



A Global Ocean Accounts Partnership for Sustainable Development

General Objectives and Terms of Reference

Background

We depend on the oceans as the life source of our planet and as a foundation of social and economic development. Oceans cover 70% of the Earth's surface, are the planet's largest biosphere, and are home to 50-80% of all life on Earth.

Oceans make major contributions, many irreplaceable, to human well-being and development. More than 90% of global trade in goods and 95% of internet traffic travel by sea. Ocean environments generate 50% of the Earth's oxygen, absorb 25% of all CO₂ emissions, and capture 90% of the additional heat generated from those emissions. Marine and coastal ecosystems regulate water quality, attract tourism, protect cities and communities from storms and flooding, and support the livelihoods of many millions of people globally. Nearly 3 billion people obtain almost 20% of their annual protein from fish. And increasingly we look to oceans and coasts for new sources of raw materials, medicines, biotechnology, and renewable energy.

Many of the benefits and opportunities that depend on oceans are being missed or lost. Marine and coastal ecosystems are being rapidly degraded as a result of pollution, overfishing, climate change, and habitat destruction. The global ocean economy has entered a historic period of structural transition, where the importance of established sectors (e.g. oil and gas, fisheries) is declining relative to emerging sectors (e.g. aquaculture, offshore renewable energy, and biotechnology). Sustained growth of the ocean economy is expected until 2030, with growth prospects beyond then being severely limited if current environmental trends continue.

Statistical and governance challenges

There is a rapidly growing body of scientific evidence that clearly indicates the critical importance of oceans in general terms. However, many context-specific relationships between economic prosperity, social well-being and oceans (and how these change over time) are inadequately documented and understood. This knowledge gap limits our ability to make effective and inclusive decisions about oceans and deliver on the long-term commitments recognised in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Our ability to account for the social, economic and environmental implications of oceans is also undermined by the pronounced isolation of relevant knowledge and evidence-which remains scattered across many different countries, institutions, and specialist expert communities. There is an urgent need to interlink different types of data, statistics and other evidence concerning oceans, and embed use of this connected evidence in laws, policies and development planning.

Considerable progress towards addressing these challenges has already been achieved through development of the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA). SEEA sets out internationally agreed standard concepts, definitions, classifications, accounting rules and tables. It is



designed to follow a similar accounting structure as the widely used System of National Accounts (SNA) in order to facilitate the integration and international comparability of environmental and economic statistics. SEEA is now being implemented in 80+ countries, however its application to ocean environments has been limited to date and presents a range of conceptual and technical challenges (e.g. concerning the classification of ocean ecosystems and associated benefits, across large and dynamic spatial scales). These are further complicated by the practical importance of interlinking environmental and various socio-economic statistics (e.g. concerning ocean livelihoods, poverty, disaster risk and climate change), and structured information about the status of characteristics of oceans governance, that fall beyond the core scope of the SEEA framework.

Further, the need for national ecosystem accounting to “Ensure the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning and development processes, poverty eradication strategies, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments...” is included in Target 14 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Objectives and purpose

The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership responds to the above challenges by establishing a coordination and communication structure for diverse member institutions¹, who have a common interest to ensure that the values and benefits of oceans are recognised and accounted for in decision-making about social and economic development.

The Partnership will achieve this objective by developing a shared technical framework for ocean accounting, coupled with collaborative capacity-building activities that support the development, maintenance, and ongoing use in decision-making, of holistic ocean accounts that link together social, environmental and economic statistics.

Terms of Reference

Members of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (the Partnership) are expected to make an individual and non-contractual commitment to the following Terms of Reference (Terms):

1. Preamble

Recognising the critical importance of oceans and ocean environments, including ecosystems and biodiversity, as a foundation of social and economic development.

Acknowledging the urgent need for coordinated and transformative action to preserve and restore ocean environments, and to accelerate progress towards sustainable ocean-based development, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Convention on Biological Diversity, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and other relevant international commitments;

Recognising the urgent need for coherent data and statistics concerning oceans, including their social, economic and environmental dimensions and implications, in accordance with relevant

¹ Including but not limited to research and education organisations, national and subnational governments, and intergovernmental organisations.



international best practices and standards;

Determined to support the ongoing development, maintenance and widespread use in decision-making of holistic ocean accounts, including capacity building in developing countries;

The Members of the Partnership hereby agree as follows:

2. Purpose

The Purpose of the Partnership is to foster collaboration between its Members to support the sustainable development of oceans, through:

- coordination of the Members' individual work, and planning of joint initiatives, concerning ocean data, statistics, and governance;
- ongoing development and implementation of a shared technical framework for ocean accounting, including concepts, classifications, methods and indicators that are compatible with the System of National Accounts, System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and other relevant international statistical standards and approaches;
- iterative testing and application of the technical framework to compile holistic ocean accounts at multiple scales (local, subnational, national, regional and international), including work to identify and address relevant research and knowledge gaps;
- ongoing efforts to support the maintenance of ocean accounts in order to improve the quality, coherence, integration, comparability and policy relevance of ocean data and statistics,
- ongoing efforts to support the widespread use of ocean accounts in policymaking and governance processes at multiple scales;
- ongoing contributions to the activities of relevant inter-governmental and other regional and international initiatives and programs concerning ocean data, statistics and governance.;
- promotion of common learning, sharing of expertise, capacity building, ongoing communication between Members, and the dissemination of information related to ocean accounting including standardised ocean data and statistics.;
- fostering and supporting the development of ocean accounts at global, regional and national scale through joint fundraising initiatives and support to the Partnership.

3. Objectives

The overarching strategic Objectives of the Partnership are to support:

- the sustainable development of oceans and coasts in manner consistent with the 2030 Agenda's 17 Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets, in particular SDG 14 concerning life under water, and other relevant international commitments;
- the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), in particular target 14 concerning national accounting for biodiversity values;
- national, regional and global efforts to account coherently for the interconnected social, economic, environmental and other relevant features of oceans, including through the development of Technical Guidance on Ocean Accounting on Sustainable Development;
- efforts to embed ongoing use and maintenance of holistic ocean accounts in relevant laws, policies, development planning and other governance processes;
- the design, compilation and use of appropriate indicators of sustainable ocean-based development, including capacity building in developing countries.



4. Membership

4.1 Members

Membership is open to national governments, intergovernmental institutions, inclusive representative bodies for the private sector, and research-intensive institutions that have been granted formal not-for-profit status in their country of origin.

New Members may join the Partnership at any time, subject to the approval of both Co-Chairs. The Co-Chairs shall give due regard to the Partnership's Purpose and Objectives, and shall seek and consider the views of other Members, prior to granting approval.

Existing Members may leave the Partnership at any time by submitting written notice to the Co-Chairs. In exceptional circumstances involving activities inconsistent with the Partnership's Purpose and Objectives, the Partnership may decide to discontinue the membership of one or more Members, in accordance with Clause 6 below.

4.2 Co-Chairs

The Members will elect two Co-Chairs of the Partnership who are expected to act in the best interests of the Partnership. At least one Co-Chair should represent a developing country.

Co-Chairs shall serve for a renewable term of two years and are elected by a vote of the Members at an official Members meeting; Co-Chairs are elected by majority voting of those present, if two or more Members are tied in votes, Members will be asked to vote again for just those Members which are tied. Elected Co-Chairs will have equal powers; No ranking or authority will be conveyed by the absolute number of votes for each Co-Chair.

In exceptional circumstances, Members can remove Co-Chairs through written notice to the Secretariat from at least two current Members of the Partnership. The Secretariat will call an extraordinary Members meeting to consider the request within 45 days of the letter. A formal vote of the majority of all Members will be required to remove the Co-Chair. The election of a new Co-Chair to serve the remaining term will be completed within 60 days of the extraordinary Members meeting.

4.3 Non-Members

Non-Members are recognised as important facilitators and enablers of ocean accounts uptake worldwide. Where appropriate, Non-Members are encouraged to apply for Membership of GOAP.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Members

Members are collectively responsible for ensuring the Partnership realises its global coordination role, ambition and Objectives. All Members are expected, in accordance with their respective capabilities, to:

- act in a manner consistent with the Partnership's Purpose and Objectives
- provide regular updates to the GOAP Secretariat on their work which is relevant to other Members concerning their work in the Partnership's Objectives; relevant activities and plans.
- leverage Secretariat support and experience to facilitate alignment of ocean accounting



activities in countries where multiple organisations are working;

- work towards aligning ocean accounting approaches and activities in which they are involved, with other relevant global ocean accounting and related activities and policies.
- work towards the alignment of data and information, wherever possible, with national systems and, making these data and information open-source;
- provide, where possible, appropriate and within the individual organisational constraints, support and resources to the GOAP Secretariat and ocean accounting community;
- work with other Members and the Secretariat to foster the development of ocean accounts through joint fundraising initiatives.

Members have a central role in the administration of the Partnership. In accordance with this Members:

- agree, support, and revise as necessary, the strategic vision and mission of GOAP;
- participate in regular Members Meetings;
- elect Co-Chairs to serve a time-restricted term, subject to Clause 4.2, and to act on behalf and in the best interests of the Members;
- delegate running of the Partnership and decisions to Co-Chairs and, where applicable, the Secretariat, consistent with the Terms;

Members are also able to source assistance from the Secretariat to support their activities. In accordance with this Members:

- are prioritised for support, advice and funding from GOAP's resources;
- can leverage the Secretariat to assist in raising resources for ocean accounting;
- can request the Secretariat to coordinate or convene stakeholders, Members and others involved in ocean accounting on their behalf;
- are prioritised to attend and present at Global Dialogue discussions.

5.2 Non-Members

Non-Members can:

- access financial and technical support of the Partnership, subject to available resources and contractual requirements;
- ask the Secretariat to coordinate or convene stakeholders, Members and others involved in ocean accounting on their behalf;
- attend and present at Global Dialogue discussions.

However, Non-Members:

- Do not have priority access to funding, technical assistance and other Partnership resources, subject to contractual requirements;
- do not have rights to attend Member meetings, voting rights, nor the ability to elect Co-Chairs;
- cannot direct Co-Chairs to act on their behalf;
- cannot direct Secretariat activity or affect the direction of the Partnership;
- cannot represent the Partnership, Members or associated entities at any forum;
- do not have a review role for GOAP documentation and knowledge products, unless contracted to do so.



Where Non-Members are assisted by the Partnership they should fulfil the reporting requirements and expectations of Members whereby they:

- provide regular updates to the GOAP Secretariat on their work which is relevant to the Partnership's Objectives;
- work towards ensuring that ocean accounting activities, in which they are involved, are aligned with other relevant national and global ocean accounting activity;
- work towards the alignment of data and information, wherever possible, with national systems and, making these data and information open-source;
- provide, where possible and appropriate, support to the GOAP Secretariat and wider ocean accounting community.

5.3 Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs will provide representation and direction on behalf of Members. As such Co-Chairs are accountable to Members and will act in the best interests of the Members and the Partnership. The Co-Chairs will be individually and collectively responsible for:

- on behalf of Members, the strategic direction and performance of the Partnership, including its Secretariat;
- attending regular meetings with the Secretariat at a frequency they deem appropriate and practical;
- approving the agenda and papers, attending, and chairing the regular Member meeting(s) and the yearly Global Dialogue meeting;
- final agreement on allowing new Members of the Partnership where this is not delegated to the Secretariat consistent with Clause 7;
- the access of Non-Members to financial and technical support subject to contractual requirements;
- delegation of responsibilities to Secretariat and Secretariat (co-)directors as deemed appropriate.

6. Decision-making and accountability

Partnership decisions, except for those referred to in Clause 4.2 and Clause 9, will be made at a Regular Members Meeting by consensus of the Members present and will be recorded in Minutes. If a consensus cannot be reached, both Co-Chairs may in exceptional circumstances declare that Members' views are irreconcilable, after which the relevant decision may be made by majority vote. Quorum for the Regular Meeting shall be one third of Members.

7. Secretariat

The Partnership shall designate one Member to host a Secretariat. The Secretariat may be transferred to another Member in accordance with clause 9.

The Secretariat exists to support Members of the Partnership to achieve its vision and mission through coordination, facilitation, support and liaison roles as appropriate. Subject to delegation of activities by Co-Chairs and Members, activities include, but are not limited to, the below:

GOAP administration

- smooth running and administrative procedures of the Partnership;
- prepare communications for Members and other stakeholders;



- management of financial resources on behalf of Partnership Members;
- manage Member and non-member correspondence and meeting with contractors, Members and other stakeholders;
- alongside Members and Co-Chairs, secure additional financial resources to progress the ocean-related Beyond GDP agenda;
- provide meeting support (i.e. assisting the Co-Chairs to develop agendas, collate and circulate papers, prepare and circulate minutes);
- organise meetings including all logistics (i.e. travel, accommodation, catering, venue booking, etc.).

Communications and global visibility

- maintain the Partnership's branding and website;
- maintain and manage the GOAP communications including regular newsletters and social media messaging.

Global community and agenda

- arrange global and regional community of practice meetings;
- support global visibility of Ocean Accounts and GOAP to support the wider 'Beyond GDP' agenda;
- work with Members to facilitate the alignment of ocean accounting activities within countries;
- represent and act on behalf of the Partnership, as appropriate, in international and national forum;
- track global activity, GOAP or non-GOAP, in the area of Ocean Accounting;
- grow the Membership of Partnership in line with the Terms.

Knowledge production, dissemination and technical assistance

- provide access to a wider network of technical assistance and support;
- provide technical assistance to Members;
- support Non-Members to develop ocean accounts and related policies as requested by Members or Non-Members, or in a way consistent with contractual requirements;
- support monitor, evaluation and learning including but not exclusively the development of knowledge and learning products, ensuring quality of content and production;
- reporting to donors and other funding bodies on activities of the Partnership as required by each organisation.

Any activities identified, or roles as delegated, by the Co-Chairs.

8. Use of emblems and Website

The use of emblems of each Member will be in accord with the current policies of each Member concerning such usage.

All Members of the Partnership will be listed on the Membership page of the Partnership Website.

9. Discontinuation and amendments

The Partnership may amend these Terms as circumstances change over time subject to a vote of the majority of all Members at a regular Member meeting and included in the minutes, or if in-between Member Meetings subject to written approval of two-thirds of all Members.

The Partnership may discontinue the Partnership if the Objectives have been achieved. Decisions to discontinue the Partnership, transfer the Secretariat or remove Members pursuant to Clause



4.1 above, shall require the written approval of two-thirds of all Members.

10. Disclaimer

The Partnership is not subject to the authority of its Members, other than as provided in these Terms. These Terms represent only a specific statement of intent by the Members. They are not in any way intended to operate as legally binding commitments.

Nothing in these Terms will be deemed a waiver, express or implied, of any of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations.