Update on the Southern Ocean contribution to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

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**Information Paper submitted by SCAR, Belgium, Netherlands and WMO**

on behalf of the Southern Ocean Task Force ([www.sodecade.org/about/](https://www.sodecade.org/about/))  
(coordinated by SCAR, and including the SCAR Antarctic Biodiversity Portal, SOOS, EPB, ICED, SCOR, IODE, IAATO, WCRP, CLIVAR, SORP, NIOZ, Pew Bertarelli, WWF, RBINS and BELSPO)

Summary

Following the publication of the Southern Ocean Action Plan in April 2022, the Southern Ocean Task Force has both promoted the Action Plan and worked to ensure the Southern Ocean has appropriate representation within the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development Framework. Having consulted with the Decade Coordination Unit and other stakeholders, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) and the Task Force are working to develop a Decade Collaborative Centre for the Southern Ocean as it provides the best opportunity to facilitate collaboration and coordination. These efforts represent an opportunity to connect Southern Ocean science with global ocean science, reinforcing cooperation and collaborations by Parties and NGO stakeholders between the Antarctic region and adjacent regions, and complementing Article III of the Antarctic Treaty.

The Southern Ocean in the UN Ocean Decade

The 2017 United Nations proclamation of the [Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development](https://oceandecade.org/) 2021-2030 (hereafter referred to as the UN Ocean Decade) called for international scientific cooperation to improve and sustain global ocean health. In response to the call, the SCAR-coordinated [Southern Ocean Task Force](https://www.sodecade.org/about/) (refer to ATCM XLIII IP136[[1]](#footnote-1)), comprising key members of the international Southern Ocean stakeholder community developed the [Southern Ocean Action Plan (SO-AP)](https://www.sodecade.org/action-plan/southern-ocean-action-plan/) which was published in April 2022 (refer to ATCM XLIV IP107[[2]](#footnote-2)). This work built on contributions from a wide range of Parties, Experts, and Observers participating in series of Southern Ocean Decade Workshops, Open Surveys and Working Groups, and UN Ocean Decade Laboratories, focussed on the key Societal Outcomes for the UN Ocean Decade (see [The Southern Ocean Process](https://www.sodecade.org/southern-ocean-process/)).

Better understanding, management and protection of the Southern Ocean is a key contribution to achieving the UN Ocean Decade goals and addressing its challenges. The SO-AP guides Southern Ocean and wider stakeholders in identifying and developing tangible actions and deliverables to achieve the [UN Ocean Decade vision](https://oceandecade.org/vision-mission/).

Facilitating international collaboration to deliver on the SO-AP

The launch of the SO-AP was followed by the hosting of a webinar as a kick-off event, which was open to the entire community (see recording [here](https://vimeo.com/699056921)). This webinar presented the content of the Action Plan and the future of the Southern Ocean community’s engagement in the UN Ocean Decade.

The webinar was followed by two dedicated sessions at the UN Ocean Conference (27 June – 1 July 2022) in Lisbon, Portugal (see conclusions in IP035 *Conclusions of the UN Ocean Conference 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal*):

1. “*From the Southern Ocean to the Arctic – a Call to Action via the UN Ocean Decade*” (organised by: European Polar Board (EPB) with Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS); Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR); Southern Ocean Observing System (SOOS); Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research (SCOR); World Climate Research Programme (WCRP); Climate and Ocean - Variability, Predictability, and Change (CLIVAR); Integrating Climate and Ecosystem Dynamics in the Southern Ocean (ICED); Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation (FPA2)). See recording [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoqDN7izxHw).
2. “*Polar Oceans: Engine to the Global Ocean - Messages and Messengers*” (organised by Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, Oceanographic Institute - Prince Albert I of Monaco Foundation, Oceano Azul Foundation, SCAR, International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI), EPB). Dr Sian Henley, representing both SOOS and the Task Force, presented on the “Southern Ocean Action Plan and Arctic Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science”. See recording [here](https://www.fpa2.org/en/news/polar-oceans-engine-to-the-global-ocean-08207).

The SO-AP was also presented at the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance Ministerial Meeting in Washington, DC in July 2022, at a Side Event (“Research Cooperation from Pole to Pole”) that was co-chaired by Renuka Badhe (EPB). The recording is accessible [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoqDN7izxHw).

Applying to become a Decade Collaborative Centre (DCC)

The main driver behind the decision to become a DCC is that, at the time of writing, there were four UN Ocean Decade endorsed projects that pertain to the Southern Ocean, along with further relevant projects that the Task Force is aware of but which are not yet formalised within the UN Ocean Decade context. More widely, at least 29 endorsed actions of the UN Ocean Decade have some connection to the Southern Ocean. However, an overall coordination of these activities is lacking. The Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) advised SCAR that, in seeking to coordinate a Southern Ocean regional node in the UN Ocean Decade context, the most suitable structure would be a DCC. Through the DCC, SCAR will be able to create an international network for these groups to communicate and collaborate and to integrate with future large-scale projects such as “Antarctica InSync” (see below).

Furthermore, the Southern Ocean DCC (SO-DCC) will enhance collaboration, promote the effective co-design of science, and optimize the use of resources among the diverse stakeholders. It will ensure the creation of synergies and links between existing Southern Ocean Decade Actions, catalyse new actions, and enhance technical and scientific capacity related to the Southern Ocean.

Following thorough feedback and communication with the DCU, the SO-DCC application process was approved in principle by the UN Decade Advisory Board in early 2023. This will allow SCAR and the DCU to expedite the process of developing a mandate and budget for the SO-DCC following extensive stakeholder engagement.

Activities that will fall under the SO-DCC umbrella will include some already underway and others in active stages of planning. An example of the projects that a SO-DCC would help coordinate is the “Antarctica InSync” proposal (ATCMXLV IP059 *International Science & Infrastructure for Synchronous Observation (Antarctica InSync)*). This major international collaboration cites the SO-AP as outlining the need for pan-Antarctic studies across a number of scientific disciplines and envisages realisation through close collaboration with the SO-DCC.

An important consideration for the process is the current Call for Decade Actions (No. 05/2023), open until the end of August 2023, and focussing on marine ecosystems and marine pollution. The aim would be to work with those suitable Actions and Programmes aligned with the SO-AP, with a strong emphasis on mobilizing international collaboration.

Outlook

The next steps for the SO-DCC will be determined by its stakeholders over the coming months while a full plan is being collectively developed. As part of this, in collaboration with the DCU, an explanatory webinar will allow stakeholders, including any Southern Ocean Actions not currently represented on the Task Force, to provide feedback and shape the SO-DCC mandate and budget. As with the establishment of the Task Force and the development of the SO-AP, considerations of equality, diversity and inclusion will be of key importance for both the development of the SO-DCC and the activities that follow. This reflects priority 13 of the Strategic Working Plan calling for Parties to “*Address equality, diversity and inclusion issues, by promoting full participation of underrepresented groups in Antarctic science in operations and activities across all Antarctic issues, including science, operations, policy and law*".

The upcoming SOOS Symposium in Hobart, 14-18 August 2023, includes activities that are being planned to support the UN Ocean Decade effort, build on the SO-AP, and move from plan to action. Specific elements include a Plenary session titled “*Southern Ocean in the global UN Ocean Decade*” and two parallel sessions titled “*Observations to improve predictions of Southern Ocean ecosystems in the global context*” and “*Taking the pulse of the Southern Ocean: an internationally coordinated, circumpolar, and year-round mission*”.

The SO-DCC is expected to be operational in the course of 2023. Part of its goals for its first year will be to identify sources of financial and in-kind support to ensure that the SO-DCC can deliver an effective service for the community.

In 2022, SCAR and its sister body in the Arctic, the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), announced their intent to collaborate and participate in the proposed International Polar Year (IPY) 2032-2033 (see also ATCMXLV IP050 *Plans for a fifth International Polar Year 2032-33*). As the IPY is envisioned to be the culmination of many years of dedicated activities, it will have partially-overlapping timelines with the UN Ocean Decade. Expanding the SO-DCC’s operational reach will include thematic collaboration with the IPY, with the goal of amplifying science outcomes and public awareness about the importance and impact of this science. The IPY will provide an opportunity to ensure that the progress achieved by the UN Ocean Decade is maintained and enhanced further.

In the longer term, it is hoped that the SO-DCC will support future endorsed Decade Actions relating to the Southern Ocean with capacity development, communications, tracking of progress and resource mobilisation. The SO-DCC will also act as a hub for catalysing new partnerships and initiatives as part of the Decade and build on the existing solid foundation of the SO community.

1. ATCM XLIII IP136 *The Southern Ocean contribution to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ATCM XLIV IP107 *The Southern Ocean contribution to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)