



2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development

The Ocean Decade

75

Decade Advisory Board

Meeting No. 02/2026

10-12 February 2026

REPORT



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Intergovernmental
Oceanographic
Commission

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Decade Advisory Board Meeting 02/2026

10 – 12 February 2026 | FAO HQ, Rome, Italy

MEETING REPORT

Day 1 – 10 February

1. Welcome & Opening Remarks

Members of the Decade Advisory Board (DAB) convened for Meeting No. 02/2026 from 10-12 February 2026 at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Headquarters in Rome, Italy. The Deputy Director of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division at FAO opened the meeting, welcoming participants, thanking the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, and underscoring the value of convening at a critical juncture in the Decade as preparations advance toward the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference. She reaffirmed FAO's commitment to the Ocean Decade and emphasized the importance of strengthened inter-agency collaboration across the United Nations system, in line with the recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE), to enhance coherence, visibility, and policy impact.

Vidar Helgesen, Executive Secretary of IOC thanked FAO for hosting the meeting and highlighted the strategic priorities for the meeting, including reflection on the MTE and preparation for the 2027 Conference. He stressed that the Ocean Decade stands at a pivotal moment requiring consolidation of achievements while adapting to evolving global conditions, including uncertainty in funding landscapes for ocean observing and data systems. He emphasized that the Decade remains the most comprehensive framework available to mobilize governments, the private sector, and other stakeholders around ocean science for sustainable development. He called on the Board to provide forward-looking strategic guidance to ensure both consolidation of progress and acceleration of impact in the remaining years of the Decade.

2. Discussion of Meeting Objectives, Outcomes and Agenda

The Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) presented the objectives and expected outcomes of the meeting in line with the draft agenda including: (i) establish a shared understanding of the Decade's current status and future opportunities; (ii) reflect on the evolving strategic role of the DAB in light of the MTE; (iii) identify priority areas for consolidation toward 2027 and 2030; (iv) consider investment in ocean science and resource mobilisation; (v) strengthen engagement of underrepresented stakeholder groups, and (vi) clarify pathways toward the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference.

The DCU emphasized that the newly adopted Terms of Reference, the Board's role is evolving toward a more strategic function, focusing less on operational endorsement processes and more on guiding flagship priorities, uptake mechanisms, and systemic impact. DAB members supported this direction and stressed the need to define concrete targets for the remainder of the Board's mandate, including measurable outcomes to demonstrate added value.

2.1. Presentation of Structures, Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives of the Ocean Decade, including Mid-Term Evaluation Action Plan

The DCU presented an overview of the Decade's governance architecture, terminology, coordination structures, and key performance indicators. The presentation included the hierarchy of Decade Actions (Programmes, Projects, Contributions, and Activities), the role of Decade Collaborative

Centres (DCCs) and Decade Coordination Offices (DCOs), National Decade Committees (NDCs), and regional task forces.

The DCU reported continued growth in endorsed Actions, increased visibility, and strengthened regional and thematic coordination. Particular achievements were reported in the expansion of National Decade Committees, the establishment of thematic working groups, advancement of Indigenous and Local Knowledge engagement, and development of the investment in ocean science initiative. At the same time, the DCU acknowledged remaining challenges, including uneven geographic engagement, persistent knowledge gaps across certain Decade Challenges, limited coordination resources, and the need to strengthen science-policy pathways.

DAB members recognized the complexity of the coordination architecture and emphasized the importance of clearer external communication to facilitate engagement. Members stressed that the Decade's added value lies not only in quantitative growth but also in strengthened networks, multidisciplinary, and collaboration across scientific, policy, and financial communities that will continue throughout the Decade and remain as a legacy post-2030.

3. Perspectives from UN Agencies on Optimizing the Benefits of the Decade

Representatives from UN agencies shared perspectives on how the Decade can better support institutional mandates and global policy processes. Agencies emphasized the need for synthesized, policy-ready knowledge products rather than solely new research outputs. It was noted that UN entities often play a critical role in translating scientific findings into regulatory frameworks, global assessments, and intergovernmental processes.

The importance of aligning Decade outputs with ongoing processes such as climate negotiations, biodiversity agreements, and marine pollution governance was highlighted. Agencies underscored the need for structured engagement mechanisms to ensure timely scientific input into decision-making cycles.

DAB members welcomed these perspectives and recognized the opportunity to better formalize science-policy pathways within Decade Actions. The Board noted that enhanced collaboration with UN agencies represents both a strategic opportunity and a central recommendation of the MTE.

4. Investment in ocean science initiative – presentation from technical expert and call for DAB engagement

Building on the Barcelona Statement and the MTE recommendations, the DCU introduced the next phase of the Ocean Decade initiative on investment in ocean science. The initiative, which was presented by an external consultant, Mr Charles Cooper, aims to develop common methodologies to assess and communicate the return on investment of ocean science. The DCU emphasized that existing evidence is fragmented and geographically uneven, and that a more standardized framework is needed to strengthen the case for sustained investment.

DAB Members welcomed the initiative and stressed the importance of maintaining a clear methodological focus. Board members with private sector experience highlighted the need for clear theory-of-change frameworks, robust monitoring and evaluation systems, concrete examples

demonstrating societal and economic impact, and tailored value propositions for financial audiences. Members encouraged learning from established frameworks in sustainable finance and ensuring geographic equity in case studies. It was also stressed that messaging should avoid implying reduced government responsibility, while broadening funding partnerships responsibly. The DAB expressed support for the initiative and indicated willingness to contribute expertise to the expert working group.

Day 2 – 11 February

5. Presentation on flagship priority areas to and beyond 2027 – issues, uptake measures and resources

The DCU opened the session by recalling that identifying a limited number of high-priority flagship areas is central to consolidating efforts and impact toward the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These priorities are intended to build on the results of the Vision 2030 process carried out in the lead-up to the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference to provide a framework for collective action across Decade Challenges and to strengthen impact in the second half of the Decade through greater strategic alignment.

An external consultant, Dr Lydia Koehler, presented an analysis structured around three components: (i) mapping priority policy demands; (ii) assessing alignment within the Decade portfolio; (iii) and identifying mechanisms to strengthen uptake. The analysis identified strong demand for scientific synthesis in areas including ocean-climate interactions and resilience, marine pollution and cumulative pressures, biodiversity and ecosystem health including deep-sea issues, sustainable ocean planning and blue economy pathways, and improved ocean data accessibility and interoperability.

While significant activity exists across these areas, the analysis highlighted fragmentation, uneven geographic participation, and insufficient articulation of science-policy pathways and socio-economic relevance. The need for stronger synthesis products aligned with policy windows and clearer engagement with national and private sector actors was emphasized. The consultant underscored that flagship priorities should not create new thematic silos but rather consolidate and align existing Decade Actions around a limited number of cross-cutting, policy-responsive objectives capable of demonstrating tangible progress by 2027.

Members supported narrowing strategic focus of the Decade and stressed that each flagship priority should include clearly defined policy entry points, measurable progress indicators, and communication narratives accessible beyond scientific audiences to policymakers and financial actors. The Board recommended that the priority areas should be presented as ‘opportunities’ or ‘solutions’ and emphasized the importance of clear communication on the process and expected outcomes. The importance of ensuring inclusivity, geographic balance, and operational feasibility was also highlighted. The Board agreed that further refinement of the proposed flagship areas would continue through subsequent consultations and working group discussions, with the objective of presenting a coherent and strategically focused framework in preparation for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference.

6. Measures to enhance uptake of science and knowledge for priority users

The discussion focused on identifying practical measures to enhance the uptake and application of science and knowledge generated under the Ocean Decade, particularly in relation to the proposed flagship priorities.

Members emphasized the importance of producing concise, policy-ready synthesis outputs tailored to specific decision-making contexts. This includes executive summaries, targeted technical briefs, and integrated assessment products aligned with intergovernmental negotiation timelines and national planning cycles. It was noted that scientific findings should clearly respond to defined policy questions and demonstrate relevance to regulatory, financing, and implementation processes.

Participants also stressed the need to articulate more clearly the socio-economic and investment value of ocean science, including return on investment considerations, risk reduction benefits, and long-term cost savings associated with prevention and resilience. Strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems was identified as essential to demonstrate measurable outcomes and provide credible evidence to policymakers, finance ministries, and development institutions.

In addition, the importance of structured and sustained engagement mechanisms was underscored. This includes regular dialogue with policy focal points, stronger integration of Decade outputs into UN reporting processes, closer coordination with National Decade Committees to address the national science-policy interface, and early involvement of end users in the co-design of Decade Actions. Members reiterated that enhancing uptake requires intentional design from the outset, ensuring that knowledge generation is directly linked to implementation pathways and tangible impact.

The DCU noted that elements of this approach are reflected in the Vision 2030 process and the Barcelona Statement, and that further operationalization will be integrated into the refinement of flagship priorities and preparations for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference. In closing, members emphasized that improving uptake will require continued engagement with financial institutions and the development of common metrics to demonstrate impact, thus reiterating the importance of the financing initiative presented the previous day.

7. Measures to generate greater engagement of under-represented priority groups (private sector, ILK holders, SIDS/LDCs others)

The DCU presented ongoing efforts to enhance meaningful engagement of underrepresented groups, including with a focus on two groups: Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) holders, and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The DCU provided an overview of ongoing initiatives, including the development of an operational framework for ILK engagement, the upcoming Island States Ocean Summit and the work of the Capacity Development Facility targeting SIDS. Efforts to strengthen national coordination through National Decade Committees were also highlighted.

DAB members welcomed these initiatives but noted persistent structural barriers, including language constraints, limited access to funding mechanisms, and uneven geographic representation in endorsed Actions. Members stressed the need to move from consultation toward shared leadership,

particularly with Indigenous knowledge holders and regional actors. Concrete suggestions included strengthening regional Programmes to foster local ownership, improving communication materials in multiple languages, supporting matchmaking platforms to connect expertise with needs, and ensuring that inclusivity criteria are embedded within flagship priorities rather than treated as a parallel workstream.

The Board underscored that enhancing engagement is essential not only for equity but also for strengthening the legitimacy, relevance, and long-term sustainability of the Decade's outcomes.

Day 3 – 12 February

8. Hybrid interaction with DCC/DCOs – shared pathways to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and beyond

A hybrid session was held with representatives of thematic and regional Decade Collaborative Centres (DCCs) and Decade Coordination Offices (DCOs), in response to recommendations from the previous DAB cohort and the Mid-Term Evaluation to strengthen structured dialogue across coordination layers.

Representatives of DCCs and DCOs outlined their roles in facilitating regional and thematic coordination, supporting endorsed Actions, and fostering stakeholder engagement. They highlighted progress in building regional networks, convening scientific communities, and contributing to flagship initiatives, while also noting persistent challenges. These included limited and short-term funding, uneven engagement across regions, varying levels of institutional capacity, and the need for clearer guidance on how global priorities should translate into regional workplans.

Several coordination structures emphasized the importance of predictable communication channels with the DCU and the DAB, as well as clearer articulation of expectations in the lead-up to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference. The need to better align flagship priorities with regional realities, including differing policy cycles and development contexts, was also stressed.

In response, DAB members underlined the importance of ensuring coherence across global, regional, and thematic levels, particularly in consolidating flagship priorities and strengthening science–policy pathways. Members emphasized that DCCs and DCOs are critical intermediaries for translating global strategic direction into context-specific implementation and for feeding regional insights back into global processes.

The DCU noted that this exchange marked the beginning of a more systematic series of engagements aimed at clarifying roles, enhancing coordination, and ensuring that preparations for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference are grounded in both global ambition and regional operational realities.

9. Hybrid interaction with NDCs – shared pathways to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and beyond

In line with recommendations from the Mid-Term Evaluation, a hybrid session was also held with representatives of National Decade Committees (NDCs) to strengthen dialogue between global coordination structures and national implementation mechanisms.

NDC representatives shared experiences in translating the Ocean Decade framework into national contexts, including efforts to integrate ocean science into national development strategies, climate adaptation plans, marine spatial planning processes, and biodiversity commitments. Several NDCs highlighted progress in establishing multi-stakeholder coordination platforms at the national level, fostering collaboration between scientific institutions, government agencies, and civil society.

At the same time, representatives noted challenges, including limited dedicated resources, variable political visibility of the Decade at national level, and difficulties in aligning Decade timelines with national budget and planning cycles. The need for clearer guidance on how flagship priorities should be operationalized nationally, as well as stronger support for developing National Ocean Science Plans, was emphasized.

DAB members acknowledged the central role of NDCs in ensuring science uptake and policy impact. Members stressed that NDCs represent a critical interface between global ambition and national implementation, and that they should be supported through clearer messaging, synthesis products tailored to national policymakers, and structured engagement opportunities linked to flagship priorities.

The DCU reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening coordination with NDCs and noted that preparations for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference should explicitly incorporate national-level perspectives and contributions to demonstrate tangible impact across diverse regional contexts.

10. Resource mobilization – mapping and priorities for action

In light of earlier deliberations on flagship priorities and investment in ocean science, the discussion returned to resource mobilization. The DCU recalled previous efforts to map donor interests against the needs of the Decade ecosystem and emphasized that the Decade functions as a catalytic framework rather than a funding mechanism.

The discussion highlighted the need for a more structured and strategic resource mobilization approach. Members underscored the importance of clearly articulating the value proposition of ocean science, including demonstrating socio-economic returns, risk reduction benefits, and long-term cost savings associated with prevention and resilience. The development of common metrics and standardized methodologies to assess return on investment was identified as essential to strengthening engagement with finance ministries, development banks, and private sector actors.

Participants also stressed the importance of diversifying funding sources, including philanthropic foundations, blended finance instruments, and impact investment mechanisms, while maintaining strong government ownership and responsibility. The need to align funding narratives with flagship priorities and to ensure geographic equity in resource allocation was emphasized.

The Board agreed that resource mobilization efforts should be closely linked to the investment in ocean science initiative and supported by clear communication materials tailored to different investor audiences in preparation for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference.

11. Priority areas of action for DAB 2026 – 2027, individual roles and engagements, and ways of working to achieve priorities

In the final working session, the Board considered priority areas of action for 2026–2027 and reflected on its strategic role in supporting the implementation of the Ocean Decade.

Consensus emerged around several priority directions: (i) consolidating and articulating flagship priorities toward 2027; (ii) strengthening science uptake and synthesis mechanisms; (iii) supporting the investment in ocean science initiative; (iv) enhancing engagement of underrepresented stakeholder groups; and (v) contributing actively to preparations for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference.

Members reaffirmed that the Board’s role should remain strategic and forward-looking, focusing on providing high-level guidance, facilitating connections, and leveraging individual expertise and networks rather than engaging in operational oversight. The importance of targeted working modalities, including thematic or time-bound working groups aligned with members’ expertise and availability, was highlighted.

The Board also discussed ways of working, expressing support for a balanced combination of structured online exchanges and well-prepared in-person meetings to enable deeper strategic discussions. The DCU committed to reflecting the agreed priorities in a draft 2026–2027 workplan for validation following the meeting.

12. Closing

The DAB meeting concluded with expressions of appreciation for the constructive engagement of DAB members, UN agency representatives, and coordination structures throughout the three days of discussions. Thanks were extended to the FAO for hosting the meeting and to all attendees for their active and constructive engagement.

A shared understanding of the strategic priorities for the remainder of the Decade was reached, alongside a reaffirmed commitment to ensuring measurable impact, strengthened science–policy linkages, and a clear legacy toward and beyond 2030. Participants underscored the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference as a critical milestone to demonstrate progress under consolidated flagship priorities and to reinforce the global value of the Ocean Decade framework.

Annex A: Meeting Agenda

Day 1: 10 February

9.30 – 9.45	1. Opening Remarks and Welcome from FAO, IOC Executive Secretary & Co-Chairs
9.45 – 10.30	2. Self-Introductions of Board Members
10.30 – 11.00	Coffee Break
11.00 - 11.15	3. Discussion of meeting objectives, outcomes and agenda
11.15 – 12.50	3. Presentation of structures, achievements, challenges and perspectives of Ocean Decade including Mid Term Evaluation Action Plan Presentation of history and role of DAB Q&A and discussion, including on ways of working as a group
12.50 – 13.00	4. Overview of ‘Women and Girls in Science Networking Event’ planned for 11th February Discussion on expectations and ways of working
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch & networking time
14.30 – 16.00	5. Perspectives from UN agencies on optimizing the benefits of the Decade Discussion
16.00 – 16.30	Coffee Break
16.30 – 17.30	6. Investment in ocean science initiative – presentation from technical expert and call for DAB engagement
19.30h onwards	Group networking dinner

Day 2: 11 February

9.00 – 9.30	7. Reflections and revisiting any issues from Day 1 & Overview of objectives and agenda for Day 2
9.30 – 10.00	8. Presentation on flagship priority areas to and beyond 2027 – issues, uptake measures and resources
10.00 – 10.30	Coffee break
10.30 – 12.30	9. Discussion of flagship priority areas (break-out groups + plenary)
12.30 – 14.30	<i>Girls and Women in Science Networking Event (with lunch provided)</i>
14.30 – 16.30	10. Measures to enhance uptake of science and knowledge for priority users (break out groups + plenary)
16.30 – 17.30	11. Measures to generate greater engagement of under-represented priority groups (private sector, ILK holders, SIDS/LDCs others) (plenary discussion)

Day 3: 12 February

9.00 – 9.30	12. Reflections and revisiting any issues from Day 2 & Overview of objectives and agenda for Day 3
9.30 – 11.00	13. Hybrid interaction with DCC/DCOs – shared pathways to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and beyond
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 13.00	14. Hybrid interaction with NDCs – shared pathways to the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference and beyond
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch & networking
14.30 – 15.30	15. Resource mobilisation – mapping and priorities for action
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee break
16.00 – 17.15	16. Priority areas of action for DAB 2026 – 2027, individual roles and engagements, and ways of working to achieve priorities
17.15 – 17.30	17. Closing Words

Annex B: List of Participating Board Members

Expert Members

Adrian Lema, National Center for Climate Research, Danish Meteorological Institute (Denmark)

Aminath Shauna, Soneva Conservation & Sustainability Maldives (CSM) (Maldives)

Dr. Alfredo Girón Nava, the World Economic Forum (WEF) (Switzerland)

Dr. Davies Makilla, State Department for the Blue Economy and Fisheries (Kenya)

Michelle Heupel, Australia's Integrated Marine Observing System (Australia)

Dr. Philile Mbatha, University of Cape Town; One Ocean Hub (South Africa)

Katherine Garrett-Cox, Gulf International Bank (UK) Limited (United Kingdom)

Linda Faulkner, New Zealand's National Commission for UNESCO; New Zealand's Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge; Tūtaiao Ltd (New Zealand)

Camilla Brekke, Norwegian Polar Institute (Norway)

Prof. Donovan Campbell, University of the West Indies (Jamaica)

Prof. Hiroaki Saito, Atmosphere and Ocean Research Institute (AORI), The University of Tokyo (Japan)

Ronaldo Christofolletti, Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP) (Brazil)

Robert Blasiak, Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University (Sweden)

Torsten Thiele, Global Ocean Trust (Germany)

UN Agency Representatives

Dr. Vera Agostini, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Denis Bailly, United Nations University (UN University)

José Dallo, International Seabed Authority (ISA)

Dr. Jana Friedrich, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Dmitry Gonchar, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS)

Frederik Haag, International Maritime Organization (IOM)

Jasdeep Randhawa, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Celine Tiffay, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)

Proclaimed in 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), provides a convening framework to develop the scientific knowledge and partnerships needed to catalyse transformative ocean science solutions for sustainable development, connecting people and our ocean. The Ocean Decade is coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.

Established during the Preparatory Phase and to continue throughout implementation until 2030, the IOC's Ocean Decade Series will provide key documentation about this global initiative and aims to serve as a primary resource for stakeholders seeking to consult, monitor and assess progress towards the vision and mission of the Ocean Decade.

