



Ocean Action Newsletter: Vol. 12

**December 2019: 'Blue COP' aims to elevate the role
of the ocean in climate mitigation and adaptation**

oceanconference.un.org

The annual United Nations Climate Change Conference ([COP25](https://oceanconference.un.org)) kicked off on 2 December in Madrid, Spain, with high expectations to connect the vital need to restore the ocean to the world's broader climate action efforts at what is being billed by some as the first "Blue COP." This year's climate conference comes just a few months after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its groundbreaking [Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate](#) (SROCC), which called for more ambitious and coordinated action to address unprecedented and enduring changes in the ocean and the frozen parts of the world.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized the role of the ocean as a climate mitigator in his opening remarks at COP25, asking the world's largest carbon emitters to step up their efforts urgently, for the greater good of the planet.

“Oceans absorb more than a quarter of all CO₂ in the atmosphere and generate more than half our oxygen,” the Secretary-General said. “Absorbing more and more carbon dioxide acidifies the oceans and threatens all life within them. Three major reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change —on land, on the oceans and cryosphere, and on the 1.5-degree Celsius climate goal—each confirm that we are knowingly destroying the very support systems keeping us alive.”



Speakers pose outside the SDG Pavilion at COP25.

On Saturday, 7 December, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs will host two ocean-related events in its [SDG Pavilion](#) at COP25 aimed at better connecting the climate agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 14 on the ocean. One event features [speakers from several Communities of Ocean Action](#) discussing how their work can help scale up ocean action for climate action. That will be followed by a [briefing on the upcoming 2020 Ocean Conference](#) featuring UN Under-Secretary-General and Conference Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean Peter Thomson, and representatives from Conference co-hosts Portugal and Kenya.

On Wednesday, 11 December, the SDG Pavilion will host [a special “fireside chat”](#) with IPCC Chair Hoesung Lee and Ambassador Thomson to discuss the ramifications of the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate.

The full programme for the SDG Pavilion at COP25 is available here: <https://www.un.org/en/COP25/SDGPavilion>.

2020 Ocean Conference logo selected

A new logo has been selected for the UN Ocean Conference to be held in Lisbon, Portugal, from 2-6 June 2020, co-hosted by Kenya and Portugal. The logo features the SDG wheel with waves in the center, and the basic logistical text. Registration information for the Conference is available on the website [here](#). Note that a preparatory meeting for the Conference is expected in February 2020.





Highlights from the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson

On his arrival in Madrid to attend the Blue COP25, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean Peter Thomson said, "You cannot have a healthy planetary ecosystem without a healthy ocean ecosystem, and the latter is under serious threat." Ambassador Thomson affirmed, "The world has a universally agreed plan to save life in the ocean, which if implemented with integrity and determination, will indeed reverse the cycle of decline in which the ocean is currently caught."

The Special Envoy said that while in Madrid, he would be pressing home the key messages delivered by Secretary-General António Guterres in his COP25 opening address on 2 December. Ambassador Thomson pointed to the Secretary-General's warning that three major reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have all recently confirmed that humanity is knowingly destroying the very support systems that keep us alive.

Ambassador Thomson is expected to be in Madrid until 13 December to make presentations at over twenty climate-ocean meetings covering ocean science, marine protected areas, ocean acidification, deoxygenation, overfishing, water management and blue carbon. While at the Blue COP, he will be promoting the raising of national ambitions under the Paris Climate Agreement, along with the implementation of the SDGs, with special emphasis on SDG 14, the ocean goal.

During his time at the Blue COP, Ambassador Thomson will also be amplifying the climate-ocean work of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, the findings of the IPCC's Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere, the Because the Ocean initiative, the UN Decade of Ocean Science (2021-2030), and the 2020 UN Ocean Conference to be held in Lisbon from 2 to 6 June next year.

You are invited to follow the Special Envoy's [Twitter account](#) and [Instagram account](#), where he shares messages of solutions and strategies for achieving a healthy Ocean through implementation of SDG14 and fidelity to the Paris Climate Agreement. More information about his work can be found on the website oceanconference.un.org/SpecialEnvoy.



Updates from the Communities of Ocean Action (COAs)



Photo by IISD/ENB | Francis Dejon

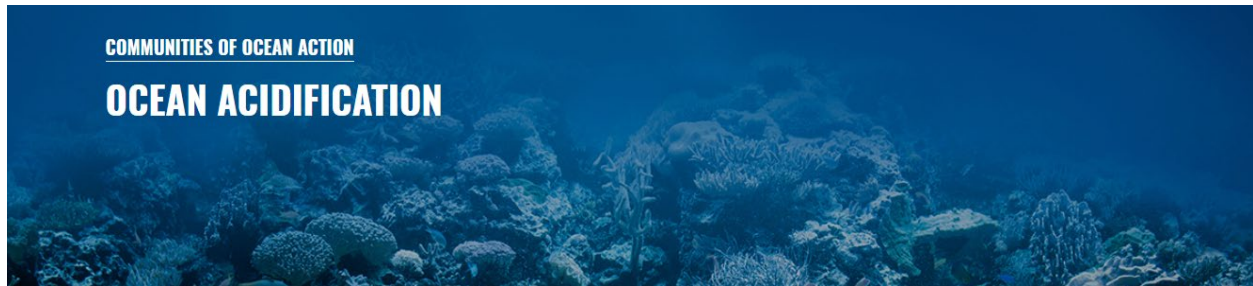
COAs on Ecosystems Management, Mangroves and Coral Reef COAs organize Montreal meeting

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and UN Environment, in their capacity as Co-focal points for the COAs on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Management, Mangroves and Coral Reefs, together organized an in-person meeting entitled “Advancing Ocean Action Towards SDG 14: Leveraging Synergies for Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, Mangroves and Coral Reefs” in Montreal, Canada, from 11 to 13 November 2019.

This meeting provided a platform for the members of these COAs to exchange experiences and lessons learned to support the implementation of voluntary commitments and to discuss key priorities for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference and the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The meeting considered, among other issues: advancing progress towards SDG 14; experiences from the voluntary commitments; and the roles of the COAs on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Management, Coral Reefs and Mangroves.

The event was organized as part of the 2020 Ocean Pathways Week (11-15 November 2019), which served as an opportunity to host focused discussions on key priorities for marine and coastal biodiversity to inform the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the 2020 UN Ocean Conference. A joint

session with participants in the thematic workshop on marine and coastal biodiversity for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (13-15 November) was convened on 13 November, coordinated by the CBD Secretariat and supported by the Ministry of Environment and Energy of the Government of Sweden and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea.



Ocean acidification

New Voluntary Commitments

As of November 2019, there are 267 Voluntary Commitments submitted under the Community of Ocean Action on Ocean Acidification. Several newly submitted Voluntary Commitments include the Ocean Acidification Mediterranean Hub ([34011](#)), Action and Outreach on Ocean Acidification ([32099](#)), and the Ocean University Initiative ([32694](#)).

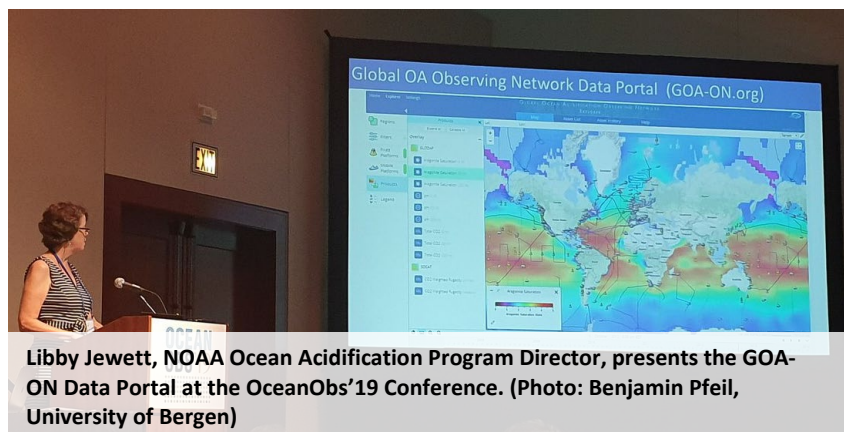
COA on Ocean Acidification holds fourth webinar

The COA on Ocean Acidification held its fourth webinar on 25 September. The webinar included presentations from Dr. Peter Thor from the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI) on Sweden's plans to address and support SDG target 14.3, including through a [national ocean acidification monitoring programme](#), and from Dr. Dorothee Bakker, University of East Anglia, UK, who presented on the Surface Ocean CO2 Atlas ([SOCAT](#)). The webinar recording can be found [here](#).

Ocean acidification highlighted at OceanObs'19 decadal conference

Advancements in ocean acidification science were featured at the [OceanObs'19](#) conference, held 16-20 September in Honolulu, USA. At the conference, 1,500 experts from more than 70 countries communicated the decadal progress of ocean observing

networks and charted innovative solutions to society's growing needs for ocean information in the coming 10 years. Representatives of the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network ([GOA-ON](#)) actively participated in sessions and panels focusing on a wide array of topics such as capacity building,



new technology, SDG 14 and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The outcomes of the conference as well as 130 Community White Papers will be the roadmap for future ocean observation. GOA-ON contributed to one of these Community White papers, which can be found [here](#). See the GOA-ON Voluntary Commitment [here](#).



Participants of the Indian Ocean Regional Ocean Acidification workshop in Zanzibar, Tanzania, 28-29 October 2019.

Developing an OA Action Plan for the Western Indian Ocean

The ocean acidification international Reference User Group (OAiRUG), chaired by the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) hosted an ocean acidification workshop focused on the Indian Ocean, held in Zanzibar, Tanzania, from 28-29 October. This workshop was organized in collaboration with the [Nairobi Convention](#), the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association ([WIOMSA](#)), the Ocean Acidification International Coordination Centre ([OA-ICC](#)), and the [Prince Albert II Foundation](#). The meeting was attended by 40 participants, including David Osborn, Co-focal point of the Community of Ocean Action on Ocean Acidification. The main outcome of the meeting is the development of an action plan for scientists, policy-makers and resource managers to address ocean acidification at the regional level. The OAiRUG and partners helped publish a similar [action plan](#) in 2018 for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Follow the Voluntary Commitments of the partners from this workshop here:

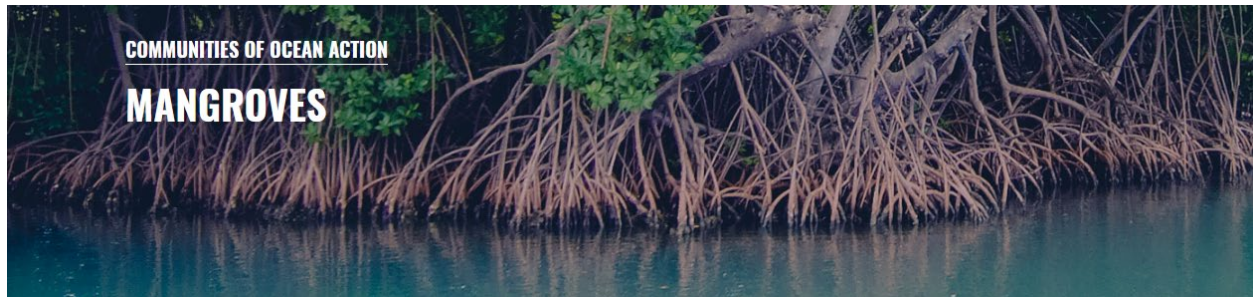
- [Nairobi Convention/WIOMSA:](#)
- [Ocean Acidification International Coordination Centre](#)
- [OA-Africa](#)

Ocean Acidification included in major climate change reports

The IPCC published its [Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate \(SROCC\)](#) on 25 September. The ocean and the cryosphere—the frozen parts of the planet—play a critical role for life on earth and host a wide range of unique ecosystems. The Special Report is the first IPCC Report to focus on the role of the ocean in the global climate and the effects of greenhouse gas emissions on the ocean,

including ocean warming, acidification, oxygen loss and sea level rise. The Special Report outlines climate-related risks and consequences if no action is taken to address unprecedented and enduring changes in the ocean and cryosphere.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) released its [Report on the Global Climate in 2015-2019](#). Ocean acidification has recently been adopted as a WMO Global Climate Indicator, and therefore trends in ocean acidification were included in this report.



Mangroves

Enhancing mangrove protection in the North Brazil Shelf

The coast between the mouth of the Amazon and the Orinoco rivers, also known as the North Brazil Shelf (NBS), is one of the world's most extensive muddy shorelines. Over thousands of years, the accumulating coastal plain has formed expansive coastal swamps and mangrove systems. Today, these coastal ecosystems are highly threatened by human activities and climate change. Unless space is maintained or provided, mangroves will be “squeezed” between rising seas and hard flood protection levees. Factoring in conservation and restoration of mangroves as part of development and climate adaptation and mitigation planning will be critical to maintaining these ecosystems and the services they provide.

The NBS Mangrove Project (“Setting the Foundations for Zero Net Loss of the Mangroves that Underpins Human Well-being in the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem”), was an 18-month project funded by the GEF and implemented between Conservation International (CI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to help establish a shared and multinational process for Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) in the NBS. The project recognizes the prevalence, socio-ecological importance and connectivity of mangroves in the retention and generation of key ecosystem services (fisheries, coastal protection, water quality, blue carbon, etc.) from which communities in the NBS countries are beneficiaries. The countries of Suriname and Guyana were prioritized to consolidate and improve the technical knowledge base necessary to further national and complementary regional coastal management strategies with neighboring countries Brazil (Amapá state) and French Guiana.

As a result, the project has developed a valuable baseline of knowledge and technical assessments as inputs towards a collaborative vision and a coordinated well-informed management of NBS mangrove systems, with emphasis on the information needs of Guyana and Suriname. At the same time, it explored the creation of a practical transboundary coordination mechanism between the countries of Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, and Brazil toward improved integrated coastal management of the extensive, ecologically connected yet vulnerable mangrove habitat of the NBS region.



To learn more about mangroves in the NBS, visit <https://nbslmegef.wordpress.com/> or contact [Emilio Cobo](#), IUCN South America.

New Voluntary Commitment in the spotlight

Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs in Latin America and the Caribbean

This commitment ([34287](#)) from Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs and the Governments of Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Nicaragua, Honduras and the Dominican Republic, aims to increase the area and number of wetlands with mangrove ecosystems in Latin America and the Caribbean that are wisely used and conserved according to the Ramsar Convention guidelines and in line with the work plan of the regional initiative and the Strategic Plan of the Convention. To achieve this, Ramsar methodologies will be implemented in each country to:

1. Develop an inventory of priority wetlands with mangrove ecosystems for conservation;
2. Designate at least 14 key areas (one per country) with mangrove ecosystems as wetlands of international importance or under a national category with management plans developed for key areas;
3. Carry out a participatory rapid assessment of the ecosystem values and functions of 14 Ramsar sites with mangroves;
4. Capacity development workshops for member countries of this regional initiative on environmental flows and their implementation.

These commitments are based on and will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Regional Initiative as outlined in their work plan, namely those related to:

1. Promoting the generation and exchange of knowledge of the cover and current status of conservation of mangroves and coral reefs among the involved Contracting Parties, through inventories and ecosystem studies to extend the Ramsar Sites list;
2. Developing a regional approach for the conservation and wise use of mangroves and coral reefs by strengthening regional capacities;
3. Achieving the effective management of mangroves, coral reefs and associated wetlands through integrated watershed and coastal zone management, including adaptation and mitigation measures to climate change;
4. Encouraging, strengthening and disseminating basic and applied research, including traditional knowledge, socio-economic studies of mangroves, coral reefs and associated wetlands as a bottom line for the decision-making process that respond to national, regional and local agendas.

Follow up will be done through meetings of the Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs and their reports as well as through the Ramsar Sites database and other reports such as those submitted to the COP. The Regional Initiative operates under the framework and guidelines of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and has a governance structure that was established in 2009. For more information on the initiative, its objectives, previous and future work, click [here](#).

Other new Voluntary Commitments

- **VRIDI**, [34278](#) (350 Cote D'Ivoire)
- **Tokio Marine's Mangrove-based Value Co-Creation 100-Year Declaration**, [34206](#) (Tokio Marine & Nichido Fire Insurance Co. Ltd.)
- **Ocean Acidification Mediterranean Hub (OA Med-Hub)**, [34011](#) (The Global Acidification Observing Network)
- **Enhancing research and awareness on the impact of plastic on tropical marine ecosystems**, [33693](#) (Centre Of Marine and Coastal Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia)

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United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

*This newsletter is compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,
Division for Sustainable Development Goals.*