



BLOG POST June 17th 2025

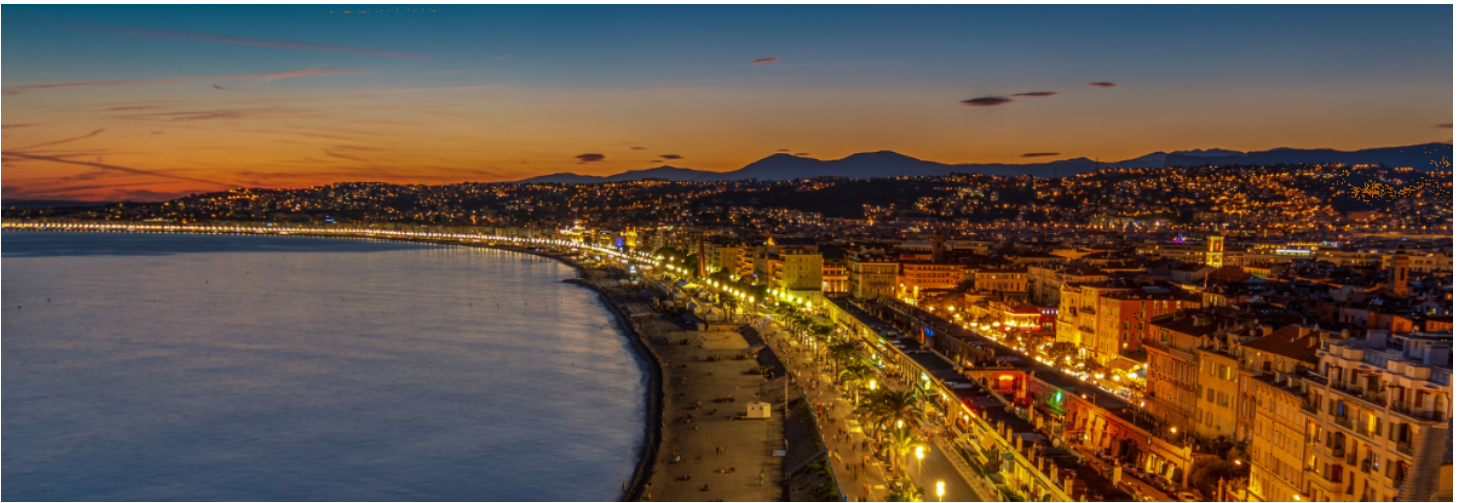
Third United Nations Ocean Conference: commitments to be turned into action

Auteur

Julien Rochette

Director, Ocean programme

🕒 Reading time: 5 min



Against a complex geopolitical backdrop, the Third United Nations Ocean Conference sent clear and positive signals of support for multilateralism and international cooperation on issues related to the protection of the seas and coasts. These signals must now be translated into concrete action at the national level and in intergovernmental fora.

A wave of support for environmental multilateralism is what will be remembered from the Third United Nations Conference on the Ocean (UNOC-3), held in Nice in recent days. This support was initially expressed symbolically, through the presence of some 60 heads of State and government—compared to around 20 in Lisbon for the last conference in 2022—and the participation of a large number of countries represented at the United Nations, without the United States, as expected. This political mobilization was accompanied by strong participation from scientists, the [private sector](#) and [coastal cities and regions](#), each of which had its own dedicated forum organized ahead of the official segment. At a time marked by nationalist tendencies and attempts to appropriate common resources, these are encouraging signs of shared commitment among many countries and stakeholders to accelerate the sustainable management of this common good.

But beyond this mobilization, UNOC-3 was eagerly awaited for the pledges it would generate. From this perspective, the outcome is not without substance. At the national level, several countries and territories announced the expansion of their marine protected area networks (Spain, Tanzania, Chile, Portugal, French Polynesia, etc.). Others committed to stronger regulation of human activities, such as [Great Britain](#), which has banned bottom trawling in 41 of its protected areas. Science also played a central role, with the official launch of the International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), the Neptune mission, a scientific exploration programme, and Space4Ocean, a coalition aimed at harnessing space technology for marine monitoring. The private sector also made commitments, particularly in the fields of maritime transport and ports, [finance](#) and [sustainable tourism](#). A coalition of coastal cities and regions was also launched to address the adaptation challenges they face. At the multilateral level, the Nice summit also saw significant progress. Four new countries (Slovenia, Cyprus, Latvia and the Marshall Islands) joined the initiative for a moratorium on seabed mining—there are now 37, compared to only 12 in Lisbon in 2022—while several financial institutions announced that they would not support such projects. With regard to the fight against plastic pollution, more than 90 States signed a declaration calling for the rapid finalization of an ambitious international treaty incorporating a global target for reducing the production and consumption of primary plastic polymers. Finally, a new wave of ratifications of the High Seas Treaty has brought the number of committed countries to [501](#), paving the way for its possible entry into force by the end of the year once 10 more countries have ratified it—and the momentum seems to be building. The objective is now to capitalize on these commitments and translate them into concrete progress, both at the national and international levels. In each country, civil society will be able to exert legitimate pressure on governments to hold them accountable for the promises made in Nice. At the multilateral level, the momentum that has been built up must be maintained and accelerated within the relevant intergovernmental forums: in July in Kingston, at the meetings of the Council and Assembly of the International Seabed Authority; in early August in Geneva, at the negotiating session for a treaty on plastics; in late August in New York, during the preparatory commission for the entry into force of the treaty on the high seas; in November in Belém for Climate COP30 to take stock of the [‘Blue NDC challenge’](#) and its objective of better integrating the ocean into nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

As for the French authorities, while the diplomatic work in preparation for the summit was welcomed, the government's announcements on marine protected areas were understandably disappointing, particularly the target of placing 4% of French waters under strict protection, a figure criticized both for its low level and its method of calculation. However, the unanimous reaction of scientists and NGOs showed that it is no longer possible, in France or elsewhere, to focus attention on the quantitative aspect of protected area networks (the 30x30 target of the Kunming-Montreal Agreement [[IDDRI, 2023](#)]) without providing guarantees on their level of protection. This is also an important achievement of Nice, which environmental stakeholders will be able to build on in the coming months.

The United Nations Ocean Conferences are not intended to be decision-making bodies, nor do they have a mandate to act as such. Beyond its initial objective of assessing and supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal [142](#), this third edition aimed to accelerate progress on certain key issues, particularly at the multilateral level. In this sense, some announcements could have been stronger and some commitments more substantial, but ambitious countries and actors will be able to build on the results of Nice to advance their positions in international fora over the coming months. UNOC-3 will thus have been a step forward, strengthening the collective momentum and setting the stage for future international meetings.

Thanks to the ocean—a powerful symbol of a shared common good in the eyes of the public—it is also becoming clearer that the usefulness of these major international gatherings cannot be measured solely by their ability to produce new legal instruments. Their value also lies in their power to focus political and media attention and to generate pressure and emulation between States. This can, for example, make the implementation of an existing agreement more concrete, certain and clearly achievable, as is the case for the high seas; allow allies to count themselves, as with the moratorium on seabed mining; or identify gaps in the dialogue between private actors and

governments in order to bring about profound change in a sector such as tourism. This demonstration at UNOC-3 is essential to ensure that expectations for Climate and Biodiversity COPs on climate also take into account the specific added value of these high-level political moments.

1

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

2

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14>

OCEAN

NÉGOCIATIONS INTERNATIONALES OCÉAN

DEEP SEA MINING

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

HIGH SEAS