



Despite the relevance of oceans across climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage, formal recognition in the UNFCCC process has been challenging. Oceans play a crucial role in regulating the climate as a 'carbon sink', absorbing around 90% of excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions and 25% of carbon dioxide emissions, according to the 2019 **IPCC Special Report**. Whilst providing this force for climate stabilisation, increasing global emissions have resulted in ocean warming, acidification and sea level rise, reducing the effectiveness of the oceans' carbon sink and threatening marine ecosystems and coastal communities. Ocean conservation is, therefore, a crucial tool for climate change mitigation efforts in particular.

Article 4(1)(d) of the UNFCCC indicates that all Parties should "promote sustainable management, and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol, including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems;". Despite initial optimism, the protection of oceans under Article 4(1)(d) received little further acknowledgement or focus until the creation of the 'Because the Ocean' initiative in 2015, which spearheaded calls for a clearly defined space to discuss oceans in the UNFCCC process.

1. "Because the Ocean" Initiative

At COP 21 in 2015, the 'Because the Ocean' initiative was launched with the support of Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France's Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development and other international organisations.

23 countries signed the **First Because the Ocean Declaration** (the First Declaration) ahead of COP 21 which contained three main components:

- a pledge of support for a Special Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to address the relationship between oceans and climate change;
- a call for a high-level UN conference on oceans and seas; and
- a request for dedicated space to discuss oceans in the UNFCCC process, an "ocean action plan".

Following 2015, good progress was made towards the goals of the First Declaration. The IPCC's **Special Report** on the oceans, coasts and sea level rise was published in 2019. The first UN Oceans Conference took place in New York in 2017, repeated in Lisbon in 2022 and most recently in Nice in 2025. Signatories of the First Declaration also called for reference to the importance of oceans within the **Paris Agreement** itself. As a result, the Agreement's preamble notes "the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans".

The Second Because the Ocean Declaration (the Second Declaration) was launched at COP 22 in 2016. The Second Declaration attracted 33 signatory countries by the end of COP 23 and contained, amongst other statements:

- an encouragement to UNFCCC Parties to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that "promote, as appropriate, ambitious climate action in order to minimize the adverse effects of climate change in the ocean and to contribute to its protection and conservation"; and
- an underlining of the importance of further scientific knowledge.

The Third Because the Ocean Declaration (the Third Declaration) was launched at COP 26 in 2021.

In this Third Declaration, Parties affirmed that they would:

- Strive towards accelerating efforts to phase out greenhouse gas emissions from international shipping;
- Advance the development of clean offshore renewable energy sources;
- Advocate for the strengthening of public and private sources of support for climate adaptation and mitigation in the ocean; and
- Collaborate with the IPCC to meet these goals.

2. A space for Oceans within the UNFCCC process



The COP 25 Chilean presidency branded COP 25 ‘the blue COP’ and called for collective ambition to centre a focus on the oceans in the preceding months.

This focus led to the Chile Madrid Time for Action Decision at COP 25 which requested the chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) to convene at its fifty-second session (June 2020) a dialogue on the ocean and climate change (the Ocean Dialogue) to consider how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action in the UNFCCC context (**Decision 1/CP.25**, para. 31).

The following year at COP 26, the Glasgow Climate Pact clarified that oceans would not be considered under an additional, separate agenda item to the UNFCCC process itself. Rather it invited “the relevant work programmes and constituted bodies under the UNFCCC to consider how to integrate and strengthen ocean-based action in their existing mandates and workplans and to report on these activities within the existing reporting processes, as appropriate;” (**Decision 1/CP.26**, para. 60).

COP 26 therefore marked a decision by the Parties that oceans should be integrated into existing UNFCCC workstreams. However, Parties also agreed that the Ocean Dialogue, originally a one-off event at SB 52 (June 2020), should be repeated. **Decision 1/CP.26** para. 61 invited the SBSTA Chair to hold an annual dialogue, starting at SBSTA 56 (June 2022), to strengthen ocean-based action. The Parties also requested that the Chair prepare an informal summary report covering the annual dialogue, to be made available to the Conference of the Parties at its subsequent session. This decision positioned the Ocean Dialogue as a recurring event in the UNFCCC process for discussion of ocean-related issues.

At COP 27 in 2022, the Ocean Dialogue format was further refined. Parties decided that the Ocean Dialogue would be conducted by two co-facilitators, selected biannually by Parties, who are responsible for determining topics and conducting the dialogue in consultation with Parties. The co-facilitators are also responsible for preparing an informal summary report to be presented at the following COP (**Decision 1/CP.27**, para. 49).

3. Themes under the Ocean Dialogues

Since 2022, the Ocean Dialogue has taken place annually at the Subsidiary Bodies (SB) negotiations in Bonn.

Following the latest Ocean Dialogue at SB 62 in June 2025, the informal **Summary Report** released by co-facilitators from Brazil and Belgium highlighted as key issues, amongst others, the importance of:

- Parties including ambitious ocean-based measures in NDCs to be submitted ahead of COP 30;
- inclusion of oceans as a cross-cutting consideration across all thematic targets under the Global Goal on Adaptation; and
- a continued focus on ocean-climate-biodiversity synergies.

At COP 30 in Belem, Carlos Márcio Bicalho Cozendey, the Brazilian co-facilitator, will present the main outcomes of the 2025 Ocean Dialogue during the COP 30 opening plenary and host a side event for Parties and observers to encourage co-operation to action the report’s key findings.

In the summary report, the co-facilitators stressed ahead of COP 30 that “the 2025 NDC cycle presents a unique and time-bound opportunity for Parties to demonstrate their collective progress to enhance ocean-based climate ambition” (paragraph 31).

4. Ocean in the NDCs

Multiple workstreams across the UNFCCC process have stressed the importance of ocean-based commitments in NDCs. As noted above, the **Second Declaration** of 2016 encouraged Parties to submit NDCs that centre ocean protection and conservation. This call was consistently reinforced across the most recent Ocean Dialogues. The first Global Stocktake (GST) to assess collective progress on implementation of the Paris Agreement took place during COP 28 (Dubai). Following the 2023 Ocean Dialogue, the first GST contains several references to oceans in relation to mitigation and adaptation. The preamble of **Decision 1/CMA.5** noted the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including the ocean. Paragraph 35 addressed mitigation and invited “Parties to preserve and restore oceans and coastal ecosystems and scale up, as appropriate, ocean-based mitigation action”. Similarly, paragraph 56 covered adaptation and noted “that ecosystem-based approaches, including ocean-based adaptation and resilience measures, as well as in mountain regions, can reduce a range of climate change risks and provide multiple co-benefits”.

This follows the call in the **informal summary report** of the 2023 ocean and climate change dialogue, which was welcomed by the GST conclusions at paragraph 180, for the GST to include and mainstream ocean measures so as to promote the establishment of guidelines for Parties to be able to include and strengthen ocean-based measures in their updated NDCs (para. 12). The **Blue NDC Challenge**, launched at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference, continued the focus on implementation and represents a major international initiative to integrate ocean-focused climate action into NDCs ahead of COP 30.

Eight inaugural countries committed to the challenge, including Australia, Fiji, Kenya, Mexico, Palau and the Seychelles. The challenge suggests mitigation and adaptation solutions including:

- sustainably managing, conserving and restoring marine ecosystems, including blue carbon ecosystems;
- phasing out offshore fossil fuel production and scaling up responsible marine renewable energy;
- reducing maritime sector emissions; and supporting climate-resilient fisheries and aquaculture.

The initiative aims to maximise the ocean's potential to deliver up to 35% of the emissions reductions needed to meet Paris Agreement targets while building resilience and delivering benefits for nature and people. **Crucially, for developing countries, the Blue NDC Challenge distinguishes between NDC commitments as unconditional targets, to be achieved using the Party's own resources, and conditional targets contingent upon international support through means of implementation such as climate finance, technology transfer and capacity building.**

A **report** from September 2023 examined 148 new or updated NDCs from the first revision cycle of NDCs and found 97 include coastal and marine nature-based solutions. Among these, 61 include coastal and marine nature-based solutions for both mitigation and adaptation purposes. 68 countries are explicitly committed to create enabling conditions for ocean action such as research, technology transfer, capacity-building and finance mobilisation. This positive trend continued into the subsequent NDC cycle. The co-facilitators' **Information Note** ahead of the 2025 Ocean Dialogue at Bonn indicated that "there has been an encouraging trend in the recently submitted NDCs. Of the 23 new NDCs analysed between 1 October 2024 and 5 May 2025, 74 per cent of Parties included ocean-based mitigation and adaptation measures, targets, and policies. Ocean-based adaptation measures were featured in the recent NDCs of 88 per cent of the Parties. In terms of mitigation, 41 per cent of the Parties included ocean-based mitigation actions in these NDCs. (Para. 17).

Parties to the Paris Agreement increasingly recognise the crucial role of conserving and restoring blue carbon ecosystems in achieving national climate goals, with these systems becoming a prominent feature in NDCs. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, in its **Explainer Document**, describes blue carbon as "the carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems." Such as mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses, both in the plants and in the sediment or soil below. When "vegetation is removed, and the land is either drained or dredged for economic development, [...] the carbon in the sediments is released into the atmosphere and ocean."

At COP 27 in Marrakech, Parties held a "Blue Carbon Implementation Lab" to discuss the issue. The summary Outcome Document called for three key actions in relation to blue carbon:

- explore innovative financing opportunities to capture the benefits of blue carbon ecosystems for climate change mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity protection and livelihoods;
- enhance NDC commitments to conserve and restore blue carbon ecosystems; and
- design projects that open pathways for indigenous peoples and marginalised communities to equitably participate in and benefit from the voluntary carbon market in relation to blue carbon stocks.

Below, we outline examples of ocean-related commitments in NDCs submitted ahead of COP 30 by a range of countries committed to the Blue NDC Challenge. These commitments highlight the cross-cutting nature of ocean issues across sectors such as mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage etc.

Jurisdiction	Sectors addressing the oceans in NDCs 3.0 NDCs 3.0 content	NDCs 3.0 content
<u>Brazil</u>	Ocean-Based Renewable Energy Mitigation	"approval of the legal framework and regulation of offshore wind energy production ." Conservation and restoration of marine and coastal biomes: aware of the critical importance of the oceans for sustainable development and in regulating climate stability , the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) launched support initiatives for actions to recover native vegetation in mangrove and resting areas in Brazil, coastal ecosystems of great ecological, social and economic importance, as well as for the conservation and recovery of shallow coral reefs and coral banks off the Brazilian coast .
<u>Kenya</u>	Adaptation	"Kenya commits to achieving the adaptation goal and addressing loss and damage through the implementation of the following key initiatives, inter alia: [...] • Improve environmental and ecosystem management through nature-based solutions including, but not limited to the protection, conservation, rehabilitation and restoration of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems with the integration of indigenous, traditional and local knowledge. [...]"

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen investment in vulnerable ecosystems such as mountains, wetlands, ocean and the blue economy (including sea grass and mangroves) to foster adaptation to climate change.”
<u>Seychelles</u>	Blue carbon	<p>“Given the high vulnerability of Seychelles and its consequential focus on adaptation, a long list of co-benefits has been identified in waste, water, health, tourism, agriculture, forestry, land use and other sectors. Most importantly, the blue economy and its potential have been further developed by mapping blue carbon seagrass and including the carbon stock into the country’s inventory.”</p>
<u>Australia</u>	Blue carbon Maritime emissions	<p>“With 5–11% of global blue carbon stocks held in Australia’s oceans, the integration of ocean-based climate solutions is critical to global climate change efforts. Through the development of Australia’s Sustainable Ocean Plan, stakeholders have called for opportunities to pursue ocean-based climate action to help advance delivery of our emissions targets and support climate adaptation, such as through protecting and restoring blue carbon ecosystems.”</p> <p>“While international shipping emissions are not counted towards Australia’s emissions reduction targets, Australia is working with the Republic of Korea and Singapore to establish green and digital shipping corridors that will support efforts to accelerate maritime decarbonisation of key shipping routes.”</p>



5. The UN Ocean Conference

Alongside the UNFCCC process, the international community is also focusing on ocean conservation in the context of the UN’s overarching **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14**: “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”. The 2025 UN Ocean Conference was co-hosted by France and Costa Rica in Nice with a focus on the objective of “accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the Ocean”. Throughout the conference, speakers stressed the links and need for coherence between climate and oceans policy.

The Ocean Rise and Coastal Resilience Summit took place in Nice a few days before the official conference and was of particular interest. The summit saw the launch of the **Ocean Rise and Coastal Resilience Coalition**, an assembly of stakeholders and decision-makers with three main priorities: organizing the exchange of practices and implementable solutions and strengthening access to, sharing, and use of scientific knowledge and data; mobilizing financial actors toward the design and implementation of appropriate financial mechanisms; and advocating for the interests of coastal cities and regions in political forums.

6. Next Steps

As noted above, the 2025 deadline ahead of COP 30 for updated NDCs is a crucial opportunity for Parties to include ocean commitments, first called for in the Second Declaration, and more recently in the GST, the Ocean Dialogues and the Blue NDC Challenge. COP 30 will give a strong indication of countries’ commitment to addressing the cross-cutting issue of ocean conservation and climate change. Parties and stakeholders will have the opportunity to learn more about these initiatives at the **COP 30 Ocean Pavilion**, which will be hosting events on three tracks: ‘Human Ocean’, ‘Planet Ocean’ and ‘Future Ocean’.

In July 2025, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) published its advisory opinion, confirming that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) forms part of the directly relevant applicable law governing countries’ obligations to combat climate change. In its published **Opinion** at paragraph 457.D, the ICJ: “is unanimously of the opinion that States parties to the UNCLOS have an obligation to adopt measures to protect and preserve the marine environment, including from the adverse effects of climate change and to co-operate in good faith”. Please see LRI’s **Delegate’s Guide to the Advisory Opinion** for further information on the interaction between UNCLOS and the UNFCCC process and how the ICJ opinion may impact future UNFCCC negotiations.

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