

# **REGULAR PROCESS FOR THE GLOBAL REPORTING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES**

## **THE PROPOSED SCOPE OF THE THIRD WORLD OCEAN ASSESSMENT**

The 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole has been convened in accordance with the programme of work for the period 2021 to 2025 for the third cycle of the Regular Process. This programme of work was adopted by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process during its thirteenth meeting in October 2020 and endorsed by the General Assembly through its resolution 75/239 of 31 December 2020 on “Oceans and the law of the sea”.

The 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole to be held from 27 to 28 March 2023 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York will consider the following documents:

- **The proposed scope of the next World Ocean Assessment(s);**
- **The comprehensive annotated outline of the World Ocean Assessment(s) containing a summary of content and format;**
- **The list of expertise needed for the writing teams;**
- **The assessment of potential gaps and overlaps in expertise and the way to manage them.**

In setting out the scope of the assessment(s), the Group of Experts have identified key thematic areas that the assessment(s) will cover (where scope is equivalent to the thematic and temporal extent of assessment(s)).

The programme of work for the third cycle of the Regular Process identifies:

“In resolution 71/257, the General Assembly recalled that the scope of the first cycle of the Regular Process focused on establishing a baseline, and decided that the scope of the second cycle would extend to evaluating trends and identifying gaps. Based on these considerations and the lessons learned from the second cycle, this draft programme of work assumes a similar scope for the third cycle.”

This identifies that the scope of the assessment(s) of the third cycle is required to include an evaluation of trends and identification of gaps.

This document intends therefore, to detail the main thematic areas to be included in the assessment(s) of the third cycle of the Regular Process and the temporal scale at which trends and gaps will be evaluated.

This document does not include consideration of the structure or format of the assessment(s) as these are to be included in a comprehensive annotated outline of assessment(s) which has been included in the documents provided to the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.

## **Thematic areas identified in the lessons learned from the second cycle and via consultation with other relevant processes and organizations**

The concept note for the third cycle, based on the lessons learned from the second cycle and consultation with other relevant processes and organizations, identifies the following thematic areas for inclusion within the overall scope of assessment(s) produced during the third cycle:

- sustainable and inclusive ocean economy
- gender,
- coastal communities
- Indigenous knowledge

It also identifies the inclusion of the knowledge needed to support:

- the evaluation of SDG 14 targets, specifically spatial conservation measures, marine spatial planning, fisheries subsidies and small-scale fisheries, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDS);
- the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change processes;
- the Convention on Biological Diversity post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

## **Thematic areas arising from the regional workshops held to assist the scoping process**

The scoping exercise and the preparation of the comprehensive annotated outline of the assessment(s) of the third cycle has been supported through regional workshops focused on identifying, among other things, regional priorities, the thematic focus of components of the assessment(s) and key topics that the chapters comprising the assessment(s). The five regional workshops were held in:

- Tanzania, 25-27 July 2022, with a focus on the Indian Ocean (including the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal), the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and the ROPME/RECOFI area
- Jamaica, 12-14 September 2022, with a focus on the North Pacific and the Wider Caribbean area
- Argentina, 28-20 September, with a focus on the South Atlantic (between the African and American coasts) and the Wider Caribbean area
- The Kingdom of the Netherlands, 28-30 November, with a focus on the North Atlantic, the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea region
- Indonesia, 13-15 December, with a focus on the Indian Ocean (including the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal), the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and the ROPME/RECOFI area and the North and South Pacific

Participants of the workshops, were provided with the opportunity to provide presentation on regional perspectives, initiatives that could contribute to the third cycle and through moderated break-out group sessions were provided with the opportunity to contribute their perspectives on:

- Potential formats or products that would improve the relevance and utility of the assessment(s) of the third cycle to policymakers in the region;
- Additional products that might assist policy-makers in progressing the United Nations 2030 Agenda and reporting against the Agenda;
- Whether there should be one assessment or several targeted or thematic products
- Where the assessment(s) might produce original work produce original work and where existing assessments could be referred to;
- Whether the assessment(s) should incorporate future scenarios and associated likelihoods
- Where might assessment(s) focus on responses or solutions that could be utilized to address changes observed;
- Mechanisms/processes the Regular Process can incorporate for supporting recognition and integration of Indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge and in association how might outputs from the third cycle be best co-designed and co-delivered with custodians of Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge;
- Existing regional organizations/processes and mechanisms through which they could provide information that is relevant to the assessments of the Regular Process;
- Relevant processes and activities, such as the Ocean Decade, IPBES and the IPCC and how these might be leveraged to support the Regular Process, particularly in bringing information from outside traditional research areas into assessments (e.g., socio-economic information, indigenous and traditional owner knowledge and perspectives). In association, how might assessments produced during the third cycle better incorporate national progress against the 2030 Agenda;
- How to increase and strengthen the Pool of Experts, including building capacity, and improve networking and collaboration between experts and organizations taking part in the Regular Process, including with the Group of Experts and Secretariat;
- How to extend the outreach of the outputs from the third cycle. In association the specific outreach and communication activities that might be incorporated that could support access to the outputs of the third cycle by specific stakeholders in the region including local and indigenous communities;
- Outreach activities that might be undertaken to provide the content from the outputs of the third cycle to decision makers and support use of the content across the region, thereby bridging gaps in the science policy interface,

In considering the extensive contributions provided by workshop participants, including a number of specific proposals on assessment outlines provided by individuals attending the workshops, the Group of Experts undertook an in-depth series of brainstorming sessions aimed at identifying the key elements from the workshops that could form the basis of Output 1 of the programme of work (the assessment(s) of the third cycle). These involved dedicated meetings of the Group of Experts facilitated through the use of virtual whiteboards that focused on distilling down the content generated through the workshops with a focus on the overall structure of assessment(s), the focus of assessment(s) (i.e., the thematic, temporal, spatial focus of the assessment(s) and the specific topics (content) to be included in the assessment(s).

The key elements identified included:

### **1. A short update on trends since the second World Ocean Assessment**

The main components of the second World Ocean Assessment (WOA II) that would need to be considered in providing an update include:

- Drivers of change in the marine environment;

- Scientific understanding of the ocean;
- The physical and chemical state of the ocean;
- The state of the main taxa of marine biota;
- The state of marine habitats;
- The state of human society in relation to the marine environment;
- Pressures on the marine environment;
- Management approaches to the marine environment;

## **2. Expansion of topics from WOA II where there has been rapid development or new, substantive issues requiring consideration.**

A number of topics identified as emerging areas in WOA II are either undergoing rapid expansion or are being identified as growing issues. These were identified by the Group of Experts as needing some broader consideration in the assessment(s) of the third cycle (beyond a short update on trends). These included:

- Marine renewable energy
- Emerging contaminants

## **3. New/emerging topics of issue/interest**

In considering new/emerging topics of interest, the following topics were identified:

- Sustainable and inclusive ocean economies
- Blue carbon/Carbon sequestration
- Decarbonisation
- New technologies for mitigating threats
- Equitable distribution/sharing of benefits
- Nature-based solutions
- Ecosystem restoration
- The ocean and human health

Other thematic areas identified from the workshops that were identified included:

- Ocean governance
- Social and economic aspects
- Capacity of ocean science to contribute to sustainable development
- Ecosystem services
- Transboundary risks and impacts
- Integration of gender issues
- Acknowledgement and integration of Indigenous (and traditional owner) knowledge

Some of these topics were identified as overlapping with those already approved by the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.

In considering the above topics, current knowledge and capacity gaps would be considered.

## **Temporal scale at which trends and gaps will be evaluated**

In considering the temporal period across which trends since the WOA II would be evaluated it, was recognised that there was a lack of consistency in approaches across chapters of the WOA II. This highlighted that additional effort would need to be undertaken by the Group of Experts in providing

consistent and clear guidance to writing teams. Given that most drafts of chapter contained in WOA II had been drafted by mid 2019, very little further updating of content was done after this date. In light of this, it was identified that the period to be evaluated for any changes since WOA II could be 2018-2024. This time period ensures that any literature or content produced just prior to the finalisation of chapters in the WOA II could be captured and takes into account that the current timetable for the third cycle identifies that first drafts of chapters in the assessment(s) of the third cycle will be completed within the first half of 2024. It should be noted that this temporal period should not preclude literature released or published prior to this time period being included in chapters, particularly where it provides context to the evaluation of trends and gaps.

Where topics that were considered in WOA II, but identified as needing greater consideration due to rapid development/emerging issues, the same temporal scale for content would be applied. Again, it should be noted that this temporal period should not preclude literature released or published prior to this time period being included in chapters, particularly where it provides context to the evaluation of trends and gaps.

New and emerging topics should consider temporal scales of relevance to the topic and the period across which content on the topic has been developed. By nature of these topics being new and emerging the assumption is that the temporal period across which these topics would be considered would be on the order of the last decade.

## **Other intergovernmental processes and UN initiatives**

The scoping exercise identified that the assessment(s) should also consider the following:

1. Provision of knowledge to support intergovernmental processes

In including content on the knowledge needed to support the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change processes, the assessment(s) should focus on content that add knowledges and fill gaps relevant to these processes rather than repeat content either directly contained or utilized by the reports produced by these processes.

2. Other new international agreements

It was recognised that the process for developing an agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) will likely conclude at around the same time that the documents on the scope of the assessment(s) and the annotated outline of assessment(s) will be considered for approval by the AHWG. In addition, progress is underway on developing a new international convention on the sustainable production and consumption of plastics (the intergovernmental negotiating committee met for the first time at the end of 2022). It was identified that it was important to capture the progress on these two agreements.

### 3. The UN Decades

The programme of work for the third cycle explicitly identifies that “Particular focus will be given to ensuring a dynamic and mutually reinforcing cooperation between the activities of the Regular Process and the United Nations Decade on Ocean Science throughout the first half of the Decade.” Further, the Group of Experts identified that the United Nations Decade on Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration were both relevant to the third cycle, producing a policy relevant brief summarising the content of the second World Ocean Assessment within the context of the two Decades. Consideration of the activities and outputs from these two Decades was identified as important for the assessment(s) of the third cycle.