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INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
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Item **4.4** of the Provisional Agenda

DRAFT IOC OCEAN LITERACY PLAN OF ACTION FOR 2026–2030

Summary

Decision A-31/3.5.4 (2021) established an IOC Ocean Literacy Group of Experts for a period of four years, with the Group to report to the IOC Member States on its activities at the 33rd session of the Assembly. It also endorsed the IOC Ocean Literacy Plan of Action 2018–2021 (IOC/A-31/3.5.4.Doc) as a guidance document for the work of the Group of Experts for the four-year period. An addendum to this document with the detailed explanation of the priorities for Ocean Literacy complement this document (in English only).

This document prepared by the Group of Experts provides a draft of an updated IOC Ocean Literacy Plan of Action for 2026–2030 for the consideration of the Assembly in view of its final adoption by the IOC Executive Council in 2026.

The proposed decision(s) is referenced A-33/Dec.4.4 in the Provisional Action Paper (IOC/A-33/AP) of the 33rd session of the IOC Assembly.

Introduction

> *"Ocean literacy is the compass guiding us toward a sustainable future. It empowers us to understand the stakes, connect the dots, and take meaningful action."*

—Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean

1.   The ocean is fundamental for all life on Earth, climate stability, biodiversity, and economic prosperity. However, our ocean currently faces multiple threats, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and unsustainable resource exploitation. Addressing these challenges demands a robust scientific understanding, science-based tools, products and actions for decision making, coupled with widespread public awareness, informed policy development and comprehensive behavioural change. Ocean literacy, when effectively implemented bridges ocean science, decision-making and societal understanding, enabling knowledge-driven actions for ocean sustainability and conservation.

2.   Since the endorsement of the *IOC Ocean Literacy Action Plan (2018–2021)*, efforts focused on ocean Literacy have significantly expanded and evolved beyond formal educational contexts to embrace diverse perspectives, progressing broader restoration of society's relationship with the ocean. This evolution reflects a deeper recognition of the ocean's critical role across social, cultural, and economic dimensions, underscoring the need for renewed strategies and frameworks. It is also reflected in the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development Vision 2030 white paper on challenge 10: *'Restoring society's relationship with the ocean'*.

3.   UNESCO-IOC established the Ocean Literacy Group of Experts through IOC Assembly Decision A-31/3.5.4 in 2021. This multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder body has been instrumental in guiding the implementation, coordination, and evolution of Ocean Literacy initiatives globally and regionally both under the IOC and more broadly. Their expertise and experience have provided vital insights into effective practices, stakeholder engagement, and innovative approaches to making ocean science accessible and actionable. In this context, the Group has provided technical support in drafting the 'IOC Ocean Literacy Plan of Action 2026–2030', which is based both on the assessment of the progress achieved with regards to the priorities of the IOC Ocean Literacy Plan of Action 2018–2021 and the activities developed within the framework of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

4.   In particular, significant progress has been made in the capacity development of teachers and educators and other professional groups such as private and public sectors, journalists and communication professionals and architects and urban planners. These training courses have been developed and made publicly available in collaboration with the Ocean Teacher Global Academy (OTGA). In addition, multi-stakeholder partnerships have been established, particularly with the private sector and media and information organizations to enhance the outreach and visibility of Ocean Literacy in different contexts and at different levels. This has been achieved through the organization of Ocean Literacy side events within major events related to the ocean such as the European Maritime Days, the World Ocean Summit, the second UN Ocean Conference and the UN Water Conference. Moreover, a global database of Ocean Literacy resources has been developed in different languages and made available through the Ocean Literacy Portal. The collaboration with Ocean Literacy national experts groups and networks has been enhanced also in the context of the Ocean Literacy With All (OLWA) Ocean Decade programme. Collaboration with UNESCO Education and Science Sectors has been promoted through the Intersectoral Programme IP2 on Environmental Education, which aims to promote learning and teaching activities on climate change and the environment in UNESCO designated sites, engage schools and teachers with local communities, and collect and share evidence and policy efforts on climate change education. Lastly, resource mobilization has been reinforced through the establishment of partnerships with different donor types.

5.   Aligned with the *IOC Medium-Term Strategy (2022–2029)*, the draft Ocean Literacy Plan of Action for 2026–2030 enables Member States to achieve all the High-Level Objectives contained in

the strategy, increasing understanding of the role of the ocean and the services and providing better connection between science policy and society. The overall objective of this Plan of Action is to ensure the translation of ocean scientific knowledge into practical applications that facilitate societal support for a sustainable ocean future.

6.   The Action Plan for 2026–2030 emphasizes activities carried out within formal, informal, and lifelong learning structures, focusing on education, experience and awareness-raising, in order to strengthen global understanding and management of ocean ecosystems. Through collaboration with other IOC sections, programmes, and initiatives, such as the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE), the Ocean Teacher Global Academy and regional IOC sub-commissions, and utilising the Ocean Decade Challenge 10 Decadal Coordination Office, this Action Plan aims to foster a cohesive approach that enhances the collective impact of IOC's scientific outputs and services. This means recognising the diversity of cultural perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge, and acknowledging these knowledge systems as integral part of Ocean Literacy programmes and frameworks. This inclusive approach ensures respect for and support of indigenous and local communities, and recognises their role in improving the effectiveness of ocean management and conservation.

7.   This update to the IOC Plan of Action recognises the need for sustained stakeholder engagement, the development of accessible and inclusive educational resources based on behavioural science, communication strategies, and impact assessments of Ocean Literacy programmes and activities. The tools, products and outputs from these combined efforts will equip Member States with the tools and capacities needed to achieve scientifically informed and sustainable ocean management and, ultimately, contribute to the vision of the current IOC Medium-Term Strategy (2022–2029): bringing governments and the scientific community together to achieve the 'Ocean We Need for the Future We Want.'

8.   Guided by this vision statement, the Plan of Action highlights the need for international collaboration, the exchange of best practices and the promotion of robust partnerships, particularly to ensure ocean knowledge is fully exploited to advance and ultimately achieve long-lasting ocean sustainability.

Vision Statement

"Through international collaboration, exchange of best practices, and strengthened partnerships, UNESCO-IOC empowers Member States to enhance Ocean Literacy, translating ocean science into accessible knowledge that drives sustainable action and governance for the ocean we need."

9.   The following table presents the enhanced list of priorities, areas of action and activities. Alignment with the *IOC Capacity Development Strategy, 2023–2030* as well as with the *IOC Communication and Outreach Strategy for Data and Information Management* will be ensured.

Financial and administrative implications

10.   Ocean Literacy activities are mainly funded by voluntary contributions, although regular budget funding is to be identified in the framework of the IOC contribution to the Intersectoral Programme 2 (IP2) on Environmental Education.

Enhanced Priority for Ocean Literacy	Area of Action	Activity
1. Ocean science concepts integrated into the curriculum of education systems in order to enhance global ocean literacy	1.1 Formal, informal, non-formal, and lifelong learning curricula at all educational levels	1.1.1 Promote membership of schools amongst Member States in the Blue Schools network to facilitate exchange of good practices between countries and the implementation of ocean-based curricula aligned with national strategies.
		1.1.2 Promote the development of region-specific educational materials that reflect local marine systems, challenges, and cultural connections to the ocean
		1.1.3 Enhance capacity development among teachers and educators.
	1.2 Inter and trans-disciplinary collaboration	1.2.1 Strengthen partnerships and collaborations with other UNESCO sectors working across different disciplines
		1.2.2 Promote the value of multiple disciplines such as the arts and social sciences in ocean science education
2. Dialogue enhanced and collaboration increased through the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in ocean literacy discussions	2.1 Inclusive and Multidisciplinary Stakeholder Engagement	2.1.1 Establishment of regional and global platforms and networks for cross-sectoral exchange and co-development of ocean literacy initiatives
		2.1.2 Enhance collaboration with IOC Regional Subcommissions to support regional coordination of ocean literacy activities and sharing of knowledge and resources
		2.1.3 Take advantage of major ocean-related online and offline events to amplify the reach of Ocean Literacy to potential new stakeholders

Enhanced Priority for Ocean Literacy	Area of Action	Activity
		2.1.4 Co-design and co-deliver ocean literacy opportunities with diverse actors and stakeholders
		2.1.5 Provide a digital space for continuous stakeholder dialogue
3. Accessible and Inclusive Ocean Literacy Resources made available	3.1 Assessment of existing Ocean Literacy materials globally	3.1.1 Compile and evaluate a global compendium of Ocean Literacy resources
	3.2 Development of inclusive and accessible Ocean Literacy resources	3.2.1 Produce ocean literacy resources that take into account different cultural approaches and different target groups, including disadvantaged or under-represented groups
	3.3 Distribution of both new and existing resources	3.3.1 Host all such relevant resources in a single online hub
		3.3.2 Support the effective use of these resources through the creation of pilot projects and tests
		3.3.3 Leverage existing ocean literacy networks to create pilot projects and tests that maximize the distribution of resources
4. Capacity Development for Effective Ocean Stewardship	4.1 Evaluation of current stewardship capacities worldwide	4.1.1 Conduct a needs assessment of the various stakeholder groups
		4.1.2 Analyze the existing OL training resources and opportunities

Enhanced Priority for Ocean Literacy	Area of Action	Activity
	4.2 Development of programs to bridge gaps in capacity among stakeholders	4.2.1 Design a capacity development strategy based on results of the needs assessment
		4.2.2 Widen access to training resources and opportunities among all stakeholders
	4.3 Organization of opportunities to develop capacities tailored to the needs of different stakeholder groups	4.3.1 Build on the success of OL Summer Schools and ECOP-led initiatives to amplify their capacity development potential
		4.3.2 Leverage the Ocean Teacher Global Academy to deliver tailored resources to target groups
5. Further research on human behavioural change, science communication, impacts of ocean literacy to improve its efficacy	5.1 Establish experts' networks on behavioural change, science communication, and impact assessment	5.1.1 Identify experts in the fields of behavioural change, science communication, and impact assessment
	5.2 Develop tools for behavioural change, science communication, and impact assessment	5.2.1 In partnership with experts identify opportunities to develop innovative tools for behaviour change, science communication, and impact assessment
		5.2.2 Design and implement unified indicators to measure behavioural change and evaluate impact on a national, regional, and global level
	5.3 Promote research projects on behaviour change, science communication, and impacts of ocean literacy	5.3.1 Verify the existence of projects on behaviour change, science communication and impacts of ocean literacy
		5.3.2 Implement and collaborate with citizen science programmes
		5.3.3 Define what gaps need

Enhanced Priority for Ocean Literacy	Area of Action	Activity
		to be filled in those research areas
6. Sustained Resource Mobilization	6.1 In-kind opportunities	6.1.1 Foster partnerships to increase in-kind support (for example, by encouraging secondments, loans...)
	6.2 Financial support by Member States, the private sector, and philanthropies' for IOC activities	6.2.1 Mobilize resources from Member States, institutional partners and the private sector 6.2.2. Enhance the impact of donors from public and private by channelling their contributions towards common goals
7. Recognized Cultural and Natural Heritage as Pillars of Ocean Literacy	7.1 Integration of Cultural and Natural Heritage in Ocean Literacy Content	7.1.1 Develop educational resources and storytelling initiatives that highlight historical maritime traditions, seafaring knowledge, and cultural ties to the ocean 7.1.2 Collaborate with cultural institutions (e.g., museums, heritage sites, archives) to co-create exhibitions, curricula, and outreach programmes that connect heritage to ocean literacy.
	7.2 Recognition and Protection of Cultural and Natural Marine Heritage Sites	7.2.1 Raise awareness of culturally significant marine areas. 7.2.2 Promote policy dialogues and conservation actions that integrate ocean literacy with safeguarding marine cultural and natural heritage.
	7.3 Recognition of the importance of Indigenous and Local Knowledge Systems	7.3.1 Ensure respectful representation of Indigenous and local knowledge in formal and informal ocean literacy efforts.

Enhanced Priority for Ocean Literacy	Area of Action	Activity
8. Ocean Literacy Integrated into Policy and Decision-Making	8.1 Awareness improvement among policy-makers	8.1.1 Create opportunities for interaction with policymakers at different levels
		8.1.2 Enhance awareness through ad hoc materials and opportunities designed for policymakers
	8.2 Cross-sectoral governance	8.2.1 Embed ocean literacy principles into national and regional marine policies, blue economy strategies, and climate adaptation frameworks
		8.2.2 Encourage cross-sectoral governance approaches that prioritize ocean literacy as a tool for sustainable ocean management
		8.2.3 Leverage youth perspective in decision-making processes
9. Public Awareness and Digital Engagement Enhanced	9.1 Media visibility	9.1.1 Strengthen collaboration with traditional media outlets and online content creators to amplify OL, including through newspapers, magazines, social media, podcasts and interactive storytelling
		9.1.2 Enhance collaboration with young ocean advocates to transform them into amplifiers of Ocean Literacy
		9.2.1 Conduct campaigns and public outreach programmes designed to engage broader audiences in Ocean Literacy
	9.2 Digital outreach	9.2.2 Utilize emerging technologies such as VR and data visualization tools to create impactful and immersive storytelling that renders ocean science more accessible and compelling.