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The ocean community is mobilising for COP21

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With COP21 fast approaching, the “ocean community”—a network of scientists, NGOs and private sector representatives—is wondering how much scope it has to influence the negotiations. Its concerns are legitimate: oceans, like the atmosphere, play a central role in climate processes. As oceans absorb CO₂ and some of the heat accumulated in the atmosphere, they help to limit global warming. But at the same time, they suffer the consequences: warming and acidification.

Some fifty international scientists^[1] met in Monaco from 12 to 14 January 2015 to address local socioeconomic impacts of ocean acidification and identify the key messages to put to decision-makers, particularly in the context of climate negotiations. IDDRI contributed to the work of this expert group by coordinating Working Group 5 on

“governance, governments and legislation”.

The experts first of all identified five reasons why the international climate change community must now fully integrate the issue of ocean acidification:

- Billions of people worldwide depend more or less directly on a healthy ocean both for their well-being and their development. Acidification is not therefore simply an environmental issue but also a development issue.
- Since acidification is a direct result of excessive concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, it surely falls within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework. COP21 is thus a real opportunity to incorporate the issue of oceans into the talks and move towards a more comprehensive climate change regime.
- Reducing CO₂ emissions is a priority because it will have very significant consequences on ocean acidification.
- In the past, the international community has had some success in managing global pollution (e.g. the London Protocol on waste, the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants, etc.). This means that it can also achieve success in the area of climate change and ocean acidification.
- Ocean acidification is yet another reason to take bold decisions, particularly when it comes to reducing CO₂ emissions. As such, it must be fully integrated into UNFCCC negotiations.

Based on these reasons, seven recommendations were drawn up, four of which directly affect the UNFCCC process, and thus COP21:

- 1. LEGAL TEXT: include the ocean in the COP21 legal text and the post-2015 agenda, to make sure that the ocean's role in the future of humanity is formally recognised, but also to stimulate policies at the national and local levels that counter ocean acidification.
- 2. FUNDING: actively promote ocean-related projects in the Green Climate Fund, to facilitate access to funding for coastal and island communities that will be forced to adapt to ocean acidification.
- 3. SOLUTIONS: include the ocean science community in the evaluation of solutions developed for both mitigation and adaptation, to ensure that these solutions have no indirect negative effects on the health of coastal areas and oceans. This would actually worsen the problem in the future and, in fact, correspond to a form of maladaptation.
- 4. OBSERVATIONS : consolidate the integration of ocean acidification observations into UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) documents, to encourage follow-up of this issue on a global scale.

[1] <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/bringing-ocean-acidification-climate-change-agenda> ;
<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/experts-include-ocean-acidification-climate-change-negotiations>