



# **Toward a Strategy on Oceans and Climate at the UNFCCC COP 21 Paris<sup>1</sup>**

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**The global oceans community supports and urges States Parties and Observers in the UNFCCC climate negotiations to reach an ambitious legally binding agreement at the COP 21 in Paris in December 2015 adopting stringent and immediate reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This is essential to ensure the continuing functioning of the oceans in sustaining life on Earth, and to avoid disastrous consequences on ocean and coastal communities around the world.**

## **1. The Importance of Oceans for the Climate Negotiations**

Oceans are essential to supporting life on Earth, and are of great economic, social, and cultural significance to all countries, including 183 coastal countries and island states.

Oceans are the life support system of the Earth, producing half of the oxygen that we breathe. Already they have absorbed nearly 30% of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, 90% of the heat added to the global system (between 1971 and 2010), and nearly all the water from melting ice, causing ocean warming, ocean acidification, and sea level rise. However, climate change is threatening the ability of the oceans to provide these vital services.

Ocean and coastal areas provide critical social, economic, and nutritional benefits and are essential to the well-being of global and national economies including through providing an estimated US\$3-6 trillion to the global economy (UNESCO 2011), supporting 90% of global trade through shipping; and providing around 4.2 billion people with more than 15% of the animal protein they consume from fisheries. However, coastal and island populations are some of the most vulnerable populations to climate change impacts. Oceans, seas, and coastal areas experience an increased frequency and intensity of climate extremes, including stronger hurricanes, typhoons, and cyclones. They are also subject to ocean warming, acidification and deoxygenation, sea level rise, and fluctuations in ocean circulation and salinity— due to increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the atmosphere, mainly due to burning fossil fuels. By 2050, it is estimated that 50 million to 200 million people worldwide will be displaced due to the negative impacts of climate change, threatening food security, livelihoods, and peace.

It is imperative that climate change impacts on oceans and coasts be considered both within and outside the UNFCCC, both for our planetary survival and for human well-being.

## **2. International Recognition of the Role of Oceans in Planetary Survival and in Human Economic and Social Well-Being**

Nations and peoples around the world understand and appreciate the central role of oceans in planetary survival and human well-being. Oceans have been prominently featured in the 1992 Earth Summit (Chapter 17, the longest chapter of Agenda 21), in the specific targets and timetables developed at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, and in the 2012 Rio+20 Conference (in particular in the outcome document, *The Future We Want*). These summits have also underlined the important role of the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention for sustainable development, which sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. Most recently, in 2014-2015, oceans and seas have been recognized as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be included in the UN post-2015 development agenda. As well, the UN General Assembly has emphasized the “critical role of oceans and seas for climate regulation, food security, livelihoods, human well-being, and more generally for the global economy” (A/69/71 Add. 1, September 2014).

## **3. Priority Actions at UNFCCC COP 21 and Beyond**

The global oceans community calls attention to the need to develop and pursue an integrated strategy for oceans and climate both within and beyond the UNFCCC, including provisions for:

### **1) Mitigation**

--Adopt stringent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to avoid disastrous consequences on coastal communities, marine ecosystems, and ocean chemistry;

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<sup>1</sup> These recommendations have been prepared by the Global Ocean Forum and partners and build on deliberations at previous Oceans Days at the UNFCCC.

--Accelerate efforts to reduce emissions from marine industries, including efforts by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and others;

--Conserve and sustainably manage coastal ecosystems (e.g., mangroves, seagrass beds, salt marshes) as major carbon sinks, and integrate the management of the coastal carbon ecosystems (Blue Carbon) into the policy and financing processes of the UNFCCC as a major tool for climate change mitigation;

--Sustainably develop ocean-based renewable energy (such as offshore wind power, wave energy, tidal power, and aquatic biofuels); and accelerate efforts to implement these approaches through integrated marine planning and enhanced regulatory frameworks;

--Consider, and, if appropriate, develop regulatory systems for carbon capture and storage via injection in deep seabed geological formations.

## **2) Adaptation**

--Implement ecosystem-based adaptation strategies through integrated coastal and ocean management institutions at national, regional, and local levels to reduce vulnerability of human settlements and build the preparedness, resilience, and adaptive capacities of coastal and island communities;

--Restore coastal ecosystems to provide natural system defences to sea level rise, storms, and flooding;

--Establish and effectively manage networks of marine protected areas to protect marine biodiversity and to enhance resilience of marine ecosystems to climate change, with the aim of achieving the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Biodiversity Target of conserving at least 10% of marine and coastal areas by 2020.

--Develop and support measures to address the issues associated with the displacement of coastal and island populations as a result of climate change.

## **3) Finance**

--Carry out detailed and comprehensive assessments of the costs of adaptation in coastal countries and in small island developing States (SIDS) to inform planning and implementation of adaptation programs. Existing estimates of the costs of adaptation in coastal areas and SIDS underestimate the investment needed, are fragmented and incomplete. For example, most cost estimates for sea level rise focus on infrastructure damage but do not address saltwater intrusion in coastal aquifers and the destruction of habitats that support fisheries and aquaculture;

--Provide sufficient funding to support adaptation for coastal and island communities that are at the frontline of climate change in 183 coastal countries and SIDS, considering the creation of a special coastal adaptation fund or directing a significant portion of the current climate funds to coastal and SIDS issues;

## **4) Capacity Development, Scientific Monitoring, and Public Education**

--Provide technical and financial assistance to SIDS and developing countries to build capacity to implement mitigation and adaptation measures, early warning systems, and disaster risk reduction;

--Establish the scientific capacity in all countries for marine environmental assessment, monitoring, and prediction, including the implementation of a global ocean acidification observing network as part of the global ocean observing system;

--Improve awareness and understanding among policymakers, especially at the UNFCCC and other high-level decision making bodies, of the importance of oceans and climate issues and the need to take bold policy measures to avoid disastrous impacts on the world's coastal and island communities;

--Expand public outreach and education efforts to enhance public understanding of the ocean's role in planetary survival and in global and national well-being, of the risks posed to SIDS and coastal communities by climate change, and to catalyze support for mitigation and adaptation responses, echoing the call on education and awareness-raising made by the Lima Declaration on Education and Awareness-raising (COP 20, 2014).