

BLOG POST May 28th 2025

What can we expect from the Third United Nations Ocean Conference?

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 Reading time: 5 min

France will be hosting the Third United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice in the next few days (9-13 June)[1](#), in a context of recent advances in the conservation and sustainable management of the marine environment, but also geopolitical dynamics that are undermining international cooperation.

With 30,000 people expected to attend, over 150 countries represented, some 60 heads of state and government, and hundreds of side events, the Nice Conference promises to be a landmark in the international mobilization around coastal and marine issues. To understand the scope and scale of this event, we first need to understand its context.

In 2015, the Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which comprises 17 thematic goals, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14: 'Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development'. This goal includes a number of targets aimed, for example, at fighting marine pollution, conserving coastal and marine ecosystems, reducing ocean acidification, ending overfishing and increasing scientific knowledge. As early as December 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution convening a first United Nations Ocean Conference to support the implementation of SDG 14. After a first edition in 2017 in New York and a second in 2022 in Lisbon, France, in partnership with Costa

Rica, is hosting UNOC-3, again with the aim of assessing and accelerating the implementation of SDG 14.

UNOC is therefore not a Conference of the Parties (COP)—as it is not linked to a specific treaty—nor is it a formal negotiating forum: it is a time for the international community to take stock of the progress made by States towards achieving SDG 14 targets, culminating in a final political declaration, currently being finalized, which will call for an acceleration of efforts for the conservation and sustainable management of the ocean. In short, this is a fairly standard UN process, governed by formal procedures and rules, which leaves little room for innovation, but it does establish a regular meeting to assess progress on the 2015 objectives.

UNOC is also traditionally a moment when the co-chairing States seek to leverage the momentum in order to place issues on the political agenda, and generate commitments and 'fast-track' action on certain issues. This is what French diplomacy has been working on for many months now, and the impact and significance of these efforts will become clearer after the event. In this respect, France—led by its President—has repeatedly expressed the wish that the UNOC should coincide with the 60th ratification of the High Seas Treaty, a condition for its entry into force. To date,² 22 States have deposited their instruments of ratification, and while more are expected soon, there is still a long way to go. Ratification processes involve national procedures that are often complex and cumbersome, many of which have been delayed due to the many national elections taking place in 2024: we cannot therefore legitimately blame French diplomacy for not having kept its 'promise', and we can hope that the acceleration linked to the UNOC will enable the treaty to enter into force by the end of the year.

Progress is nevertheless expected on other subjects. Science will be in the spotlight at a dedicated event from 3 to 6 June, and there should be many announcements in the field of research, on the role of space solutions for the ocean (Space4Ocean) or on the science-decision interface through the International Panel for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), which will be officially launched. The private sector will also be mobilized, in particular at the Blue Economy and Finance Forum to be held in Monaco on 7 and 8 June. Among the initiatives expected, a coalition of representatives from the tourism industry should, for the first time, place the sustainability requirements of maritime and coastal tourism at the heart of the international Ocean agenda. Another coalition, this time made up of elected representatives from the main coastal cities and regions, is also expected to be launched in Nice, following a summit on ocean rise and coastal resilience on 7 June. UNOC-3 will undoubtedly also be an opportunity for State representatives to engage in informal dialogue on the 'hot' issues of the moment, notably the future plastics treaty ([IDDRI, 2024](#)), for which the next negotiating session is scheduled for August in Geneva, the issues linked to deep sea mining and the debate reignited by a recent executive order from the US President,³ and preparations for the entry into force of the High Seas Treaty.

The Nice Conference should therefore be a landmark in the international commitment to issues relating to coastal zones and marine environments. In a fairly traditional UN format, the formal segment will provide a progress report on the implementation of SDG 14. The parallel agenda, drawn up by French diplomacy and fed by States wishing to come to France with concrete announcements, should mark 'accelerations' and the launch of new initiatives for the conservation and sustainable management of the marine and coastal environment. Finally, the informal meetings and corridor discussions could lead to new partnerships, not only between States, but also with civil society players.

As the host country, France should benefit from the enthusiasm generated by the organization of this event, which will bring together thousands of people, representatives of countries, scientists, NGOs, members of the private sector and the general public. The French marine and coastal policy is not always exemplary, however, and many voices are currently being raised, quite rightly, to criticize the lack of ambition of its network of marine protected areas, the pollution of the marine environment by land-based activities, and the too many harmful subsidies that contribute to the deterioration of the ocean's health. France is also expected to make some announcements if it hopes that the

speeches of its official representatives are not disconnected from its own practices.

In a world increasingly marked by tensions, divisions and uncertainties, opportunities to uphold multilateralism are precious and must be seized to strengthen international cooperation and dialogue between stakeholders. It is in this spirit that the UNOC must be mobilized to achieve concrete progress in protecting the ocean and coasts.

More information on IDDRI at UNOC

1

<https://unocnice2025.org/en/>

2

<https://highseasalliance.org/treaty-ratification/>

3

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/unleashing-americas-offshore-critical-minerals-and-resources/>

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