

# BECAUSE THE OCEAN

## - Towards Ocean-related NDCs -



### Key messages from the Because the Ocean workshop held during UNFCCC COP23 5 November 2017

For quotations, please reference: Because the Ocean Bonn workshop, Nov. 2017.  
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## Because the Ocean: Concretising an ambition

The two *Because the Ocean* declarations were launched at COP21 and COP22 and signed by more than 20 governments.<sup>1</sup> Signatories acknowledged that while the ocean plays a central role in regulating the climate system, it is also a major receptor of climate change impacts. According to these declarations, both aspects deserve increased attention within UNFCCC discussions and a better consideration of the interlinkages between climate and ocean policies, at the international and the domestic level, is necessary.

Building upon this momentum, a *Because the Ocean* workshop was organised on the eve of COP23 to discuss how the ocean could be more strongly, and more effectively, integrated in the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the building blocks of the Paris Agreement.

The workshop gathered representatives from 15 countries with coastlines along all parts of the global ocean, as well as members from international organisations, representatives from civil society, research centers and academia. This document synthesizes the discussions in the form of **three key messages**.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://goo.gl/hknTBf>

## **1. Integrating the ocean in NDCs will require a dedicated and systematic effort**

A first lesson emerging from the discussions was that while mentions of coastal and marine ecosystems could be found in a number of NDCs, there is little concrete policy linkage and synergy between the climate and ocean “sectors” and few explicit contributions proposed in that area.

Even for countries at the forefront of these issues, this appeared to be a challenging task. Given the novelty of the NDC exercise, the time constraint and sometimes a lack of capacity, the ocean sectoral issues often ended up being left aside. During the revision of NDCs, a systematic consideration and, where relevant, inclusion of ocean-related issues, could be a way to ensure ocean-climate interlinkages are better taken into account.

**Key message 1:** During the forthcoming global stocktake and the next round of NDCs development, a dedicated effort will be necessary to better reflect the importance of the ocean to raise domestic and international ambition for climate change mitigation and adaptation. A systematic consideration and, where relevant, inclusion of ocean-related issues could be a way to ensure ocean-climate interlinkages are better taken into account in revised NDCs.

## **2. Ocean-minded NDCs should help climate policies and ocean conservation to mutually reinforce each other**

During the discussions, several country representatives provided feedback on their national contexts. A crucial point emerged on the fact that ocean related adaptation and mitigation contributions should be considered in NDCs from the outset, as well as conceived on the basis of ongoing efforts and with a view to drive benefits both for ocean conservation and climate action.

Indeed, there are already numerous State and non-State commitments to conserve and protect the ocean as reflected in the number of policy instruments dedicated to ocean conservation worldwide. However, their implementation would need to be reinforced in most cases, for instance

in the case of large marine protected areas or the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. A key challenge is thus to identify how the inclusion of the ocean within NDCs could help provide additional support (e.g., political legitimacy, funding, capacity) to existing or emerging ocean conservation efforts.

At the same time, coastal and marine conservation actions do not sufficiently make the link with domestic and international climate efforts in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. More synergies are needed among ocean and climate practitioners to better assess how ocean conservation measures contribute to reducing GHG emissions and build ocean resilience to climate impacts.

These cross-sectoral synergies will be of paramount importance in the development of revised NDCs, and even more so during their implementation. The aim should be to shed full light on the environmental impacts of land-based activities, as well as ocean-based activities such as fisheries or minerals extraction, that directly or indirectly affect the ocean-climate nexus.

**Key message 2:** A better inclusion of the ocean in future NDCs can reinforce both ocean protection and climate policies and build synergies among them, thus encouraging cross-sectoral approaches. Ocean and climate practitioners should develop a strategic dialogue to identify such possible synergies and avenues for mutual reinforcement of their efforts in the future.

### **3. Reinforcing the knowledge base needed to take into account the ocean in climate action**

These efforts will need to be supported by a stronger knowledge base on the ocean and climate linkages, both at the biophysical and political levels.

As climate change amplifies in the coming decades, so will its impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems and communities. More research is necessary to understand how this will increase adaptation needs, but

also to explain how it will condition the capacity of the ocean to provide mitigation solutions. More research is also needed on the way coastal and marine management can jointly contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation, to better understand how ocean-based solutions to climate action can help to “avoid the unmanageable and manage the unavoidable.”

A number of key technical points require collective discussion. On the mitigation side especially, there is still a need for collective learning as to how to best include ocean-related mitigation strategies into national GHG accounting. There is a number of pilot cases around the world from which lessons can be learned; taking stock from these experiences is an important step to better include the ocean in the mitigation chapters of revised NDCs.

An area that deserves particular attention is the question of the so-called “blue carbon” in future NDCs. Blue carbon refers to the carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems. More research and collective discussion is needed on i) the global significance of these carbon stocks, ii) the ways to protect or increase them and the overall climate additionality of blue carbon-oriented actions, iii) the methodology to measure and account for the carbon credits iv) the durability of this storage on the long-term, especially given the expected impacts from climate change on these ecosystems, and v) the question of how to address the issue of the important marine carbon stocks that lie beyond national jurisdiction.

Furthermore, workshop participants have identified that while there are numerous pilot programmes and initiatives on ocean and climate worldwide, collective stock taking of their lessons is lacking. A key issue identified was that, in general, the capacity to produce synthesis reports is lacking, and there is thus little written, thorough analysis available for each programme or initiative. While such reports could contain key insights from the field, and especially contain important perspectives from both State and non-State actors, this important knowledge is not sufficiently documented and thus not efficiently shared.

Taken together, the forthcoming IPCC special reports (both the Special Reports on 1.5°C and on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate) as well as the Sixth Assessment Report will constitute an important synthesis of available knowledge on ocean-climate linkages. In support to these efforts, taking stock of the knowledge accumulated by

practitioners, and increasing the production of grey literature, was identified as an important exercise. This knowledge base could represent a crucial contribution to discussions on how to better integrate the ocean in the revised NDCs.

**Key message 3:** While more research efforts are needed to better understand future ocean responses to climate change, as well as how the ocean can contribute to climate solutions throughout the coming century, important action is still necessary to synthesize the knowledge accumulated by pilot projects worldwide. This would be an important contribution and complement to the efforts undertaken by the IPCC in its current assessment cycle, and key to support discussions on how to reinforce the ocean-related content in revised NDCs.



*“It should now be clearly recognised that the climate action needed to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement will never be enough if the ocean is not part of that action.”*

Hon. Minister Inia Seruiratu  
High-level Climate Champion for COP23