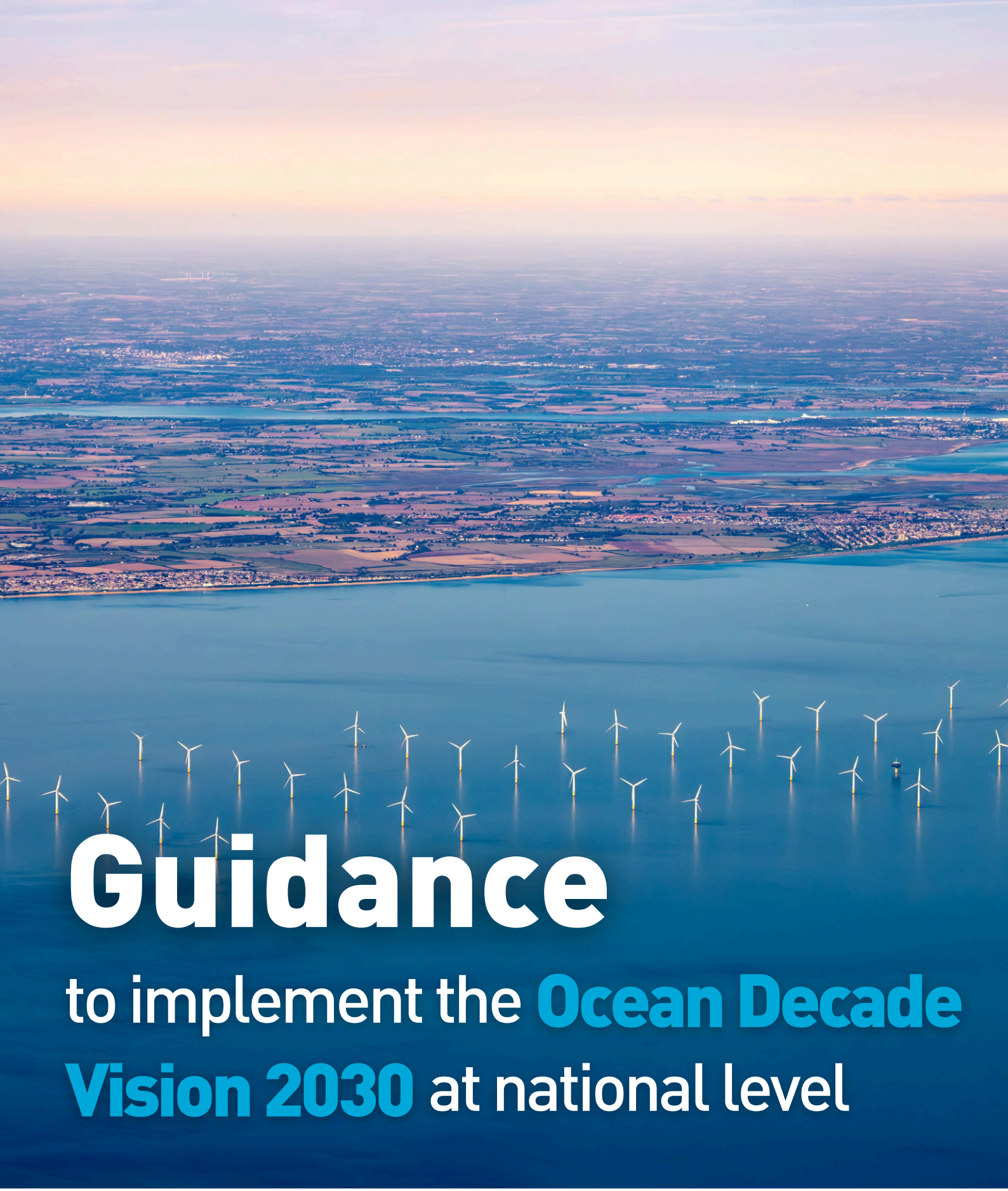

Guidance

to implement the Ocean Decade Vision 2030 at national level

The United Nations
Decade of Ocean Science
For Sustainable Development
2021-2030

2021 2030 United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This guidance[1] is designed as a non-prescriptive tool primarily for National Decade Committees (NDCs) to inform and support their Member State to promote ocean science-based decision-making at the national level in alignment with the Vision 2030 Process of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 ('Ocean Decade').

This guidance was developed to support NDCs and other national stakeholders in translating the outcomes of the Vision 2030 Process into context-specific national ocean science strategies or roadmaps. It draws from key outcomes of the Barcelona Statement (2024), the 'Ambition, Action, Impact' Report, and discussions at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, where NDCs prioritized the need for national-level implementation guidance.

This document is intended as a flexible and practical tool, not a prescriptive template. It offers suggested steps, options, and templates that can be adapted to different governance systems, policy landscapes, and institutional settings.

[1] The development of this manual is supported by the Ocean Decade Stakeholder Coordination Officer and contributing volunteers, with ongoing input from policymakers, experts, and civil society representatives. This participatory development model ensures that the manual reflects both global priorities and practical realities on the ground.

1 The Ocean Decade and the Vision 2030 Process

Led by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, the Ocean Decade[2] provides a unifying framework to catalyze transformative ocean science in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14 on "Life Below Water."[3] The Ocean Decade serves as a framework for the development of ocean science, engaging a diverse network of stakeholders to generate knowledge that supports science-based decision making.[4] To guide and streamline this collective effort, the Decade has identified **10 key Challenges**: priority areas that reflect the most urgent needs for ocean knowledge and action. These Challenges serve as strategic entry points for investment, collaboration, and innovation, helping to organize activities and align efforts across disciplines and regions toward a common goal: a healthy, resilient, and inclusive ocean for all.

As momentum builds through global processes – including the Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), the Ocean-Climate Dialogue under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – the need for actionable, nationally grounded ocean science strategies is more urgent than ever.

In June 2025, the UN Ocean Conference in Nice marked a key moment for the Decade community. Among the outcomes captured in the Nice Commitments for the Ocean[5] was a call for strengthened national implementation of Decade priorities. This guidance was directly prioritized by NDCs during an in-person meeting at the Conference and responds to the recommendation, articulated in the consolidated 'Ambition, Action, Impact' Report of the Vision 2030 Process, that the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) should work with NDCs to "develop and share guidance on the development of national action plans / roadmaps that draw from the Vision 2030 Process outcomes."[6] This guidance is therefore developed as a living knowledge product.

[2] For more details about the Ocean Decade, please have a look at the document *The Science we need for the ocean we want: the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)*. Available here.
[3] *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. Available here.
[4] For more information on the Ocean Decade, please have a look at its Implementation Plan. Available here.
[5] https://unocnice2025.org/en/actualites-presse/the-nice-commitments-for-the-ocean/
[6] *Ambition, Action, Impact: The Ocean Decade Pathway to 2030 – Consolidated Outcomes of the Vision 2030 Process*, page 29. Available here.

2 Translating the Vision 2030 Process to the national ocean science context

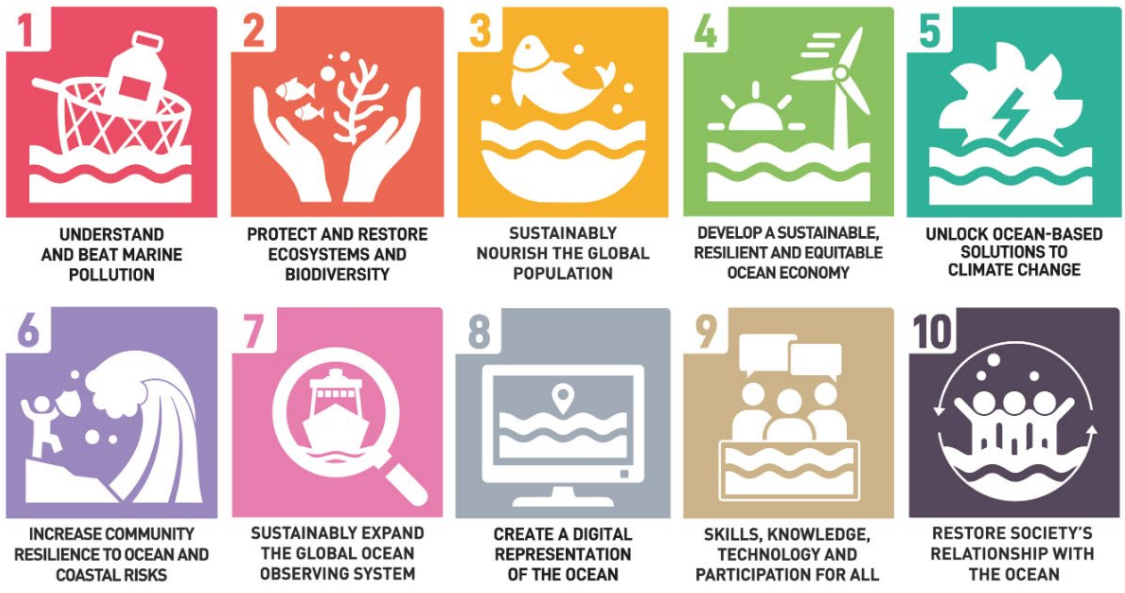
The Vision 2030 Process is a strategic initiative within the Ocean Decade aiming at defining clear, measurable goals for each of the 10 Ocean Decade Challenges. Led by expert working groups, the Vision 2030 Process translated the Decade's ambitions into actionable scientific goals and outcomes to be achieved by 2030. As the results were launched in 2024 during the Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona, Spain, the Process guides the next half of the Decade on the tangible goals to be achieved, both internationally but also inside the national realities of States.

This guidance offers a structured yet flexible framework for aligning national ocean science planning with the global goals set out in the Ocean Decade Vision 2030 Process. Rather than a prescriptive model, it presents adaptable templates and approaches that can be tailored to different institutional contexts, governance structures, and national priorities.

For more detailed context and foundational documents, readers are encouraged to refer to:

- The Barcelona Statement (2024)
- The 10 Vision 2030 White Papers (2024)
- The Ambition, Action, Impact: the Ocean Decade Pathway to 2030: Consolidated Outcomes of the Vision 2030 Process (2024)
- The Nice Commitments for the Ocean (2025)

FIGURE 1



The 10 Ocean Decade Challenges

National Decade Committees (NDCs) are voluntary national commitments involving groups of stakeholders that develop opportunities for States to take part in achieving the Ocean Decade goals. They aim to include diverse actors from the government, academia, the private sector, holders of Indigenous knowledge, youth, and scientists to create a forum for discussing the development of the Decade on a national level and foster Decade Actions. Following the guidance of a 'Best Practice Manual' published in 2023, the NDCs create a community for implementing the Ocean Decade. While supporting the national implementation of the Decade, the NDCs engage with local communities to raise awareness and support Decade Actions, and to encourage more stakeholders to apply for endorsement of the Ocean Decade.

The guidance is also intended to support Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and other resource-constrained entities where capacity-building and access to knowledge can have a significant impact. To support the implementation of the Ocean Decade, the guidance provides practical resources, including templates for mapping existing ocean policies and actions of countries against the Ocean Decade Challenges and the key actions outlined in the Vision 2030 White Papers responding to the 10 Challenges.

This document emphasizes inclusivity, capacity building, and institutional strengthening. It also supports Member States with the alignment of their national ocean science action plans and/or strategies and/or priorities with relevant international frameworks.[7] The Ocean Decade framework can act as a vehicle connecting these processes, showcasing synergies, and ensuring that science informs effective policy and action – to generate ocean knowledge to inform science-based decision-making. In doing so, it supports coherence and synergy across international, regional, and national processes.

On another note, it is essential to highlight that the recommendations and tools provided aim to support the implementation of the Ocean Decade by 2030 but also beyond this deadline, as the protection of the ocean is an ongoing process that is independent of the deadlines set by the global priorities for its protection. The recommendations that may come up from this exercise of translating the Vision 2030 Process into national contexts are also welcome to be institutionalized into different settings, such as the work of governments and other institutions that are closely related to ocean science and policy.

By following the approaches outlined in this document, stakeholders can assess their national policies and compare them to the priorities described in the White Papers of the Vision 2030 Process for each Ocean Decade Challenge. This guidance is designed to be flexible in use responding to the needs of each NDC and their national/Member State context. At the time of writing, three main outcomes are envisioned to be taken from this guidance, such as:

- A roadmap for the work of the NDCs: after completing the steps outlined in the guidance, the NDC has a clear overview of gaps and recommendations in its country and a better understanding of where to focus its efforts.

[7] Including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC, and the BBNJ Agreement.

- Supporting tool for Member State's National Ocean Science Strategies: by identifying key recommendations and gaps in countries' national policies, the NDCs can use the global Vision 2030 recommendations to advocate and support the development of their national ocean science strategies.[8]

- To contribute to how ocean science-based decision-making can better inform targets under international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC)[9], the Kunming-Montreal Protocol[10], the BBNJ Agreement[11] and other relevant international commitments.[12] By doing so, the National Ocean Science Action Plans can facilitate greater cohesion among these initiatives.

[8] For instance, some countries have already created their National Ocean Decade Action Plans, such as Brazil and Colombia.
[9] The Convention has universal membership (198 Parties) and is the parent treaty of the 2015 Paris Agreement. The main aim of the Paris Agreement is to keep the global average temperature rise this century as close as possible to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The ultimate objective is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system, in a time frame which allows ecosystems to adapt naturally and enables sustainable development. Its text can be found here.
[10] Adopted during the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the CBD following a four-year consultation and negotiation process. This historic Framework, which supports the achievement of the SDGs and builds on the Convention's previous Strategic Plans, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. Among the Framework's key elements are four goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030. More information available here.
[11] Adopted on 19 June 2023, the Agreement has the overall objective of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, for the present and in the long-term, through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the Convention. The Agreement addresses four main issues: marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits; measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas; environmental impact assessments; and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. As of November 2025, the Agreement has been ratified by 75 States and will enter into force in January 2026. Its text can be found here.
[12] One exemple would be the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), given its relationship with processes associated with ecosystems in the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. More information available here.

3 Applying the Vision 2030 Process to national context

3.1 Step 1 - Assessing synergies and gaps between current national policies and the Ocean Decade Challenges

NDCs are encouraged to take the 10 Ocean Decade Challenges[13] and for each of them assess their countries' current ocean and coastal governance system. The Challenges should be used to support national policy development and implementation. The aim is not to have a policy for each Challenge; however, the aim is to map the 10 Decade Challenges against existing national policies and national commitments to international frameworks and use the outcomes of the Vision 2030 Process as a supporting tool for further improving the national ocean science strategies.

If there is already a National Ocean Science Action Plan or a National Policy on the topic, this should be the starting point for the assessment. This assessment should analyze how national institutions, tools, policies, and programmes already engage with the themes covered by the Decade Challenges. It should also identify key areas of opportunity and current successes where science-based approaches can improve outcomes.

This mapping helps to identify potential synergies between global and national priorities. It also provides a baseline for understanding where efforts can be focused and which governance mechanisms could be strengthened or better utilized. After picking, e.g. up to two Ocean Decade Challenges that are less developed in the national realities and up to two Challenges closer to achievement as areas of focus, Step 2 will follow.

To illustrate useful cases from the implementation of the Ocean Decade into national contexts, the following useful cases were shared by the NDCs:

RUSSIA

Information about the Ocean Decade Vision 2030 Process is communicated to all participants in the implementation of the National Plan for the Decade in various ways. In particular, in the latest issue of the journal "Ocean Research", which is entirely based on the results of the conference "Russia in the UN Decade of Ocean Science: Resources and Knowledge", there is an article "Solution of the UN Decade Of Ocean Science Challenges: Vision 2030 Process", in which the results of the Vision 2030 are presented.

[13] Description of the 10 Ocean Decade Challenges can be found here.

SLOVENIA

As there is a great interest in various activities and construction projects in the coastal area of the Slovenian sea, the Slovenia NDC considers it very important to raise awareness of the importance of the sea among developers. For several years now, students from the Faculty of Civil Engineering have been taking part in field exercises at the Piran Marine Biology Station of the National Institute of Biology, where they learn about the protection of the marine environment, among other things.

In addition, in 2024, as part of the 9th Mediterranean Coast and Macro-Regional Strategies Week, the NDC organized a panel discussion on construction interventions in the sea and on the seashore, and on achieving good environmental status of the sea under the framework of the Environmental Pillar of the Adriatic-Ionian Macro Strategy (EUSAIR). The consultation was organized on the basis of the work programme of the NDC. The main purpose of the consultation was to stimulate a debate on how to prevent or minimize the negative impacts of marine and coastal construction activities on the marine ecosystem and thereby achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

PORTUGAL

The Portugal NDC aims to hold an international conference every year, in collaboration with several other entities, Portuguese and from other States, namely NDCs, to address each of the 10 Ocean Decade Challenges. In the end of 2024, after the first year of activity, the Portugal NDC promoted an international conference addressing Challenge 3 on "Sustainable Fisheries and Future Blue Food in the North Atlantic". This year, in December 2025, a conference on "Ocean and Human Heath" will be held, addressing Challenges 1 and 10.

MEXICO

Mexico illustrates the implementation of the Ocean Decade through its Mexico's Strategic Action Plan (PAEM), a framework that translates the seven Decade Outcomes into national, state, and municipal contexts, while aligning with national policies and international commitments and integrating specific actions in 17 coastal states and 263 coastal municipalities. The PAEM is supported by the National PAEM Platform, an interactive digital tool that provides access to diagnostics, objectives, and actions linked to the Decade Outcomes, including interactive maps, downloadable fact sheets, and monitoring dashboards aligned with international commitments (SDG 14, UNFCCC, CBD, BBNJ). This approach offers a replicable model for translating Vision 2030 into concrete territorial actions in megadiverse contexts. Likewise, Mexico is willing to share the strategies used in the country that can serve as a model for others.

3.2 Step 2 - Aligning assessment with the Vision 2030 Process outcomes

After identifying the Challenges that are either less developed or closer to be achieved by national policies, depending on the intended areas of focus selected, NDCs are encouraged to look further into the Vision 2030 White Papers' key actions and Barcelona Statement priorities as described in the table below.

OCEAN DECADE CHALLENGES	BARCELONA STATEMENT PRIORITIES	VISION 2030 WHITE PAPER GOALS
	• Understand global distribution and human health and ecosystem impacts of marine pollution across the land-sea continuum, including the identification of priority pollutants and consideration of emerging and unregulated pollutants.	• Develop and implement harmonized scientific protocols for pollution monitoring. • Invest in capacity building and technology transfer. • Advance ocean technology and innovation. • Build a Global Monitoring and Training Network.
	• Enhance and scale-up marine and coastal ecosystem-based management approaches, including a focus on better understanding of and solutions for multiple stressors. • Better understand deep-sea ecosystems, including vulnerability to climate change and new or emerging economic activities.	• Develop adaptive ecosystem-based management tools. • Identify and fill priority data gaps via biodiversity networks. • Invest in capacity and infrastructure for ecosystem intelligence.
	• Encourage sustainable, resilient, and equitable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture and facilitate sustainable management of industrial fisheries. • Strengthen sustainable aquatic food production and innovation for new frontiers with a focus on developing countries and strengthened public-private partnerships.	• Shift science toward nutrition-centered aquatic food. • Support sustainable fisheries governance and equitable supply chains. • Embed marine social science to drive consumer behavior.

	• Underpin evidence-based Sustainable Ocean Plans at the national level and in relevant transboundary areas. • Encourage sustainable and climate resilient ocean economy projects, prioritizing those that integrate environmental conservation with socio-economic benefits for local communities.	• Co-design innovative solutions with industry. • Enhance Sustainable Blue Economy Partnerships. • Increase involvement of the private sector.
	• Rapidly scale up climate mitigation, including through marine renewable energy and management of coastal ecosystems. • Allow timely understanding of the technical, ecological, and social feasibility, potential impacts of proposed marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) initiatives and contribute to future policy and regulation development.	• Scale up marine renewables and coastal ecosystem management. • Enhance dialogue around nature-based solutions (e.g. field-test mCDR technologies). • Advance sensors, remote sensing, and robust carbon accounting.
	• Underpin adaptive governance and management systems and decision support tools for the assessment of vulnerability and risk to coastal communities and marine industries.	• Establish people-centered multi-hazard early warning systems. • Develop vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning. • Deploy ecosystem-based solutions (e.g. mangroves). • Enhance risk communication, modelling, and stakeholder partnerships.
	• Develop economic models, policies, and innovative financial instruments to diversify and accelerate investment in ocean science, including for enhanced digital representation of the ocean and sustained and	• Strengthen the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) in under-monitored regions. • Harmonize observing protocols for interoperability. • Foster co-design with diverse stakeholders. • Build workforce capacity and investment.

	sustainable ocean observing and infrastructure.	• Develop economic policies and instruments to finance digital representation and ocean observing infrastructure.
	• Inform knowledge drawn from transdisciplinary social science and ocean literacy research on human-ocean connection, behavior change, and cultural engagement that can be integrated into the Ocean Decade digital infrastructure and used to map and measure the impact of ocean literacy initiatives. • Increase engagement with the health sector and better understand connections between ocean health and human health.	• Invest in capacity development and transdisciplinary knowledge exchange. • Support equitable participation across diverse communities.
		• Reframe from "Change humanity's relationship with the ocean" to "Restore society's relationship with the ocean". • Co-create a theory of change via "Connecting People & Ocean". • Fund marine social science, ocean literacy and behavior metrics. • Build networks of communicators, educators, Blue Schools, and cultural ambassadors. • Compile evidence on cultural-ocean links and scale best practice.

3.3 Step 3 - Defining national ocean science recommendations

After screening the 10 Challenges and identifying existing national policies, strategies, and science action plans in Step 1, and reviewing the relevant global goals and priorities in Step 2, Step 3 brings these elements together within the national context.

Based on this mapping and the alignment with Vision 2030 outcomes, NDCs can identify gaps and strengths, whether existing policies require additional scientific input for effective implementation or where national efforts are already aligned with Vision 2030 and can be scaled. Using the template in Annex I, NDCs can synthesize their national assessment findings and outline opportunities for implementation into national action, informing the development of draft recommendations.

This step can also be used for mapping of national obligations under global frameworks, including the UNFCCC, the CBD, and the BBNJ Agreement, and identifying how the Ocean Decade Challenges can serve as entry points to support their implementation. By aligning national priorities with these global commitments, NDCs can use the Vision 2030 White Papers to identify where targeted scientific knowledge, capacity development, and technology transfer can help close gaps and accelerate progress. In this way, the Challenges offer a structured lens to advance national delivery on climate, biodiversity, and ocean governance targets.

This process should be underpinned by inclusive and participatory consultation, bringing together government representatives, researchers, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, civil society, youth, and the private sector. Ensuring that recommendations are co-designed and context-specific will increase their relevance, ownership, and long-term policy impact.

4 Conclusion and developments

This guidance marks a critical step in operationalizing the ambitions of the Ocean Decade through national-level action. By offering a flexible, participatory, and practical approach, it empowers NDCs and other stakeholders to align their national priorities with the global vision laid out by the Vision 2030 Process. It also seeks to strengthen coherence across national, regional, and international commitments, recognizing the growing need to support countries in fulfilling their obligations under international frameworks by promoting that ocean science becomes more equitable and context-responsive.

Examples of national strategies:

- United States of America
- Brazil
- Colombia
- Türkiye

Strengthening coherence across national, regional, and international commitments as a stronger focus on how to fulfill national commitments under international frameworks is needed.

While this guidance is a milestone, it is also the beginning of a collective and evolving effort. Pilot experiences and peer learning among NDCs will be essential for refining its use and enhancing its impact. Ultimately, this document is a living tool at the science–policy interface, dedicated to advancing ocean policy that is science-based, inclusive, and actionable.

These pilot experiences will be essential in refining and improving the guidance. Lessons learned from the pilots, both successes and challenges, will feed back into the guidance, ensuring it remains responsive, relevant, and practical across diverse contexts.

Annex I – Step 3 template

OCEAN DECADE CHALLENGES	BARCELONA STATEMENT PRIORITIES	VISION 2030 WHITE PAPER GOALS	GAPS AND/OR STRENGTHS (UNDERDEVELOPED OR WELL ADVANCED AREAS)	OPPORTUNITIES OF IMPLEMENTATION INTO NATIONAL ACTION (DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS)
	• Understand global distribution and human health and ecosystem impacts of marine pollution across the land-sea continuum, including the identification of priority pollutants and consideration of emerging and unregulated pollutants.	• Develop and implement harmonized scientific protocols for pollution monitoring. • Invest in capacity building and technology transfer. • Advance ocean technology and innovation. • Build a Global Monitoring and Training Network.		
	• Enhance and scale-up marine and coastal ecosystem-based management approaches, including a focus on better understanding of and solutions for multiple stressors. • Better understand deep-sea ecosystems, including vulnerability to climate change and new or emerging economic activities.	• Develop adaptive ecosystem-based management tools. • Identify and fill priority data gaps via biodiversity networks. • Invest in capacity and infrastructure for ecosystem intelligence.		

- Encourage sustainable, resilient, and equitable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture and facilitate sustainable management of industrial fisheries.
- Strengthen sustainable aquatic food production and innovation for new frontiers with a focus on developing countries and strengthened public-private partnerships.
- Shift science toward nutrition-centered aquatic food.
- Support sustainable fisheries governance and equitable supply chains.
- Embed marine social science to drive consumer behavior.

- Underpin evidence-based Sustainable Ocean Plans at the national level and in relevant transboundary areas.
- Encourage sustainable and climate resilient ocean economy projects, prioritizing those that integrate environmental conservation with socio-economic benefits for local communities.
- Co-design innovative solutions with industry.
- Enhance Sustainable Blue Economy Partnerships.
- Increase involvement of the private sector.

- Rapidly scale up climate mitigation including through marine renewable energy and
- Scale up marine renewables and coastal ecosystem management.
- Enhance dialogue around nature-

	management of coastal ecosystems. • Allow timely understanding of the technical, ecological, and social feasibility, potential impacts of proposed marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) initiatives and contribute to future policy and regulation development.	based solutions (e.g. field-test mCDR technologies). • Advance sensors, remote sensing and robust carbon accounting.	
	• Underpin adaptive governance and management systems and decision support tools for the assessment of vulnerability and risk to coastal communities and marine industries.	• Establish people-centered multi-hazard early warning systems. • Develop vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning. • Deploy ecosystem-based solutions (e.g. mangroves). • Enhance risk communication, modelling, and stakeholder partnerships.	
	• Develop economic models, policies, and innovative financial instruments to diversify and accelerate investment in ocean science, including for enhanced digital representation of the ocean and	• Strengthen the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) in under-monitored regions. • Harmonize observing protocols for interoperability. • Foster co-design with diverse stakeholders. • Build workforce capacity and investment.	

	sustained and sustainable ocean observing and infrastructure.	• Develop economic policies and instruments to finance digital representation and ocean observing infrastructure.
	• Inform knowledge drawn from transdisciplinary social science and ocean literacy research on human-ocean connection, behavior change, and cultural engagement that can be integrated into the Ocean Decade digital infrastructure and used to map and measure the impact of ocean literacy initiatives. • Increase engagement with the health sector and better understand connections between ocean health and human health.	• Invest in capacity development and transdisciplinary knowledge exchange. • Support equitable participation across diverse communities.
		• Reframe from "Change humanity's relationship with the ocean" to "Restore society's relationship with the ocean". • Co-create theory of change via "Connecting People & Ocean". • Fund marine social science, ocean literacy and behavior metrics. • Build networks of communicators, educators, Blue Schools, and cultural ambassadors. • Compile evidence on cultural-ocean links and scale best practice.

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