



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
COMMISSION OCÉANOGRAPHIQUE INTERGOUVERNEMENTALE  
COMISIÓN OCEANOGRÁFICA INTERGUBERNAMENTAL  
МЕЖПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННАЯ ОКЕАНОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ КОМИССИЯ

اللجنة الدولية الحكومية لعلوم المحيطات

政府间海洋学委员会

UNESCO – 7 Place de Fontenoy - 75352 Paris Cedex 07 SP, France  
<http://ioc.unesco.org> - contact phone: +33 (0)1 45 68 03 18  
E-mail: [v.ryabinin@unesco.org](mailto:v.ryabinin@unesco.org)

**IOC Circular Letter No 2951**

(Available in English, French, Russian, Spanish)

IOC/VR/HE/FS/pbo

12 July 2023

To : Official National Coordinating Bodies for liaison with the IOC

C.c. : Permanent Delegates/Observers Missions to UNESCO, and  
National Commissions for UNESCO of IOC Member States  
Chair and Vice-Chairpersons of IOC  
Officers of Major Subsidiary Bodies of IOC

**Subject: Call to include Ocean Literacy in school curricula by 2025  
as a part of the Education for Sustainable Development**

Ocean Literacy is a major opportunity to highlight importance of the ocean to general public, inspire a new generation of ocean scientists and marine practitioners. At the One Ocean Summit 2022 in Brest, the UNESCO Director-General of UNESCO, Ms Audrey Azoulay stated that:

*“the international community must make education one of the pillars of its action for the ocean. Because if we want to protect it better, we must teach it better. On the occasion of the One Ocean Summit, I am setting a common goal for our 193 Member States: to include ocean education in school curricula by 2025.”*

On the International Day of Education 2022, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO published the release [90](#) in the series of IOC Manuals and Guides, entitled *A new blue curriculum: A Toolkit for policy-makers*. Developed jointly with the UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE), the document aims to provide Member States with recommendations and guidelines on how to incorporate Ocean Literacy in educational curriculum frameworks. The work continued at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in 2022, where IOC and IBE organized a workshop on the Blue Curriculum implementation ([298](#)). Experts with diverse backgrounds including curriculum authorities and developers, policymakers, came from 12 Member States to discuss advocate for ocean literacy and strengthen coordinated action.

The UNESCO/IOC *Blue Curriculum*, which should be seen in the context of wider UNESCO efforts to promote Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), aims to facilitate and promote a whole-school approach to ocean knowledge content, while also supporting awareness and appreciation of indigenous and traditional knowledge intrinsic to such UNESCO frameworks as the 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage or the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

**Chairperson**

Dr Yutaka MICHIDA  
Professor  
Atmosphere and Ocean Research  
Institute, The University of Tokyo  
Kashiwanoha 5-1-5  
2778564 Kashiwa  
JAPAN

**Executive Secretary**

Dr Vladimir RYABININ  
Intergovernmental Oceanographic  
Commission — UNESCO  
7 Place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris Cedex 07 SP  
FRANCE

**Vice-Chairpersons**

Dr Marie-Alexandrine SICRE  
Directrice de Recherche  
Centre national de la recherche scientifique  
(CNRS)  
3 rue Michel Ange  
75016 Paris  
FRANCE

Dr Nikolay VALCHEV  
Director  
Institute of Oceanology  
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences  
40 Parvi May Str.  
9000 Varna  
BULGARIA

Mr Juan Camilo FORERO HAUZEUR  
Executive Secretary  
Colombian Ocean Commission (COO)  
Avenida Ciudad de Cali No. 51 – 66  
Edificio WBC, Oficina 306  
111071 Bogotá, D.C.  
COLOMBIA

Dr Srinivasa Kumar TUMMALA  
Director  
Indian National Centre for Ocean  
Information Services (INCOIS)  
Pragathi Nagar (BO), Nizampet (SO)  
Hyderabad 500090  
INDIA

Prof. Amr Zakaria HAMOUDA  
President  
National Institute of  
Oceanography and Fisheries  
(NIOF)  
Qaitbay, Al-Anfوشي  
Alexandria  
EGYPT

An ocean literacy curriculum also presents an additional opportunity for more cross-cutting themes such as digital literacy, the transformation of educational spaces, as well as support diversity and inclusion in the school space. Updated content will additionally support science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and art education.

Annexed to this Circular Letter you will find an inspiring letter about Ocean Literacy by the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, His Excellency Ambassador Peter Thomson. His contribution has been essential in taking ocean at the forefront of UN activities. Ambassador Thomson offers support for the Blue Curriculum advocacy and outreach.

The development of school curricula is a very comprehensive process, and I am writing to ask you to support the inclusion of the ocean in school curricula as part of education for sustainable development. In order to take stock of progress in including ocean science content in school curricula, I would ask you to please fill in the online form at:

<https://forms.microsoft.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Uq5PHbM5-kuwswlpVrERIO33IOwTwy1GoCC6Di3Smn1UQzU2MVdKVFIVQIZJTTBRUThPMTNGN1IISC4u>

I would also like to offer support of the IOC Secretariat to Member States in:

1. Advocating for the promotion of a Blue Curriculum within Educational Ministries, National Specialized Agencies, and Secretaries by 2035;
2. Encouraging all regions to embed Ocean Literacy in national educational frameworks including syllabuses, textbooks, and lesson plans;
3. Ensuring that Ocean Literacy is adapted to local realities allowing conscious decision-making regarding the ocean;
4. Organizing locally tailored Blue Curriculum training in the local national language, which can encourage efforts at the national level and help with coordinated action around the world; and
5. Holding training workshops and develop resource materials in different languages.

Lastly, let me inform you that the UNESCO-IOC has started a consultation with the IOC Officers, with the UNESCO Education Sector, and other relevant stakeholders about organizing a World Conference on Ocean Literacy to be held in 2024. Your support here will be extremely valuable.

Requests for information and clarifications on the content of this circular letter can be addressed to Ms Francesca Santoro, IOC Senior Programme Officer for Ocean Literacy ([f.santoro@unesco.org](mailto:f.santoro@unesco.org)).

I take this opportunity to thank IOC Member States, which are already contributing to and engaging in the IOC activities in this field.

Yours sincerely,

*[signed]*

Vladimir Ryabinin  
Executive Secretary

Enclosure: Letter from the UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean to the IOC Executive Secretary



**UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean  
United Nations**

H.E. Vladimir Ryabinin  
Executive Secretary  
IOC/UNESCO  
Paris

20 June 2023

Dear Executive Secretary,

In the course of preparations for the next UN Ocean Conference, to be held in Nice in June 2025, I am drawing your attention to the need for inclusion of ocean literacy in the curriculum frameworks of UN Member States. Despite the fact that ocean is inextricably connected to human health, provides the basis of climate regulation and our food systems, and consistently inspires art, literature, and cultural practices across the world, it is currently remarkably misunderstood, under-represented or absent from school curricula.

As you well know, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) represents a unique moment for us to come together as a global community to address solutions to the challenges our ocean is facing. As the mantra goes, the Ocean Decade must give us the science we need for the ocean we want. It is clear that inclusion of the ocean's place in school curricula around the world is essential if we are going to achieve ocean literacy and lay better foundations for ocean science. Ocean literacy is undeniably a key element in unlocking equitable ocean science, inspiring youth, and ensuring that ocean-related education is delivered to all students regardless of circumstances.

I believe we must acknowledge that the ocean is not sufficiently emphasized in formal education. On the occasion of the second edition of the Ocean Literacy Dialogues, organized in the context of the IMPAC5 conference, I had the opportunity to engage in debates held in Canada in the framework of the "Ocean Literacy With All" initiative. During this event, I clearly heard the frustrations of educators and ocean literacy practitioners regarding the lack of ocean-related topics in scholastic curricula. This observation underscored a recurring theme I have heard throughout my time as UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, namely the need for urgent attention to be given to the inclusion in our academic institutions of the ocean's central place in human and planetary well-being.

Embracing ocean literacy through a whole-school approach will ultimately lead to universal recognition that the ocean is crucial for the survival of humankind on Planet Earth. In so saying, I reiterate my core belief that there can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean's health is currently measurably in decline. Enabling ocean literacy will provide

.../...

the necessary tools for Member States to stop this decline by aligning a “Blue Curriculum” into their national priorities that will support competencies, nature connectedness, and positive values respecting the ocean.

Permit me to recall the goal of including ocean education in school curricula made by UNESCO Director General, Ms Audrey Azoulay, at the One Ocean Summit in Brest in February 2022. I recall this announcement followed the launch of the publication “A New Blue Curriculum: A Toolkit for Policy-Makers”. The latter provides guidance for authorities and curriculum developers in support of the twin goals of teaching and learning more about the ocean, and co-delivering solutions to the threats it faces.

As UNSG’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, I urge the taking of concrete steps towards the promotion of a Blue Curriculum. And as a firm advocate for ocean literacy, I stand ready to work closely with the IOC/UNESCO and other relevant partner agencies, including the International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO), to ensure ocean literacy reaches all corners of the world. For success to be achieved in this global exercise, it is essential that mobilisation of advocacy commences, including diplomatic engagement and public outreach efforts. Development of specialized training for curriculum developers, teachers, and curriculum experts, along with calls for relevant authorities to support the promotion of ocean-related content in their national scholastic curricula, are essential elements in developing a Blue Curriculum.

Some concrete steps that could be taken together are:

1. the development of appropriate training programs for the Education Ministries and representatives of countries;
2. political advocacy to encourage international collaborations for the organization of an Ocean Literacy World Conference in 2024;
3. fomenting international support for the UN Ocean Conference 2025 to highlight the importance of a Blue Curriculum.

I believe your support in these areas will go a long way in promoting a Blue Curriculum in support of Agenda 2030. Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and I look forward to your support in elevating ocean literacy in the school curricula of the world.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Thomson  
United Nations Secretary General’s Special Envoy for Ocean