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ISLAND STATES OCEAN SUMMIT

SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ACTION FOR RESILIENT ISLANDS

BACKGROUND BOOKLET

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This background document was prepared by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO in the framework of the Island States Ocean Summit (June 2026, Tokyo, Japan) as preparatory material for the Summit. It has been developed for Summit participants with the view of informing discussions and sparking reflection by providing an overview of the state of play, including main challenges, priorities, and opportunities for action. Inputs were collected from attending country delegations and partner organizations to inform its development through a voluntary online survey. The Summit organisers would like to thank all the individuals and institutions for providing their detailed responses to inform this document.

Context

Ocean pressures are accelerating at an unprecedented speed. Habitat degradation, unsustainable resource use, marine pollution, fisheries depletion, and marine biodiversity loss are being compounded by the accelerating impacts of climate change - notably ocean warming, acidification and deoxygenation, sea-level rise, coastal erosion and intensifying extreme weather events. Marine ecosystem degradation is approaching tipping points, affecting the billions of people worldwide who rely on coastal and marine ecosystems for livelihoods, food security, development, and protection from climate-related risks.

This situation is particularly critical for island nations, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which remain at the frontline of climate change-related threats and accelerating ocean pressures. For many island states, the ocean is also a defining feature of national identity, territory, and development, with maritime zones often far exceeding land area and sustaining livelihoods, food systems, cultures, and economies. Given the deep interconnections between ocean health and social, spiritual, cultural, and economic values, the need to protect and sustainably manage the ocean for future generations is fundamental.

From an economic standpoint, OECD projections indicate that ocean-based industries could contribute more than USD 3 trillion in global value added by 2030. Within the global ocean economy, growth is being driven by sectors such as tourism, shipping, fisheries, and aquaculture, as well as emerging industries including marine biotechnology and offshore renewable energy. For island states, this creates significant opportunities to shape sustainable ocean economies that generate livelihoods and resilience while safeguarding the ecosystems on which those economies depend.

What is Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management?

Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (SOPM) is a **comprehensive, strategic, and future-oriented framework designed to guide decision-making about the overall sustainable use and conservation of a nation's entire ocean resources**. By integrating ecosystem and economic considerations, societal benefits, and climate resilience, SOPM aims at ensuring the long-term health of marine ecosystems, and the natural services they provide, while fostering sustainable economic growth and societal well-being and equity considerations. SOPM is a whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach that serves as a 'unifying umbrella' framework for ocean related governance at all scales.

The concept has been championed by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, where its members have committed to sustainably managing 100% of ocean areas under national jurisdiction by 2030, and other countries have made similar commitments within the framework of the 100% Alliance campaign. Moreover, to help operationalize the Ocean Panel's ambitions, the Ocean Action 2030 coalition was launched to support countries within the Ocean Panel membership and beyond to develop and implement Sustainable Ocean Plans (SOPs), connecting countries that want to advance sustainable ocean planning with institutions that can provide technical assistance, financial support, capacity development and knowledge-sharing.

In addition, adopted by the Member States of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO at the IOC's 33rd Assembly in June 2025, the IOC Strategy for SOPM (2025–2030) sets out a five-year path to help countries meet global ocean-related policy targets and support the development of sustainable ocean-based economies, with the mission to equip every *Member State* with the capacity to develop and *implement knowledge-based* SOPs.

Considering ocean complexities as an interconnected and dynamic system influenced by numerous factors simultaneously, SOPM supports countries to meet national commitments under existing global and regional ocean governance frameworks, typically focused on single specific components. These include, for example, climate and biodiversity commitments under the UNFCCC and CBD frameworks, as well as commitments under the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS, 2024 - 2034) or the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

SOPM also provides a unifying framework to policy integration across sectors at the national level through the development and implementation of SOPs. In practice, as defined by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, SOPs comprise "policies and mechanisms to facilitate sustainable use of the ocean and maximise benefits and value creation for current and future generations." They provide a national framework to navigate competing ocean uses and sectoral priorities and enable sustainable ocean economy development. Consequently, sustainable ocean plans equip decision-makers with the science and knowledge needed to drive long-term prosperity and resilience, better prepare for mounting ocean risks, and help meet global commitments. Ten member countries of the Ocean Panel have already embarked in or completed the development of a national Sustainable Ocean Plans - these include: Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Portugal, and Seychelles.

Existing mechanisms and measures can be embedded within the framework of SOPM processes including other national ocean governance instruments that aim to deliver nature positive, climate resilient, people-centric and long-term economic development, such as:

- Regulatory reforms, policy processes and commitments made through international agreements
- Strategic investments in emerging ocean sectors
- Marine spatial planning (MSP)[1]
- Integrated coastal zone management (ICZM)
- Marine protected areas (MPAs)
- Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)
- Sectoral plans related to ocean economy industries
- Indigenous-led and community-based management approaches
- Ecosystem-based management approaches

Island States Leading the Call: The Island States Ocean Summit as a Global Dialogue for Strengthened SOPM

There is growing recognition of the potential for evidence-based SOPM approaches to support enhanced ocean governance and management especially among ocean-dependent Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other island states, driven by intensified use of ocean spaces, climate impacts, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

Hosted by The Nippon Foundation and in partnership with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC) and Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Island States Ocean Summit will convene high-level government representatives of island nations, as well as representatives of partner

[1] IOC's refers to MSP as a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives that are usually specified through a political process: https://www.mspglobal2030.org/

organisations to share knowledge and good practices, forge partnerships, and accelerate collective action on SOPM for a sustainable and climate-resilient ocean future.

The Summit is being held in the framework of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. It will accelerate the implementation of the IOC SOPM Strategy (2025–2030) and Implementation Plan (2025-2027), a five-year plan endorsed by Member States as a roadmap to equip nations with the science, tools, and capacities required for knowledge-based SOPM. Moreover, as governments and stakeholders look ahead to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference in Rio de Janeiro, this Summit will serve as an inaugural moment for igniting national and regional SOPM efforts, in island states in particular, to strengthen linkages between marine planning, biodiversity protection, sustainable ocean economy development, and climate resilience. It will also seek to strengthen ocean action on climate and biodiversity in preparation for the UNFCCC COP31 and CDB COP17 and other regional and global policy frameworks.

Current SOPM 'state of play' in island states and efforts from partner organizations

This section brings together a summary of voluntary inputs received from island governments and partner organisations in preparation for the Island States Ocean Summit. It presents a preliminary overview of current SOPM-related initiatives, achievements and lessons. This overview is not exhaustive and is intended to provide a practical snapshot of ongoing efforts and to help frame Summit discussions around shared experience, emerging opportunities and areas where cooperation can add value.

Country initiatives

Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua and Barbuda is strengthening the legal and policy foundations of its sustainable ocean-based economy through a draft Blue Economy Bill and a draft Seabed Minerals Bill. Marine Spatial Planning is also emerging as a priority, given its potential to balance ocean uses, support conservation and guide future sustainable ocean economy development. Food security remains a central concern, particularly as climate change affects fisheries, which are vital to the country's economy and communities. Future priorities include aquaculture and mariculture, alongside responses to sargassum blooms affecting beaches and in consequence, tourism, as well as coral bleaching affecting reef ecosystems.

In addition to ongoing policy processes, other key milestones include the successful implementation of two aquaponics projects, and the role of the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries and the Blue Economy's Department of the Blue Economy in establishing the "Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy" (COBE) at the Five Islands Campus of the University of the West Indies in Antigua. The process has underscored the importance of detailed planning, strong organisation and collaboration with the key stakeholders needed to move sustainable ocean economy priorities from concept to implementation.

Australia

Australia is developing a national Sustainable Ocean Plan as a member of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy. The Plan builds on extensive national engagement with ocean users, managers and custodians to identify existing work, challenges, opportunities, priorities and draft national outcomes for the ocean. Australia's approach to sustainable ocean management extends beyond a single plan and includes sustainably managing 100 per cent of its Marine Protected Areas, covering more than half of its ocean areas, a commitment to 30 per cent high protection by 2030, leadership on the High Seas

Biodiversity Treaty, programmes to reduce threats such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and plastic pollution, and reforms to national environmental laws for improved outcomes across land and sea.

Major milestones from the development of Australia's draft Sustainable Ocean Plan include dedicated engagement with First Nations peoples through facilitated workshops, interviews and a First Nations Sustainable Ocean Reference Group; the release of a draft Sustainable Ocean Plan for a four-week national comment period, which received a great number of submissions from ocean businesses, industry peak bodies, First Nations peoples, NGOs, advocacy groups, researchers, scientists and community members; and an Ocean Dialogue convened alongside the Global Nature Positive Summit in 2024, which marked the culmination of almost two years of nationwide engagement.

Australia's experience shows that time, trust and flexibility matter. Early and frequent engagement helped build relationships, create space for difficult issues to be raised, and gather practical solutions. The process also revealed strong common ground: ocean users and managers may not always agree on how action should be taken, but there is a willingness to work together around a shared vision. Key lessons include the importance of protecting and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems, recognising the ocean's role in responding to climate change, improving coordination across jurisdictions and sectors, and strengthening enabling conditions such as data, knowledge and finance.

Relevant resources: Australia's Sustainable Ocean Plan; Our Ocean initiative

Comoros

Comoros highlights sustainable tourism and connecting ocean, coastal and community-based development priorities. The country is advancing an ecotourism initiative linked to the creation of a visitor circuit through Ngazidja island.

Cuba

Cuba has developed a broad national policy, legal and programme framework for the planning and management of seas and oceans. This includes Law No. 150/2022 on the System of Natural Resources and the Environment; Law No. 115/2013 on Maritime, River and Lake Navigation; Law No. 230/2002 on Ports; Law No. 129/2019 on Fisheries; and Decree-Law No. 77/2023 on Coasts. Strategic frameworks include the National Economic and Social Development Plan to 2030, the State Plan for Confronting Climate Change (Tarea Vida), the National Environmental Strategy, a biological diversity programme aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and a Roadmap for the Conservation, Management and Sustainable Use of Coral Reefs.

Cuba is also implementing research and investment projects relevant to SOPM, including the macro-project on hazards and coastal vulnerability of the Cuban archipelago for 2050-2100, the Green Climate Fund-financed project on coastal resilience to climate change through ecosystem-based adaptation, and GEF-financed projects on the conservation and sustainable use of 'turtle-grass' and the integration of biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation into sustainable tourism. Key achievements include expanding the area of marine protected areas by almost 5 per cent from 2015 to 2025, establishing Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, and strengthening science and innovation for environmental assessments and marine ecosystem quality.

Cuba's experience reinforces that sustainable ocean management depends on science and its integration into public policy. It also points to the importance of collaboration, communication and exchange among

the actors involved in ocean planning and management, as well as institutional and human capacity development for a more holistic response to the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Relevant resources: www.citma.gob.cu ; www.tareavida.cu ; www.redciencia.cu

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is advancing a set of national initiatives to strengthen SOPM, including the development of a National Oceanographic Data Platform supported by a network of oceanographic buoys and tide gauges that provide real-time data for research, coastal management and evidence-based decision-making. It is also developing a National Manual for the Construction, Repair and Rehabilitation of Maritime Infrastructure to promote climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable coastal development, while progressing toward its first National Maritime Strategy to strengthen ocean governance and sustainable use of marine resources.

Additional initiatives include sustainable marine aquaculture, such as reef fish breeding and macroalgae cultivation through marine aquaponic systems, and scientific expeditions in offshore banks within the national maritime territory to expand knowledge and support conservation of strategic marine ecosystems. Key achievements include ratification of the BBNJ Agreement, making the Dominican Republic the 87th State to ratify the instrument, and reaching protection of 30.8 per cent of its marine territory in September 2025, thereby achieving the global 30x30 target ahead of 2030 and becoming the first Caribbean country to achieve it.

The Dominican Republic's experience underlines that marine spatial planning is essential for sustainability, conservation, responsible use of living and non-living marine resources, resilience and sustainable ocean economy development in SIDS. Inter-institutional coordination, political commitment, technical and scientific participation, civil society engagement and public ocean awareness have also been key success factors. Access to reliable oceanographic data and scientific information are central to adaptive capacity and evidence-based decisions, particularly as climate change and global warming affect marine ecosystems, coastal zones and sustainable ocean economy activities. For instance, the sargassum crisis remains a major environmental, social and economic challenge for the Greater Caribbean, requiring monitoring, regional cooperation, capacity development and sustainable prevention, management and valorisation strategies.

Relevant resources: ANAMAR; Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources projects; World Bank Dominican Republic policy notes; A Case Study on flood vulnerability in Santo Domingo.

Federated States of Micronesia

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is advancing the Blue Prosperity Micronesia programme as a national commitment to SOPM. The programme brings together marine spatial planning, marine protected areas and science-based fisheries management to organise ocean uses, conserve biodiversity and support the long-term sustainability of marine resources. Through the Micronesia Challenge, FSM also participates in a regional commitment to effectively manage 50 per cent of marine resources and 30 per cent of terrestrial resources.

Key milestones include the use of a vessel monitoring system under the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) to monitor the Exclusive Economic Zone and IUU fishing; the initiation of marine spatial planning in two of FSM's four states, enabling increases in protected areas within coastal waters; and expanded

coastal fisheries monitoring through initiatives led by the National Government, State Governments and partners.

The process has reinforced that ocean management in FSM requires a bottom-up approach that actively engages community stakeholders in decision-making and supports coordination, inclusivity and harmony across all levels of governance and society. FSM's priority needs are closely linked to data and monitoring. Reliable ocean data remain limited and dispersed across agencies and institutions, while coastal fisheries monitoring is still small in scale compared with the extent of reef ecosystems requiring oversight. Strengthening and centralising data management systems, improving accessibility to reliable data, and expanding monitoring efforts are therefore essential for more informed and effective ocean management and conservation.

Relevant resource: Micronesia Challenge

Iceland

Iceland is advancing Marine Spatial Planning in national coastal waters through its maritime spatial planning framework and related policy on the organisation of ocean and coastal areas. Its approach also connects to the global 30 x 30 goal as a benchmark for conservation within broader ocean governance, alongside national biodiversity policy and regulation on the protection of sensitive marine areas and benthic ecosystems.

Icelandic fisheries are widely regarded as among the more sustainable in the world, supported by a legal and regulatory management framework grounded in science-based advice from well-supported institutions. The main lesson from this experience is clear: high-quality scientific advice is essential to ensure that commercial stocks are harvested as sustainably as possible. Looking ahead, Iceland identifies the need for a national SOPM framework that enables co-creation of strategy and action across ministries, government institutes and stakeholders, recognising that ocean management requires coordination across multiple governance frameworks and institutions.

Relevant resources: Iceland Maritime Spatial Planning; Strategy for Maritime Spatial Planning; National Biodiversity Policy; Regulation on Protection of Ocean Areas

Japan

Japan promotes maritime governance in a comprehensive and systematic manner under the Basic Act on Ocean Policy and the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy. The Basic Plan is reviewed approximately every five years and amended as needed. Within the Plan, the creation of a sustainable ocean and maritime security form the two main pillars of maritime policy, with key measures identified for steady implementation. Progress is summarised and published annually in an ocean policy report.

Inter-ministerial coordination is a central success factor in Japan's approach, supporting coherence across the institutions involved in ocean policy and helping translate strategic direction into implementation.

Relevant resources: Basic Plan on Ocean Policy; Annual Ocean Policy Report (Japanese version only).

Madagascar

Madagascar is advancing several national and regional SOPM-related initiatives to strengthen marine governance, support sustainable ocean economy development and conserve marine biodiversity. Led by the Ministry of Fishery and Blue Economy, in collaboration with national and international partners, the

country has developed key national frameworks including the National Ocean Policy, the National Blue Economy Strategy and Investment Plan, and the national institutional and legislative framework for Marine Spatial Planning. Madagascar has also contributed at the regional level to the Western Indian Ocean MSP and Ocean Governance Framework.

Implementation of these core policy and planning instruments is now in progress, with the view of promoting sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, climate resilience, and inclusive coastal economic development. Madagascar is also actively expanding Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) through the MIHARI Network, and MPAs, which play a key role in community-based conservation and biodiversity protection. In addition, the country has recently strengthened its legal framework by formalizing OECMs. Pilot MSP and integrated coastal management programmes are also being implemented in coastal regions such as Diana, Sofia and Boeny, with emphasis on participatory governance, gender inclusion, poverty reduction and local planning capacity.

Key milestones include steady progress in developing the national MSP framework, stronger coordination and improved use of marine data for integrated ocean planning, progress towards adoption of the 30x30 strategy, and the emergence of a large marine seascapes approach informed by exchanges with models such as Fiji's Lau Seascape and Indonesia's Bird's Head Seascape. Madagascar's experience highlights the importance of strong government leadership, effective coordination tools, coastal community involvement, stakeholder engagement, and community-based management. Priority needs include securing long-term financing for SOPM implementation, alongside strengthening research and marine data collection.

Relevant resource: Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy governance tools

Malta

Malta is advancing SOPM through a robust national legal and institutional framework that regulates marine spatial planning and the conservation of the marine environment under national jurisdiction. As an EU Member State, Marine Spatial Planning in Malta is regulated by the Maritime Spatial Planning Regulations of 2016, which transpose the EU MSP Directive. Marine Spatial Planning is also embedded in Malta's Strategic Plan for Environment and Development, which addresses the management of land and maritime resources and seeks to balance socio-economic growth with environmental protection. The Strategic Plan is currently under review. Institutional coordination is supported by a Marine Spatial Planning Committee, bringing together representatives from the Planning Authority, Environment and Resources Authority, Continental Shelf Department, Department for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Armed Forces Maritime Section, Transport Authority and Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Despite being a European Union Member State, Malta's geophysical realities and economies of scale share similarities with SIDS. Hence, at regional and global levels, Malta has also positioned itself as an advocate for island states and SIDS through multiple initiatives. Its Foreign Policy Strategic Framework 2025–2026 identifies capacity development for SIDS as a priority, while Malta's 2023–2024 term on the UN Security Council gave particular attention to climate change, ocean preservation, and sea-level rise. The "Island for Islands" initiative, launched at UNFCCC COP26 in 2021, supports SIDS through technical exchange, best practices, and lessons learned from Malta's experience. Malta also supports SIDS capacity development through scholarships at the University of Malta's Islands and Small States Institute, the Climate Vulnerability and Resilience Index developed with the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and

Pacific States (OACPS) and the University of Malta, cooperation with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and the Malta-based Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence for capacity development.

Key lessons from Malta's experience point to the need for stronger inter-sectoral cooperation, investment in research and data to guide policy-making, and sustained skills development, including upskilling and reskilling, to respond to changes in the maritime sector and support the transition to a sustainable ocean economy.

Relevant resources: Strategic Plan for Environment and Development; Maritime Spatial Planning Regulations; Marine Protected Areas in Malta.

Nauru

Nauru is progressing several initiatives that together form the basis of SOPM across its Exclusive Economic Zone of approximately 308,000 km² and its coastal waters. The Fisheries Management Act 2024 strengthens the legal and institutional framework for the conservation and management of tuna and other marine resources. Subsidiary legislation under the Act applies Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission conservation and management measures in Nauru's EEZ and to Nauru-flagged vessels operating outside national fisheries waters.

At the coastal level, the Resilient Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture in Nauru project, financed by the Adaptation Fund, and MiCOAST activities under the Kiwa Initiative support ecosystem-based coastal fisheries management, aquaculture, nature-based solutions and stronger community engagement. Regionally, Nauru works through the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement and wider Pacific Ocean governance frameworks to advance science-based management of shared fish stocks and strengthen cooperation.

Key milestones include the enactment of the Fisheries Management Act 2024, application of WCPFC measures through subsidiary legislation, and implementation of coastal fisheries, aquaculture, nature-based solutions and community participation activities. The process demonstrates that strong political commitment and updated legislation are essential enabling conditions; regional partnerships and climate and ocean finance mechanisms are critical for small island administrations; and community engagement and locally grounded approaches are vital for ownership and long-term effectiveness.

Relevant resources: Fisheries Management Act 2024; the Government Gazette notice applying conservation and management measures in Nauru's EEZ.

Palau

Palau is implementing a comprehensive Marine Spatial Planning initiative covering 100 per cent of its ocean jurisdiction. The framework aims to harmonise sectoral plans, strengthen agency mandates and meet regional and international commitments. Through data-driven assessments, it seeks to optimise management of the Exclusive Economic Zone while balancing biodiversity conservation, sustainable fisheries and other ocean priorities.

Subnational engagement is central to Palau's process. The MSP initiative is working with state governments to document current and future maritime uses and to standardise zoning nomenclature across all states, creating a common regulatory language for management and enforcement. By the end

of 2026, the process is expected to culminate in a Sustainable Ocean Policy and Implementation Plan connecting national strategy with local action and supporting Palau's role as a Large Ocean State.

Key achievements in this process include comprehensive national stakeholder engagement, completion of strategic EEZ assessments, and development of targeted reports for high-impact sectors, including offshore fisheries and biodiversity conservation. The process has shown the importance of robust science, broader sectoral integration beyond conservation alone, and careful navigation of political and community sensitivities in ocean decision-making. Palau identifies institutional reform as a critical requirement to design a more integrated coordinating mechanism for a unified "One Ocean" approach. This includes securing the sustained financial, technical, and human resourcing necessary to implement the Sustainable Ocean Policy (SOP) effectively across all government levels and state jurisdictions.

Philippines

The Philippines is advancing national SOPM-related initiatives to strengthen climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and sustainable ocean economy development. These include the development of a National Ocean Environments Policy and a national Marine Spatial Planning framework to promote integrated, science-based ocean governance across sectors. The Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System is also helping integrate ecosystem values into development planning and decision-making.

The Philippines is strengthening Marine Protected Areas and identifying Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures in support of the global 30x30 biodiversity target. The Extended Producer Responsibility Act addresses marine plastic pollution through circular economy approaches and private sector engagement, while new Marine Scientific Research Stations are being established nationwide to strengthen marine biodiversity, climate and ocean data generation. The country also participates actively in regional and global ocean governance processes, including the BBNJ Agreement and Convention on Biological Diversity negotiations, and promotes South-South and triangular cooperation among island and archipelagic states.

Key achievements include updating marine Key Biodiversity Areas, strengthening area-based conservation, implementing the Extended Producer Responsibility Act, and establishing new Marine Scientific Research Stations. The Philippines' experience underlines that science-based and integrated planning, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral collaboration, and policy coherence with institutional support are all essential to accelerate SOPM implementation.

Saint Lucia

Saint Lucia is advancing SOPM through the implementation of actions to conserve, sustainably use and effectively manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources, while addressing existing and emerging threats. Its policy and planning framework includes the National Ocean Policy and Strategic Action Plan (2020-2035), Coastal Master and Marine Spatial Plan (2020-2035), National Adaptation Plan (2018-2028), Sectoral Adaptation Strategies and Action Plans for the fisheries, agriculture and water sectors, the Resilient Ecosystems Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan (2020-2028), the National Policy for the Fisheries Sector (2020-2030), and a draft National Ocean Governance Study. Actions may be site-specific, including the establishment of Marine Protected Areas and measures to address sargassum influxes, while broader discussions and initiatives are national where feasible. Saint Lucia also benefits from partnerships, projects, technical assistance and financial support from regional bodies including the

OECS, Cartagena Convention Secretariat, Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism and CARICOM.

Notable milestones include the Eastern Caribbean's first mobile desalination plant, developed through a GEF Small Grants Programme-supported project with the Laborie Fishers and Consumers Cooperative and capable of producing 1,000 gallons of water daily. Another example is the conversion of sargassum accumulating on south-eastern beaches into useful biofertilisers through Algas Organics, an initiative that has received international recognition. Saint Lucia's priority needs point to the importance of valuing marine ecosystems and resources while protecting them from biodiversity loss, climate impacts and land-based pollution and degradation. Effective management of Marine Protected Areas, equitable stakeholder benefits, community-led conservation, and legal action to curb overfishing, IUU fishing, inappropriate waste disposal and marine plastic pollution remain central.

Seychelles

Seychelles is advancing SOPM through the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP), a national, government-led initiative launched in 2014 to support the sustainable use, protection and management of its ocean space through an integrated and science-based approach. The Plan reflects a strong participatory model, engaging government institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society and local communities. It draws on scientific research, more than 100 spatial data layers, government reports and local knowledge to expand marine protection to 30 per cent of Seychelles' marine space, strengthen climate resilience and support sustainable ocean economy development.

The Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan is complemented by the Blue Economy Roadmap, which provides the strategic framework for sustainable ocean-based economic development while maintaining environmental sustainability. Together, these instruments align conservation, climate adaptation and economic growth within an integrated ocean governance approach. Key milestones include the Plan being signed into law on 31 March 2025, its approval by Cabinet on 14 May 2025, and Cabinet approval to establish the Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning Agency and initiate the enabling legislative process for the Agency, playing a central role in coordinating implementation, monitoring, compliance, stakeholder engagement, and the long-term management of the SMSP.

Seychelles' experience shows the value of a strong multi-stakeholder approach that builds ownership, strengthens cross-sector coordination and combines scientific evidence with local knowledge. It also demonstrates that environmental sustainability and economic development can be advanced together when conservation, resilience and growth are designed as integrated rather than competing priorities. Science and spatial data have been critical to understanding competing ocean uses and conservation needs, while strong political commitment and long-term vision have sustained implementation and mobilised support.

Relevant resource: Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is advancing SOPM through an integrated sustainable ocean economy and ecosystem-based governance approach. Guided by the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, the Coastal Zone and Coastal Resource Management Plan, and emerging sustainable ocean economy policy frameworks, the country is strengthening sustainable fisheries management, marine conservation and climate-resilient coastal development.

Current initiatives include science-based fisheries management, sustainable aquaculture, protection of mangroves and coral ecosystems, and improved monitoring to combat IUU fishing. Sri Lanka is also advancing Marine Spatial Planning and cross-sector coordination to balance fisheries, tourism, maritime transport, energy and biodiversity conservation within its ocean space. Regional cooperation on ocean governance, marine pollution prevention and climate adaptation is also being strengthened, alongside community participation and sustainable livelihoods for coastal populations.

Key achievements include policy and legal modernisation, digital monitoring and compliance, and science-based sustainable sector development. Sri Lanka frames SOPM as a practical pathway to translate ocean commitments into measurable action on the ground and at sea. For island states, the process must be strategic, inclusive, climate-responsive and implementable, with stronger regional collaboration on ocean data, monitoring technology, financing and knowledge exchange, and deeper engagement of fishing communities, women and youth.

Tuvalu

Tuvalu is developing its first National Ocean Policy with technical assistance and support from the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC) and partners including Oceans 5, ADB, Pristine Seas and the Wildlife Conservation Society, with funding assistance from the Bezos Earth Fund. This process is a major step in consolidating Tuvalu's ocean governance framework and strengthening the basis for implementation across the country's eight islands.

Key milestones include Tuvalu's ratification of the BBNJ Agreement, its aim to complete the National Ocean Policy in June 2026, and its commitment to achieve up to 30 per cent marine protected areas by 2030 across all eight islands. The Government has established a National Ocean Policy Coordination Committee to oversee both development and implementation of the policy. A central lesson from the process is that fragmentation in ocean governance, both nationally and regionally, can hinder smooth implementation. The coordination committee helps address this by identifying overlapping mandates, existing ocean-related initiatives and agendas across agencies and stakeholders, thereby reducing duplication and supporting clearer collaboration.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) is developing a national Sustainable Ocean Plan as part of its membership of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy. The plan is currently in the scoping phase, ahead of wider engagement, and builds on existing national workstreams and policies, including Fisheries Management Plans and Marine Protected Areas. The UK's wider ocean governance context is significant: it has the fifth largest marine estate in the world, including across its 14 Overseas Territories. Internationally, the UK also leads programmes such as the Blue Belt Programme and the Blue Planet Fund, which support conservation, sustainable ocean economies and marine governance in overseas territories and partner countries.

Key milestones include the institutionalisation of marine spatial planning through the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009), which created one of the world's first comprehensive marine planning and licensing systems, and the UK Marine Policy Statement (2011), which established a unified, cross-UK vision for sustainable marine development and plan-led decision-making. Moreover, the Blue Belt Programme supports the UK Government's commitment to provide long-term protection for more than four million square kilometres of marine environment across UK Overseas Territories. The - UK's ocean leadership

is underpinned by world-class hydrography, integrated marine science institutions, and advanced data/observing systems that translate directly into policy and global ocean governance.

Relevant resource: UK Small Island Developing States Strategy 2026 to 2030.

Partner organisations initiatives

Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil

Brazil in currently undertaking a suite of national and regional ocean governance processes, including Marine Spatial Planning, Marine Protected Areas, biodiversity and climate plans, 'Blue' NDCs and integrated coastal zone management. This framing presents SOPM as an umbrella for aligning policies, strategies and tools to better plan and manage the ocean, including potentially in areas beyond national jurisdiction where international governance frameworks are in place.

The core lesson is that meaningful stakeholder participation is essential, but participation must be supported by organised and accessible information. Data may exist, but it is not always structured or visualised in ways that support planning and decision-making. A clear national governance framework and vision must therefore be in place before implementation can advance effectively. Priority needs include aligning governance, people, data and finance to enable coordinated, ecosystem-based decision-making.

Relevant resource: Brazilian Marine Spatial Planning information

Global Ocean Accounts Partnership Secretariat

The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) Secretariat develops and mainstreams ocean accounts as an evidence backbone for SOPM. Ocean accounts are integrated frameworks that combine environmental, economic and social data to support decision-making across national, regional and global scales. At national level, GOAP supports countries to develop and apply ocean accounts in response to policy needs. Recent examples include social accounts piloted at atoll level in the Maldives; support to Sri Lanka's National Forum on Plastics and Circular Economy, national plastics dashboard and coastal ecosystem accounts; and the first internationally standardised National Shipping Asset Account and Maritime Labour Account in Solomon Islands, delivered with SPC. GOAP is also supporting work in Fiji, where plastics, social and ecosystem accounts are being advanced under a formal government MOU, and in Belize, where ocean accounts provide core data infrastructure for the national Blue Economy MRV system.

Regionally, GOAP convenes Communities of Practice across the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia to facilitate peer learning and embed ocean accounts in regional governance. Globally, GOAP provides technical guidance and digital infrastructure to support the Ocean Panel's 100% sustainable ocean management commitment.

Key milestones include the Pledge to Advance Ocean Accounts by 2030, led by Costa Rica and launched ahead of UNOC3, which has brought together 20 countries and seven organisations, including several SIDS. GOAP also now brings together 44 member organisations from 23 countries, with ocean accounting initiatives underway in more than 33 countries and more than 36 ocean accounting datasets compiled across participating nations. The main lessons are to start with a clear policy question and a

clearly defined decision that government needs to make, embed accounts in institutions rather than one-off projects, and invest in fellows and embedded capacity as long-term multipliers.

Relevant resources: Handbook on Sustainable Ocean Plans; GOAP Progress Report 2025.

International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)

ICRI's SOPM-related work is guided by its Plan of Action, which strengthens coral reef conservation and resilience through science-based management, restoration and adaptation, sustainable financing, capacity development, global monitoring, policy engagement and strategic communications. The Plan emphasises collaboration among governments, scientific institutions, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the private sector to accelerate coordinated coral reef action across scales.

ICRI coordinates and supports the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, the primary global mechanism for assessing coral reef status and trends and informing management, policy and reporting. It is also advancing the Coral Reef Breakthrough, launched with the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions and the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, to help secure the future of at least 125,000 km² of shallow-water tropical coral reefs by 2030 through protection, restoration, threat reduction and finance mobilisation. These initiatives support global biodiversity and climate frameworks at global, regional, national and local scales.

Key achievements include coral reef advocacy in major international processes, including the UNEA-7 Resolution on Coral Reefs, IUCN World Conservation Congress Resolution 037, UNFCCC COPs, CBD COP16, the UN Ocean Conference and the Ocean Breakthrough agenda; the Global Coral Reef Summit; and continued strengthening of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network through global and regional status assessments. The main lessons are that collective action and multi-stakeholder collaboration are critical at scale, trusted convening power can elevate coral reefs within global policy agendas, and science-based decision-making supported by monitoring and knowledge networks is fundamental for adaptive management, accountability and resilience. As the only global partnership dedicated specifically to coral reefs, and with a membership of more than 100 members and entities spanning governments, UN agencies, scientific institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, ICRI is uniquely positioned to utilize its convening capacity to support alignment, coordination, knowledge exchange, and collective action across the global coral reef community. This convening role enables ICRI to help bridge policy, science, finance, and implementation efforts across scales and sectors. Continued investment in inclusive partnerships, science-based decision-making, and collective action will be critical for accelerating implementation and supporting resilient ocean ecosystems and communities. ICRI strongly encourages continued collaboration and alignment across SOPM-related processes and would welcome the opportunity to continue leveraging its convening role to support and advance this work moving forward.

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines

Mitsui O.S.K. Lines is advancing SOPM-related action through its Environmental Vision, which commits the company to contributing to a sustainable ocean and global environment and to achieving medium- and long-term targets, including net-zero emissions by 2050. Based on analyses aligned with TNFD and TCFD frameworks, the company identifies greenhouse gas emissions as the most significant environmental impact of its shipping operations and is prioritising emissions reduction through alternative fuels and fuel-efficiency improvements.

The company is also reducing impacts on the marine environment and biodiversity, including through ballast water management, and contributing to sustainable ocean use through participation in energy value chain development. Its initiatives are primarily global, reflecting the characteristics of international shipping, while also responding to region-specific environmental and social challenges.

Key milestones include targets for alternative fuel use of 20 per cent by 2030 and 45 per cent by 2035, alternative fuel-capable vessels of 210 by 2030 and 300 by 2035, fuel-efficiency improvements through the DarWIN Project and wind-assisted propulsion technologies, and targets for Wind Challenger-equipped vessels. Lessons from implementation point to the need for a clear outlook on the economic viability of zero-emission fuels, supported by appropriate regulatory frameworks such as carbon pricing, and to the practical value of fuel-efficiency measures that reduce both emissions and fuel costs. For international shipping, harmonised IMO-led regulations are essential to maintain fairness and effectiveness.

Relevant resource: MOL Environmental Vision

Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Commission (OECS)

The OECS region is advancing regional and national initiatives to strengthen SOPM and sustainable ocean economy development. The OECS Sustainable Ocean Management Programme, guided by the Eastern Caribbean Regional Ocean Policy (ECROP) and Strategic Action Plan, provides the central framework for coordinated ocean governance, marine spatial planning, ecosystem protection, climate resilience and sustainable socio-economic development across OECS Member States.

This work builds on the World Bank-supported and GEF-funded “Caribbean Regional Oceanscape Project”, which strengthened regional capacity for ocean governance and coastal and marine spatial planning, and helped catalyse a transition toward a sustainable ocean economy in the Eastern Caribbean. The World Bank-supported “Unleashing the Blue Economy of the Caribbean Project” is further advancing regional cooperation, harmonised ocean governance frameworks, sustainable fisheries and tourism, marine pollution management and sustainable ocean economy investment opportunities across participating OECS Member States.

A major milestone is the establishment of the OECS Ocean Governance Framework, which provides the institutional architecture for implementing ECROP and coordinating sustainable ocean management across Member States. It includes national ocean governance coordination mechanisms, an OECS Ocean Governance Team and the OECS Sustainable Ocean Management Unit. The OECS experience shows the importance of strong regional coordination, sustained policy commitment and inclusive stakeholder engagement. It also demonstrates that small island states can achieve greater impact through collective/regional action, shared technical resources, harmonised policy frameworks and regional knowledge exchange, while recognising the persistent need for technical capacity, even implementation and sustained financing.

Relevant resource: OECS Ocean Governance and Blue Economy in the Eastern Caribbean

Perempuan Laut Indonesia

Perempuan Laut Indonesia is a civil society organisation established in 2024 to advance women’s leadership in ocean conservation, blue food systems and coastal community resilience across Indonesia’s 17,000 islands. Its primary initiative, Dapur Laut or Ocean Kitchen, documents Indonesia’s coastal culinary heritage as a form of community-held ocean knowledge relevant to SOPM. By recognising the food practices, seasonal knowledge and livelihood strategies of fisher wives and coastal women as

SOPM-relevant data, the initiative addresses a structural gap: the near absence of gendered, community-held knowledge in formal ocean planning frameworks.

Through capacity development, community engagement and partnerships with local and national stakeholders, Perempuan Laut Indonesia supports coastal women as active agents in ocean stewardship, fisheries resilience and inclusive decision-making. In Muara Angke, one of Jakarta's largest fishing communities, fisher wives have been engaged directly in ocean governance literacy and participatory planning. The organisation is also connecting Indonesian ocean practitioners and women professionals working globally, building a diaspora knowledge network that links local community practice with international ocean governance and channels Indonesian expertise back to coastal communities.

Key milestones include the establishment of women-centred ocean programmes connecting coastal livelihoods, marine conservation, blue food systems and climate resilience; partnerships with governments, academia, NGOs, youth groups and international organisations; and increased visibility for women and local communities in ocean discussions through storytelling, policy engagement and knowledge-sharing. The process shows that inclusive ocean governance is stronger when women, youth, Indigenous knowledge holders and local communities are engaged from the beginning; that community-based approaches linking livelihoods, food systems and environmental stewardship create long-term ownership and resilience; and that cross-sector collaboration is essential to translate ocean sustainability goals into locally relevant action. As the organisation grows, it frames coastal women not as beneficiaries, but as co-designers, knowledge holders and implementation partners in SOPM. The SOPM Support Platform being announced at this Summit represents a generational opportunity to embed this principle at the architecture level — before the platform's design is fixed.

The Pacific Community

The Pacific Community supports SOPM-related work across regional, national and community levels for its 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories members, with a focus on fisheries, ocean science and management, and climate. SPC supports the advancement of National Ocean Policies through reviews, planning processes, workshops and regional dialogue, and has helped Pacific Island countries move toward completion of their maritime boundaries. Marine Spatial Planning is progressing, notably in Palau, with technical reviews, regional exchanges and new micro-qualification training programmes. SPC's ocean acidification work has strengthened data, policy integration and partnerships, while Fiji has submitted SDG data and aligned ocean acidification with national climate commitments. SPC is also strengthening ocean observing systems through the Pacific Islands regional alliance for GOOS and has expanded the Fishing Vessel Ocean Observing Network, deploying 24 monitoring units to collect ocean and climate data.

SPC has also led progress on tuna harvest strategies, which led to adoption of a management procedure for South Pacific albacore at WCPFC22. It also delivered aquaculture support to seven countries, including policy advice, hatchery development, and new species introduction. Finally, climate–ocean initiatives advanced, including a regional fisheries strategy and USD 107.4 million secured for tuna programmes, and support to UNFCCC processes, evidence synthesis, and Pacific participation in climate negotiations linking ocean and climate policy.

Key milestones include completion of 75 per cent of Pacific maritime boundaries, progress on sustainable pelagic fisheries, and stronger visibility of Pacific and SIDS priorities in global climate negotiations. SPC's

experience points to the importance of coordination among projects, sustained financing, country and stakeholder consultation, engagement, and in-country capacity building. It also highlights the need to avoid duplication and stakeholder fatigue, ensure long-term sustainability, strengthen financing for sectoral activities such as coastal fisheries data and management, and account for the limited absorption capacity of SIDS for large climate finance projects.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNECA is supporting SOPM-related initiatives across African island states, including the RESIslands project, which strengthens climate resilience of African island states and capacity to access climate finance; the Great Blue Wall initiative in the Indian Ocean region, implemented with IUCN; the Blue Economy Valuation toolkit, applied in several African countries; and a Regional Circular Economy Action Plan for African Island States developed with the Indian Ocean Commission.

A key achievement is the creation of a carbon registry for African island states under the RESIslands project, adopted at the Guinea-Bissau summit of the African Island States Climate Commission in October 2025. UNECA's experience shows that close regional cooperation and knowledge exchange among African islands are important success factors for climate and sustainable ocean economy initiatives, including finance mobilisation. Priority needs include unlocking finance for public investments that enable and de-risk private investment, improving access to international climate finance for adaptation and mitigation, and strengthening data availability, ecosystem mapping and socio-economic information for project preparation, monitoring, reporting and verification.

Relevant resource: Unlocking the potential of the Blue Economy in Central Africa

World Bank Group

The World Bank supports SOPM primarily through PROBLUE, under Pillar 4 on Seascape Management, across four interconnected streams. 1) PROBLUE has provided technical and financial support to countries including Namibia, Ghana and Mexico in the development of their SOPs. Beyond the MSP Toolkit, a step-by-step guidance resource covering all planning phases, the Bank supports capacity building through the PROBLUE–IOC-UNESCO MSPGlobal Partnership, geospatial nature-based solution opportunity scans and the co-development of national MSP Action Plans that integrate biodiversity, climate resilience and economic analysis. This work is active in countries including Namibia, Ghana, Mexico, the Eastern Caribbean, Mozambique and Kenya. The Bank also supports ocean accounting through blue economy satellite accounts, public expenditure reviews and natural capital accounts aligned with the UN SEEA standard, including through GOAP. Moreover, its Blue Carbon Readiness Framework helps countries map ecosystems, build MRV systems, integrate blue carbon into policy and access carbon markets and climate finance. It has been piloted in Belize, Ghana and Mozambique and is expanding to six additional countries. The Bank is also a founding member of Ocean Action 2030.

Key milestones include publication of two PROBLUE-supported SOPs in 2025, in Ghana and Mexico; the piloting and global scaling of the Blue Carbon Readiness Framework; and the 2025 launch of the PROBLUE–IOC-UNESCO MSPGlobal Partnership, a formal collaboration to jointly deliver MSP training and implement the MSPGlobal Rapid Assessment Methodology, directly strengthening countries' capacity to advance SOPM through standardized, comparable diagnostics. Lessons from this work show that SOPM is more durable when embedded in broader investment operations and government-led frameworks, rather than treated as standalone technical assistance. Effective ocean initiatives also need to address data, policy and finance dimensions together, as gaps in any one area can constrain

implementation. Aligning SOPM with climate and biodiversity commitments can help unlock political will, co-financing and cross-ministerial engagement.

World Maritime University–Sasakawa Global Ocean Institute

The World Maritime University–Sasakawa Global Ocean Institute advances SOPM through a portfolio of regional and global initiatives, with particular emphasis on SIDS and LDCs. The Nippon Foundation-funded "Future Ocean Programme" addresses the triple planetary crisis in areas beyond national jurisdiction through research on institutional interactions, non-State actors and rights-based approaches, ocean observation technologies and AI, and the future of ocean governance. This includes work on area-based management tool proposals under the BBNJ Agreement with the Sargasso Sea Commission and partners in Costa Rica, including MarViva, in relation to the Costa Rica Thermal Dome. The Ireland–WMU-GOI BBNJ Clinic Programme provides capacity-building workshops, model legislative clauses and implementation support for SIDS and LDCs across the Eastern Caribbean and CARICOM, the Indian Ocean and Africa, the Pacific, and a planned SIDS Symposium with Sri Lanka in 2027. WMU-GOI also contributes to maritime decarbonisation through METAVASEA in the Eastern Mediterranean and to ocean carbon understanding through the Horizon Europe OceanICU project.

Key achievements include the consolidation of the 'Future Ocean Programme''s four research pillars, peer-reviewed publications and policy contributions, work on early area-based management tool proposals under the BBNJ Agreement, two completed regional cycles of the BBNJ Clinic Programme, and technical support to the BBNJ Preparatory Commission. METAVASEA has engaged 125 shipping companies and maritime organisations, trained more than 1,000 maritime professionals and reached more than 400,000 people worldwide. Lessons from these initiatives underline the value of participatory approaches that engage governments, academia, local communities, industry and international organisations; the importance of inclusiveness and "leaving no one behind"; and the need for continuous capacity building, technical support, knowledge sharing, ocean data, science and technology. WMU-GOI also frames SOPM as an opportunity to move from fragmented ocean governance toward more connected, adaptive and future-oriented approaches that integrate biodiversity, climate resilience, sustainable blue economies, social equity and justice.

Relevant resources: Future Ocean Programme; Future Ocean Podcast; Ocean Sustainability, Governance and Management theses and dissertations; Climate-smart ocean planning in SIDS paper; BBNJ Clinic Programme; BBNJ Clinic brochure and website.

World Resources Institute, Ocean Action 2030 and the 100% Alliance

WRI, Ocean Action 2030 and the 100% Alliance support countries to advance and implement Sustainable Ocean Plans as integrated, country-led frameworks aligned with the IOC-UNESCO SOPM Strategy. Globally, Ocean Action 2030 functions as a coordination and matchmaking platform, connecting country demand for SOP development and implementation with technical and financial support from partners, including multilateral development banks, UN agencies and NGOs. The GEF-8 project, including the Rapid Assistance Fund, provide catalytic, fast-track support for countries beginning SOP processes.

At the regional level, cooperation is advancing through initiatives such as the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor and engagement with regional bodies including the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific, as well as dialogue in the Caribbean and Atlantic regions. At the national level, support is being provided to countries including Panama, Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica to develop SOPs, strengthen

governance frameworks and identify investment pathways that translate political commitments into implementable action and economic benefits.

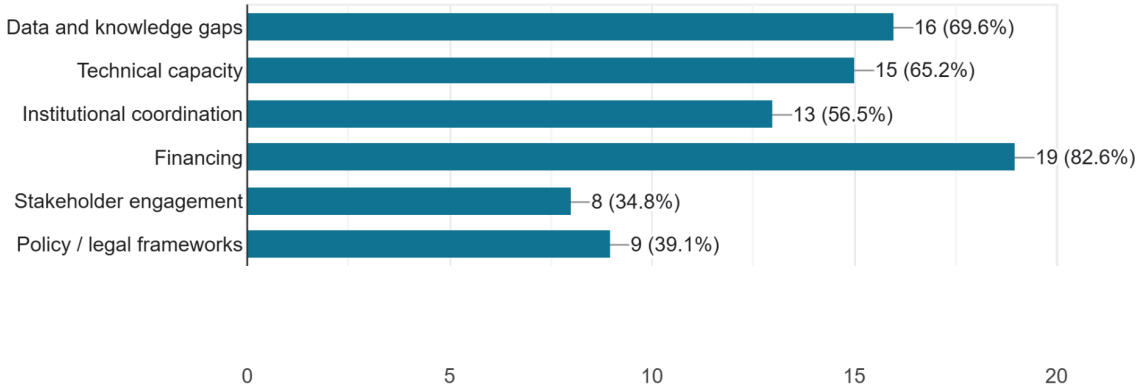
Key milestones include growing global political momentum around the 100 per cent ambition, including recognition of Sustainable Ocean Plans in the UNOC3 Political Declaration and regional commitments such as the Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration and the Yaoundé Declaration; expanded country uptake, including Colombia joining the 100% Alliance in 2026; and the operationalisation of implementation support through Ocean Action 2030, the GEF-8 project, the Rapid Assistance Fund and emerging financing approaches such as the One Ocean Finance Facility. The main lessons are that country ownership and political leadership are decisive, integrated platforms are more effective than fragmented support and linking planning to finance is essential to turn ambition into investment-ready pipelines and implementation.

Relevant resource: Ocean Panel publications

Key Barriers to Accelerated SOPM in Island States

Based on an analysis of inputs from country delegations and institutions that participated in the survey, clear implementation challenges remain. As evidenced in the previous section, countries and partners are advancing a wide range of SOPM-related initiatives that could benefit from a stronger unifying framework. However, progress will depend on **more predictable finance, stronger data and science systems, sustained technical capacity and better coordination across institutions and sectors.** Policy and legal frameworks and stakeholder engagement as well as the scale of national ocean area and the diversity of stakeholder interests were also identified as considerable challenges.

What are the main challenges or barriers to advancing SOPM in island states?



Source: Voluntary survey responses submitted by country delegations and partners in advance of the Island States Ocean Summit.

- **Financing and investment constraints.** Stable, predictable and accessible finance remains a major barrier to moving from planning to implementation. Island states often face limited domestic fiscal space, high transaction costs, difficulty preparing investment-ready projects, and challenges accessing climate and ocean finance. Private investment in sectors such as renewable energy, aquaculture, coastal resilience and sustainable tourism often requires additional de-risking.

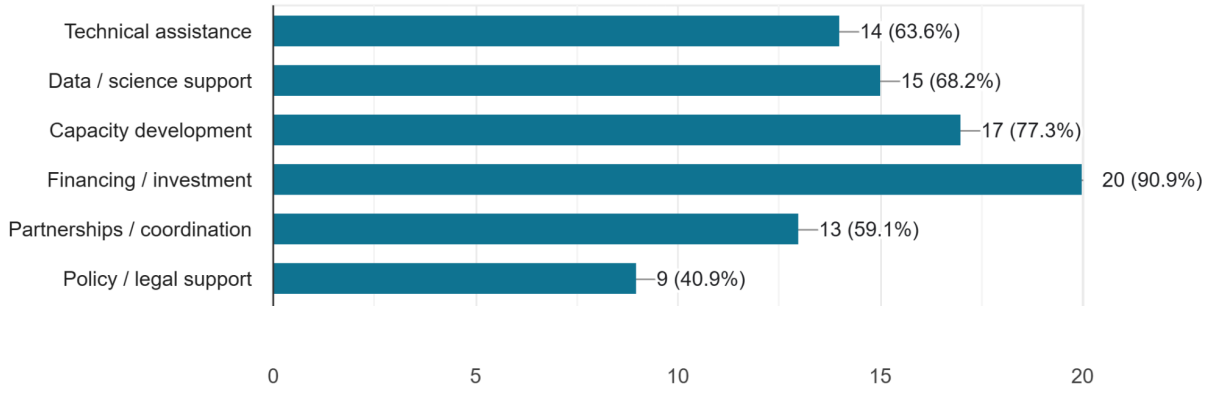
- **Data, knowledge and monitoring gaps.** Evidence-based SOPM is constrained by insufficient ocean mapping, monitoring, modelling and analysis. Common gaps include geospatial information, ecosystem and biodiversity assessments, socioeconomic data, oceanographic observations, climate-risk information and practical decision-support tools. In many countries, data are fragmented, difficult to access and not supported by centralised management systems. Community-held, Indigenous and gendered knowledge are also often underrepresented.
- **Technical and human capacity limitations.** Small island administrations frequently manage broad ocean responsibilities with limited specialised staff. Capacity constraints affect areas such as marine spatial planning, fisheries science, environmental assessment, ecosystem accounting, data management, compliance and enforcement, restoration, adaptive management, technology use and project preparation.
- **Institutional coordination and governance fragmentation.** Ocean governance responsibilities are often spread across multiple ministries, agencies and governance levels, with overlapping mandates and uneven implementation. Weak coordination can slow decision-making and create duplication across environment, fisheries, climate, maritime transport, tourism, energy and finance institutions.
- **Policy and legal gaps.** In some countries, outdated or incomplete legal and policy frameworks limit implementation, weaken compliance and enforcement, and create uncertainty for sustainable investment and emerging sustainable ocean economy sectors.
- **Stakeholder engagement and social inclusion challenges.** Sustained participation by coastal communities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, First Nations peoples, women, youth, fishing communities, civil society, academia and the private sector can be difficult to maintain, particularly as planning moves into regulatory and operational phases requiring long-term trust and buy-in.
- **Climate, biodiversity, pollution and ecosystem pressures.** Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution increase the complexity and urgency of ocean management. Challenges include coral bleaching, sargassum influxes, acidification, deoxygenation, marine pollution, IUU fishing, sea-level rise, extreme weather events and degradation of mangroves, coral reefs and seagrasses.
- **Scale, complexity and competing ocean uses.** SOPM must balance conservation, fisheries, tourism, transport, energy, climate resilience, cultural values and emerging industries within a single framework, often across very large marine areas and with limited administrative capacity.

Priority needs and opportunities to advance SOPM

The survey inputs point to a **strong demand for practical, country-tailored support that combines access to finance, technical assistance, data systems, capacity development, partnerships and policy advice to overcome the identified barriers**. Such support is most useful when it helps countries move from commitments and plans to implementation by strengthening national and regional institutions, improving access to data and decision-support tools, developing and retaining technical expertise,

preparing bankable projects, connecting countries with technical and financial partners, and reducing fragmentation across support providers.

What types of support are most required to advance SOPM in island states?



Source: Voluntary survey responses submitted by country delegations and partners in advance of the Island States Ocean Summit.

Within the process of initiating, developing, or implementing SOPM to achieve protection, production and prosperity of ocean ecosystems and resources, several critical priority areas for action were identified based on an analysis of the survey results:

- **Predictable and accessible finance for implementation.** Countries need sustained funding for implementation, monitoring, enforcement, technology, restoration, community engagement and sustainable ocean economy investments, including better access to climate and biodiversity finance and mechanisms that can attract private capital.
- **Investment-ready project pipelines.** There is a need to translate SOPM priorities into well-prepared programmes and projects aligned with national budgets, development finance institutions and private investors.
- **Improved ocean data and decision-support systems.** Countries require stronger national data systems, data-sharing platforms, practical tools and expanded monitoring programmes that make scientific, local and Indigenous knowledge more accessible and usable in decision-making.
- **Long-term capacity development.** Sustained support is needed to build and retain national expertise and institutional capacity tailored to the realities of small administrations.
- **Stronger coordination mechanisms.** Clearer mandates, inter-ministerial collaboration, engagement across national and subnational levels, and enhanced regional cooperation are needed to reduce fragmentation and improve implementation.
- **Inclusive and sustained stakeholder engagement.** Effective SOPM requires mechanisms to ensure communities and stakeholders remain involved throughout design, implementation, monitoring and adaptive management.

- **Enabling policy and legal reforms.** Updated laws, regulations and policies are needed to support marine spatial planning, co-management, compliance and enforcement, sustainable investment and policy coherence across ocean-related sectors.
- **Integrated responses to climate, biodiversity and pollution.** Countries need support to protect and restore marine and coastal ecosystems, strengthen nature-based solutions and address interconnected environmental pressures while safeguarding livelihoods and food security.
- **International and regional cooperation.** Stronger collaboration is needed to align support, share technical resources, foster South-South and triangular cooperation, and connect national priorities to global ocean, climate and biodiversity frameworks.
- **Support for implementation, monitoring and adaptive management.** SOPM requires long-term assistance to operationalise measures, monitor progress, evaluate outcomes and update plans as environmental, social and economic conditions change.

Overview of the Sustainable Ocean Planning Support Platform

A proposed flagship outcome of the Summit is the announcement of a Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management Support Platform, a collaborative global mechanism designed to strengthen coastal and island nations access to technical assistance and resources. Through this human-centered facilitation platform, countries will have access to science, technical knowledge and training, best practices, practitioner exchange, and coordinated support needed to advance Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management across the different stages of the SOPM cycle. Quality-controlled action plans would include identified needs and priorities, following results from rapid assessments of the state of play for SOPM. As such, the SOPM Support Platform aims to strengthen the scientific, technical, and practitioner foundations needed for knowledge-based, climate-resilient, and inclusive Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management, while improving collaboration and alignment across the broader SOPM support ecosystem. It will provide a clear point of entry to SOPM for all IOC Member States, including those who have committed to 100% sustainable ocean management through the 100% Alliance. It will also facilitate connections to tailored in-country implementation support, technical partners, as well as financing and investment tools for SOPM development and implementation, including through Ocean Action 2030 and its coalition partners.

As a collaborative global support mechanism for Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (SOPM), the Support Platform will:

1. **Support countries' needs assessment and priority-setting** across the SOPM development process.
2. **Enable country-tailored technical assistance and capacity development** by matching country needs with available scientific, technical, and financial support to close existing gaps and directly providing targeted capacity development initiatives focusing on ocean data and science aspects of SOPM development and implementation.
3. **Facilitate coordination across the broader SOPM support ecosystem** by connecting countries with relevant implementation, technical, and financing partners through existing operational mechanisms, including Ocean Action 2030 and its coalition network.

4. **Help countries strengthen readiness for investment in sustainable ocean-based economic activities** by improving clarity around country priorities, implementation pathways, and enabling conditions for finance.
5. **Provide a trusted and country-centered entry point** for governments seeking guidance on SOPM processes, while supporting improved collaboration across the broader ecosystem of institutions and partners contributing technical, scientific, and financial support.

The Support Platform will build on existing expert networks and funding sources. It will engage with bilateral and multilateral partners and expert institutions through a technical coordination hub hosted within IOC to deliver the following services to Member States in line with the recently adopted IOC Strategy for Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management:

- **Country demand window and helpdesk:** a structured, country-led process for submitting support requests linked to national SOPM objectives.
- **Rapid Assessment of Country Needs**: a standardised, participatory methodology to assess the country's state of readiness for SOPM and develop an action plan to advance SOPM, including institutional, technical and resource needs for SOPM development and implementation.
- **Matchmaking and coordination:** in collaboration with Ocean Action 2030 and its coalition partners, facilitate connections between country needs and relevant technical expertise, implementation support, capacity development opportunities, financing pathways, and in-kind support mechanisms.
- **Capacity development:** country-specific capacity development support provided based on identified needs and gaps from country Action plan for SOPM development and implementation.
- **Targeted technical support**: targeted, in-depth support on key elements of SOPM development and implementation in relation to ocean science and data for decision-making and working across the science-policy interface.
- **Practitioners Platform**: Global network for practitioner learning and exchange and access to tools and resources.

The Platform will contribute to achieving the following outcomes:

1. Countries are equipped with **stronger institutional, human, and technical capacities** to translate commitments into science-based SOPs and implementation.
2. **Improved multi-partner coordination** and **regional and South-South cooperation** for scientific, technical, and financial support.
3. **Increased opportunities for partner coordination and collaboration in investment** for inclusive and climate-resilient SOPM implementation through increased SOPM ecosystem clarity, improving returns to investment and resource mobilization.
4. **Enhanced delivery against national commitments to global UN processes** (SDGs, CBD, UNFCCC, BBNJ, and UN Ocean Decade) and achievement of national sustainable development strategies through integrated ocean planning.

The Platform will be hosted by IOC and be co-designed in close collaboration with key stakeholders including SIDS Member States and Ocean Action 2030. It will be designed to have operational presence in SIDS regions to ensure proximity and strong collaboration with the users of its services. A Steering Committee will be set up to guide the Platform's development and implementation. The Platform will

further build on the complementary strengths of its partners: IOC will provide the scientific and technical foundation through its ocean science programmes, practitioner networks, and capacity development expertise, while Ocean Action 2030 will serve as a core operational coordination and matchmaking mechanism, leveraging its coalition network to connect countries with implementation support, technical expertise, and financing opportunities. Building on country-led needs assessments and action planning processes, country requests for support will be connected to the most appropriate partners across the broader SOPM ecosystem — including Ocean Action 2030 coalition members, IOC programmes, UNDP, UNEP, regional development banks, philanthropic foundations, and other technical and financial institutions — based on transparency, country demand, and comparative advantage.

The Platform will align strongly with existing initiatives of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, supported by the World Resources Institute (WRI) – the 100% alliance and Ocean Action 2030. The 100% Alliance will serve as an important political engagement and country mobilization mechanism for the Platform, supporting awareness-raising, high-level peer exchange, and country-to-country advocacy on the benefits of SOPM. Countries engaging through the 100% Alliance may connect with the Platform to access scientific, technical, implementation, and financing support for SOPM development and implementation. Ocean Action 2030, a coalition of technical, financial, and implementation institutions supporting countries in developing and implementing Sustainable Ocean Plans, will play a central operational coordination and matchmaking role within the broader Platform ecosystem, building on its existing coalition architecture and country engagement mechanisms. Leveraging its existing coalition network and country engagement mechanisms, Ocean Action 2030 will help connect countries with tailored implementation support, technical expertise, and financing opportunities aligned with country priorities and identified needs. Ocean Action 2030 will also mobilize coalition partners to deliver country-responsive support packages and facilitate access to early-stage catalytic financing mechanisms, including the Rapid Assistance Fund (RAF), as part of broader efforts to accelerate SOPM development and implementation.

Key Milestones Ahead and How to Get Involved

The following timeline outlines the next steps in the development and launch of the Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management Platform:

1. **Ideation and conceptualisation phase** - January to June 2026
2. **Consultations** with interested countries, partner organizations and resource providers - March to August 2026
3. **Platform Concept Announcement**, including initial commitments - June 2026
4. **Full build-out and operationalisation**, establishment of Platform Steering Committee to finalise the operational architecture into a functioning, governed institutional framework.
5. **Formal SOPM Support Platform Launch,** including showcasing initial results at UN Ocean Decade Conference - April 2027
6. **Scale-up and full operationalisation** - June 2027

Organisations interested in shaping and contributing to the first global mechanism for coordinated, science-based support to SOPM in island states are invited to contribute by:

- **Engaging in the design process** to co-create a global platform for SOPM action.

- **Participating in the Island States Ocean Summit** in Tokyo and engaging with Island Nations counterparts to scope potential matching opportunities.
- **Supporting core platform setup and operations.**
- **Identifying potential services and resources** to be provided through the matchmaking mechanism.
- **Proposing potential targeted technical pillars** to provide in-depth country assistance.
- **Developing new partnerships** for streamlining assistance and aligning existing initiatives.

Other Resources

- The **IOC-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Ocean Planning and Management (SOPM) 2025–2030** - officially endorsed at the 33rd IOC Assembly in July 2025, sets the vision *to* equip all IOC Member States with the capacity to implement knowledge-based SOPM by 2030.
- The ***'Handbook on Sustainable Ocean Plans: A Practitioners' Guide'*** — a practical and accessible tool that provides a strategic, science-based framework to support Member States in developing inclusive, resilient, and sustainable ocean plans.