOS/EVS/PI/197](#), which highlighted the increasing importance of IOC in supporting the UN Ocean Decade to deliver sustainable management of the ocean. The evaluation included six recommendations and suggested actions, including:

“...(with) 2030 Agenda, IOC-UNESCO’s role only increases in importance. The Decade is thus an opportunity for IOC-UNESCO to reaffirm its global leading position and relevance to the Member States of UN Oceans, to policy makers and to the world at large in helping to bring about more sustainable management of the ocean”

The IOC-SOPM Strategy further aligns with the **IOC Medium-Term Strategy, 2022–2029** ([IOC/INF-1412](#)), which sets out five high-level objectives, including the development of services and tools for the responsible growth of a sustainable ocean economy by 2030 and a focus on building institutional, human, and technical capacities for sound management and governance of the ocean and human activities.

The IOC-SOPM Strategy also seeks to intensify capacity development efforts across all aspects of SOPM in close alignment with the **IOC Capacity Development Strategy, 2023–2030** ([IOC/INF-1433](#)), which identified six outputs, including the development of ocean research policies in support of sustainable development objectives and the increase of visibility, awareness, and understanding on the roles and values of the ocean and ocean research in relation to human wellbeing and sustainable development.

The IOC-SOPM Strategy is also consistent with the goals and objectives of the **United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development** and will contribute to the **Decade programme on Sustainable Ocean Planning**, which was launched at the [Ocean Decade Conference](#) in 2024. The IOC-SOPM Strategy will enable the IOC to contribute more systematically to this Decade programme by stimulating the creation of partnerships that actively contribute to achieving the IOC-SOPM mission and vision.

The IOC-SOPM Strategy will be implemented concurrently with the **IOC and the Future of the Ocean Consultation process** (IOC/A-33/5.3.Doc(1) & [Doc\(2\)](#)) to which it will provide insights with regards to IOC’s future role in advancing science-based SOPM. The consultation processes started in June 2024 for three years and has three phases. The consultation aims at gaining an understanding of the perceived, under-served needs of IOC’s Member States and partners in relations to: (i) science-based sustainable ocean planning; (ii) ocean science to support implementation of relevant UN Conventions and frameworks; and (iii) the development of a sustainable ocean economy. The consultation process will ensure regular feedback with the SOPM working group and exchanges will be held with the SOPM working group co-chairs.

The IOC-SOPM Strategy will also support the global political momentum for SOPM that is evolving through the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy’s Ocean, and its 100% Alliance¹ aimed at **100% of ocean areas** under national jurisdiction to be **sustainably managed by 2030**. At the time of writing, 18 countries have taken a high-level commitment to bring their ocean areas under sustainable ocean plans and management. Combined, these nations account for nearly 40% of the world’s Exclusive Economic Zones, 20% of the world’s shipping fleet and 18% of the world’s fisheries. The expected outcome by 2030 is to provide a credible basis for safeguarding the long-term health and resilience of the ocean, attracting investment and creating jobs to the benefit of coastal communities and national economies.

New Terms of Reference for the **SOPM Working Group** are proposed for adoption by the 33rd IOC Assembly **to guide implementation and evaluate progress** of the IOC-SOPM Strategy and Implementation Plan. Membership of the Working Group will be composed of: (i) experts that will be nominated by IOC Member States through a call by circular letter that will define the expertise required; (ii) representatives of IOC programmes and regional bodies; and (iii) observers from partner organizations with a focus on SOPM. Expert members will be appointed for an initial two-year period, renewable once for an additional two years. The designated co-chairpersons will be elected on a rotating basis, for an initial two-year period, with a maximum of two consecutive terms.

¹ <https://oceanpanel.org>

The working group will function for the period 2025–2030, which aligns with the IOC-SOPM's Strategy's timeline. The working group will work primarily by correspondence and will meet in-person once a year. The proposed Terms of Reference for the working group include:

1. Monitor the implementation of the SOPM Strategy and Implementation plan, and guidance in the regular assessment of user-needs in the area of SOPM;
2. Update the IOC-SOPM Strategy (in 2027, linking with the results of the 'IOC and the Future of the Ocean consultations') and Implementation Plan (for 2028–2030) as relevant;
3. Advising on identifying emerging needs and science, data and knowledge issues with potential implication for SOPM practitioners;
4. Advising on the design and delivery of IOC activities in support of the SOPM Strategy;
5. Advising on the IOC contribution to the UN Ocean Decade Programme on Sustainable Ocean Planning;
6. Advising on the 'IOC and the Future of the Ocean' Consultation process' (2024–2027) as it relates to SOPM;
7. Providing inputs to the development of the IOC Medium-Term Strategy processes, to be initiated in 2027;
8. Undertaking any endeavour as requested by the IOC Governing Bodies.

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
7, Place de Fontenoy
75 732 Paris 07 SP, France
<http://ioc.unesco.org>