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Oceans and the law of the sea: oceans and the law of the sea

Report on the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

Letter dated 27 March 2024 from the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole addressed to the President of the General Assembly

We have the honour to transmit to you the report** on the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects. The Ad Hoc Working Group held its twentieth meeting, pursuant to paragraph 332 of General Assembly resolution [78/69](#), on 15 March 2024.

We kindly request that the present letter and the report be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 75 (a) of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Kimberly **Louis**

(Signed) Joanna **Skoczek**

* [A/79/50](#).

** Circulated in the language of submission only and without formal editing.



Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

I. Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

1. The twentieth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, was convened pursuant to paragraph 332 of General Assembly resolution 78/69. The meeting of the Working Group was held on 15 March 2024.

2. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group, Kimberly Louis (Saint Lucia) and Joanna Skoczek (Poland), opened the meeting. The Principal Legal Officer of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs delivered opening remarks on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel.

3. Representatives of 39 Member States¹ and two intergovernmental organizations and other bodies² attended the meeting.

4. The following documents were made available to the meeting: the provisional agenda; the annotated provisional agenda; a format; a proposed organization of work; a report of the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on its work since the nineteenth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group; a report from the Group of Experts; and a list of gaps in areas of expertise for the establishment of writing teams of the third World Ocean Assessment.³

5. Under agenda item 2, the Working Group adopted the agenda (see section II) and, under agenda item 3, agreed on the organization of work as proposed by the Co-Chairs.

6. Under agenda item 4, the Co-Chairs presented the report of the Bureau of the Working Group regarding the implementation of the programme of work for the period 2021–2025 for the third cycle of the Regular Process since the previous meeting of the Working Group. Several delegations expressed their full support for the process, especially in terms of welcoming the outcomes of the regional workshops held in 2023 to support the development of the third World Ocean Assessment, as well as the ongoing drafting efforts and the important changes which were made to the structure of the third World Ocean Assessment. Delegations welcomed the intersessional work carried out by the Bureau, noting the strengthened science-policy interface bolstered by the convening of the second round of regional workshops on capacity building for strengthening the ocean science-policy interface held in 2022 and 2023, and the International Symposium on strengthening the ocean science-policy interface held in 2023 in collaboration with IOC-UNESCO. It was emphasised that these forums provided a platform for in-depth exploration of key elements essential for creating sustainability pathways towards an inclusive ocean economy and facilitated the development of the third World Ocean Assessment. Delegations

¹ Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte D'Ivoire, Cyprus, Czechia, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mauritania, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

² European Union and International Atomic Energy Agency.

³ All listed documents are available at <https://www.un.org/regularprocess/events/twentieth-meeting>.

highlighted the importance of upcoming ocean-related events, which are anticipated to enrich the drafting process of the Third World Ocean Assessment. For example, it was noted that the 9th Our Ocean Conference: An Ocean of Potential, to be held from 15 to 17 April 2024 in Athens would be dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism in coastal areas, preventing microplastic pollution in the ocean, and fostering advancements in green shipping practices. Another event highlighted was the One Ocean Science Congress, scheduled to be held from 4 to 6 June 2025 in Nice, France. It was noted that the Congress is expected to underscore the pivotal role of providing ocean scientific evidence for supporting informed decision-making. Delegations underlined that these events, in addition to complementing the drafting process of the Third World Ocean Assessment, would also create synergy and build momentum in the lead up to the third UN Ocean Conference, offering insights which are aligned to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean governance. The importance of synthesising regional-level data and input, emanating from the outcomes of the regional workshops, to be fully utilised by the writing teams of the third World Ocean Assessment was also underscored. The Working Group took note of the report of the Bureau.

7. Under agenda item 5, the Working Group considered the progress made in the implementation of the preliminary timetable and implementation plan for the third cycle of the Regular Process. The secretariat provided an overview of the progress achieved, on behalf of the Joint Coordinators of the Group of Experts who, due to the current budgetary constraints faced by the United Nations, were not able to attend the meeting. This overview included a provision of detailed guidance to Coordinating Authors, the plan for the submission of chapter plans for review by the Group of Experts, and efforts to enhance compatibility with other ocean-related intergovernmental processes, including through the organisation of a satellite event at the upcoming 2024 Ocean Decade Conference to be held on 10 April 2024 in Barcelona, Spain. Several delegations conveyed their appreciation for the efforts of the Group of Experts, led by the Joint Coordinators, in guiding the drafting process of the third World Ocean Assessment. They commended the progress made by the Group of Experts in successfully bringing together Coordinating Authors and engaging with other ocean-related intergovernmental processes through the maintenance and application of lessons learned acquired over the previous cycles. The provision of detailed guidance to the writing teams was welcomed as an important development, which reflects the strong commitment of the Group of Experts. It was noted that this guidance document would facilitate the drafting process of the third World Ocean Assessment, by addressing pivotal points across all chapters, ensuring coherence. The critical role of raising awareness about the Regular Process and its World Ocean Assessment, with the objective of increasing the number, quality and diversity of members of the Pool of Experts, was underscored as a priority by States. A delegation emphasised the necessity of selecting experts from a diverse array of backgrounds, ensuring regional and gender balance within each of the writing team of the third World Ocean Assessment. It was further noted that the secretariat should inform States about non-active writing team members for the purposes of better monitoring and supervision. Another delegation inquired about the inability of the secretariat of the Regular Process to participate in the 60th session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change held in Türkiye in January 2024. The secretariat clarified that it was not able to attend this meeting due to the current budgetary constraints faced by the United Nations. It was noted that, regrettably, there was no provision for the submission of written statements for the aforementioned session. The Working Group took note of the report of the Group of Experts.

8. Under agenda item 6, the Working Group considered current gaps in areas and geographical expertise for the establishment of writing teams of the third World Ocean Assessment. The secretariat presented the current overview of the gaps

identified, including in areas of desalination, marine benthic invertebrates, coastal development, and fjord systems, among others. A delegation inquired about the relation between the specific call for nominations to the Pool of Experts aimed at identifying experts to cover the current gaps in areas and geographical expertise, and the current deadline of 31 July 2024 for general nominations to the Pool of Experts. The secretariat clarified that the nomination process for the Pool of Experts is a continuous process which will be maintained until the end of the cycle. Furthermore, the secretariat appealed, on an exceptional basis, for support from delegations in expeditiously approving self-recommended experts to the Pool of Experts, in light of the imminent deadline for producing the zero draft of the third World Ocean Assessment in the fourth quarter of 2024. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat.

9. Under agenda item 7, the secretariat provided updates on the Regular Process trust fund. The secretariat informed that since its last report to the Working Group in March 2023, the voluntary Trust Fund has received contributions from the Philippines and the Republic of Korea. The secretariat noted its appreciation to the Philippines and the Republic of Korea, and to other States which had made contributions to the Trust Fund. It was noted that the trust fund balance that was available for the purpose of supporting the operations of the Regular Process, including for the provision of assistance to members of the Group of Experts from developing countries, was approximately \$268,000. The secretariat noted that no contributions have been received for the special scholarship fund and stressed the importance of contributions to the special scholarship fund to support training programmes for developing countries.

II. Agenda of the twentieth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

10. The Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole adopted the agenda set out below.
 1. Opening of the meeting.
 2. Adoption of the agenda.
 3. Organization of work.
 4. Report of the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.
 5. Information from the Group of Experts regarding implementation of the preliminary timetable and implementation plan for the third cycle of the Regular Process.
 6. Current gaps in areas and geographical expertise for the establishment of writing teams.
 7. Other matters.
 8. Closure of the meeting.
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