



**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION**  
(of UNESCO)

**Thirty-third Session of the Assembly**  
UNESCO, 25 June–3 July 2025

Item 4.8 of the Provisional Agenda

**REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE DECADE ADVISORY BOARD**

Summary

This document provides a proposed revised Terms of Reference for the Decade Advisory Board that would take effect from 1 January 2026. The revised Terms of Reference have been developed primarily to increase the strategic focus of the Board and clarify issues around membership of individuals and representatives of UN agencies in keeping with the IOC Executive Secretary's management response to the Ocean Decade mid-term evaluation findings. The revised Terms of Reference for the Decade Advisory Board is an important first response to the mid-term evaluation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

1. The mid-term evaluation of the Ocean Decade that was carried out by UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service (IOS) resulted in seven high level recommendations to improve the delivery and impact of the Ocean Decade during the second half of its implementation. The first of these recommendations related to the need to streamline and strengthen governance and coordination of the Ocean Decade, including through an increased strategic role for the Decade Advisory Board. The IOC Management Response to the evaluation accepted this recommendation and during [Meeting No. 02/2025](#) of the Decade Advisory Board (May 2025) a working session was held to discuss the revision of the Terms of Reference.

2. The draft revised Terms of Reference are presented hereafter. They seek to increase the strategic role of the Board including in the areas of resource mobilisation, engagement of stakeholders and science to policy impact, as well as providing additional clarification and strengthening of the role, and potentially the number, of UN agency representatives on the Board. They also integrate procedural updates including provisions to replace non-active Board members.

3. The draft revised Terms of Reference have been reviewed by the current Board members and would come into effect with the next cohort of the Board in January 2026. Decade Actions.



2021 United Nations Decade  
2030 of Ocean Science  
for Sustainable Development

## **Advisory Board of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the Decade Advisory Board)**

### **Draft Revised Terms of Reference (April 2025)<sup>1</sup>**

The Advisory Board of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the “Decade Advisory Board”) is established as a technical advisory body to the Secretariat and Governing Bodies of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.

These revised Terms of Reference take effect from 1 January 2026.

### **Role of the Decade Advisory Board**

The Decade Advisory Board is responsible for providing strategic advice and guidance on the implementation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (‘the Ocean Decade’) over its ten-year implementation phase (2021–2030). It reports to IOC Governing Bodies and the IOC Executive Secretary on strategic, technical and resource issues relevant to the implementation of the Ocean Decade, as well as providing advice on the endorsement of Decade Actions and scoping of Calls for Decade Actions. In accordance with the Ocean Decade Implementation Plan, the outcomes of the Vision 2030 process, and the management response to the Ocean Decade Mid-Term Evaluation, the Decade Advisory Board will carry out the following:

- (i) Provide guidance on identifying gaps and priority areas in ocean science, knowledge, innovation and resource mobilization in alignment with global and Member States’ needs, challenges and emerging opportunities;
- (ii) Advise on means of fostering partnerships, enhancing knowledge exchange, and facilitating the transfer of scientific results, knowledge, and technology to end-users;
- (iii) Provide guidance on resource mobilisation approaches and actions both for coordination of the Ocean Decade and to reinforce the investment and financing landscape for Decade Actions, and support outreach efforts to potential resource providers in order to achieve the ambitions of the Decade;
- (iv) Advise on the engagement and outreach strategy of the Decade in order to help catalyse high-level interest and engagement among key stakeholders, including Member States, UN Agencies, business, civil society and academia to ensure the achievement of the Ocean Decade vision and mission;
- (v) As a group, and as individual members, act as champions and spokespersons for the Ocean Decade including its vision, mission, and strategic priorities;
- (vi) Guide and advise on the implementation of the IOC Executive Secretary’s management response to the Ocean Decade mid-term evaluation process, support the scoping of the final evaluation of the Ocean Decade, and make

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<sup>1</sup> Presented to the IOC Assembly at its 33<sup>rd</sup> session (June 2025) as part of Agenda Item 4.8: Implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)

recommendations on the implementation of the findings and recommendation of that evaluation;

- (vii) Advise on the means to ensure leadership and active engagement of relevant stakeholder communities, with priority given to early career ocean professionals, individuals and institutions in Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, Indigenous peoples and local communities, and similarly under-represented groups;
- (viii) Advise on the measures and approaches to optimize synergies amongst and strengthen the impact of Decade Actions, decentralized coordination structures, and National Decade Committees and advise on the means of reinforcing relevant pathways to impact that ensure that science and knowledge generated through the Ocean Decade informs decision making. This includes through a range of engagement mechanisms as required in targeted and relevant interactions with Decade Actions, decentralized coordination structures, and National Decade Committees;
- (ix) As requested by the Executive Secretary, monitor the progress and review the outputs of any working groups established by the IOC Secretariat related to structural and cross-cutting operational elements of the Decade Implementation Plan;
- (x) Review and make recommendations to the IOC Executive Secretary on the endorsement of Decade Programmes;
- (xi) Advise the IOC Executive Secretary on the scope of Calls for Actions under the Decade to support the mobilisation of proponents;
- (xii) Provide information to the IOC Executive Secretary to enable his reporting to the IOC Governing Bodies; and
- (xiii) Report as needed to the Governing Bodies in relation to strategic issues.

### **Chairing of the Decade Advisory Board**

The Decade Advisory Board will appoint two Co-chairs amongst its members, ideally one representing the science fields and another one representing the societal end-users of the Decade. The Co-chairs will be appointed by the IOC Executive Secretary for one year with the possibility of a second one-year term.

### **Decision-making process and organization of work**

The Decade Advisory Board will strive for consensus on all issues in providing recommendations and advice to the IOC Executive Secretary. The minutes of the meeting will record any instances when consensus was not reached.

The working language of the Board will be English. No interpretation will be provided.

### **Decade Advisory Board Membership**

The Decade Advisory Board will comprise up to 15 expert members serving in their individual capacity drawn from government, private sector, philanthropy, civil society, and the scientific community, as well as representatives of UN Agencies. In total, the Decade Advisory Board should not exceed 25 members, including Expert members and UN representatives. All members of the Decade Advisory Board have the same status, roles and responsibilities unless specified below.

### Expert Members

Expert members will be nominated through open calls for nominations. The calls will be circulated through the following means:

- IOC Member States via IOC Circular Letters;
- Relevant UN bodies via UN-Oceans;
- Scientific networks using formal and informal communication mechanisms;
- Dedicated ocean policy, business, and sustainable development networks through announcements; and
- The Ocean Decade and IOC website.

Proposals for nominations can be made by IOC-UNESCO and United Nations Member States or United Nations entities, as well as intergovernmental organizations. Self-nomination will also be possible to encourage nominations from non-governmental entities.

Expert members will be selected with due consideration to expertise, geographic, generational, and gender balance and will serve on a voluntary basis in their personal capacities. Expert members do not represent their institutions or countries. They should be able to commit sufficient time to the work of the Decade Advisory Board, including attendance at the annual in-person meeting, and will take the responsibility to request the authorization of their employer to participate in this process. Depending on available budget, some expert members may be supported by the Decade Coordination Unit for travel expenses associated with the in-person meetings of the Board.

A Selection Panel convened by the IOC Executive Secretary and composed of the IOC Chair and elected IOC Officers representing the five IOC electoral groups, with the technical support of the Decade Coordination Unit, will be tasked with selecting the expert members of the Decade Advisory Board.

The Selection Panel will ensure that the proposed expert members have sufficient skills, knowledge, influence and impartiality regarding the vision and objectives of the Decade and are able to undertake the work outlined in the terms of reference. Their skills and expertise should cover at least one of the following areas:

- (i) Intergovernmental processes and coordination;
- (ii) Ocean aspects of sustainable development;
- (iii) Ocean science (natural / social dimensions);
- (iv) Science-policy / decision / end-user interface and engagement;
- (v) Ocean Economy / finance/ partnerships;
- (vi) Resource mobilisation and financing of ocean science;
- (vii) Innovation / technology/ infrastructure development;
- (viii) Capacity development, training and transfer of marine technology, education, communications and outreach; and/or
- (ix) Development of large-scale multi/inter-disciplinary international programmes / projects.

### UN Agencies representation on the Decade Advisory Board

UN agencies will be represented on the Board in an institutional capacity. UN Legal Counsel/DOALOS, which is the Secretariat and focal point of UN-Oceans and the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, will have one permanent seat on the Decade Advisory Board. The IOC Secretariat as coordinator of the Decade will also have a permanent seat on the Board. Additional seats will be reserved for UN Agencies who have expressed interest to join the Board and who will be identified through biennial consultations via UN-Oceans. UN agencies are expected to self-fund their participation in the Board.

### **Selection and Membership Term**

Expert membership on the Decade Advisory Board will be for a two-year term, renewable for a second mandate. Members' terms will be staggered to ensure there is information exchange and mentoring between current and new Board members. Operational procedures for this process will be defined with the Board and its co-chairs. UN Members will be identified through a biennial Call for Expressions of Interest using the established procedures with UN Oceans.

Each Member shall comply with the Conflict of Interest guidelines to be prepared by the Secretariat and notify the Decade Coordination Unit with respect to any such potential conflicts.

### **Secretariat of the Decade Advisory Board**

The Decade Coordination Unit located within the IOC Secretariat will be the Secretariat for the Decade Advisory Board.

### **Meetings of the Decade Advisory Board**

The Decade Advisory Board shall meet four (4) times per year, with at least one (1) *in presentia* meeting annually when possible. Additional in-person or virtual meetings will be held as necessary. The agenda of the meetings will be co-created by Board members under the leadership of the co-chairs with the support of the Decade Coordination Unit. Agendas should include the expected outcomes and decisions for each meeting as well as any pre-meeting tasks or documentation for Members.

The Decade Advisory Board may invite external experts or create ad-hoc task groups as needed to address specific issues. The decision to invite these external experts or establish such groups would be a decision of the Board.

Minutes of the Board meetings will be developed and distributed by the Secretariat for the Decade Advisory Board. These will be made public on the Ocean Decade website.

Expert Members of the Decade Advisory Board must attend meetings themselves without replacements. UN agencies can change their nominated institutional representative with advance notice by email to the Decade Coordination Unit.

The Executive Secretary reserves the right to remove and replace Expert Members who do not regularly attend online or in-person meetings. Any replacements of Expert Members would draw on the previous list of nominees and follow the same selection procedure as outlined above.