



**GESAMP**

Joint Group of Experts on the  
Scientific Aspects of Marine  
Environmental Protection

GESAMP 52/7\*  
15 August 2025  
ENGLISH ONLY

52nd session  
Agenda item 7

---

## SCOPING ACTIVITIES

### Proposal to establish a GESAMP Working Group on Ocean Pollution

Submitted by IOC-UNESCO and UNEP

#### Background and context

1 Ocean pollution presents a critical challenge to ecosystems, economies, and human health. With pressures from industrial activity and population growth intensifying, the protection, management, and restoration of ecosystems from source to sea are fundamental to combating the triple planetary crises of biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change.

2 To tackle this critical challenge, IOC-UNESCO and UNEP is developing a new UN Ocean Decade Programme entitled 'A Global Ocean Free from the Harmful Impacts of Pollution by 2050.' Achieving Sustainable Development Target 14.1 of the 2030 Agenda to "prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds" and meeting the UN Ocean Decade Challenge #1 to "understand and beat marine pollution by 2030" are increasingly ambitious and urgent objectives.

3 Drawing on five decades of achievements by UNESCO IOC and UNEP in preventing and addressing ocean pollution, this proposed UN Decade Programme will contribute to key UN initiatives, including UNEP's Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (GPA), and UNESCO IOC's State of the Ocean Report.

4 The proposed programme considers the robust stakeholder consultation process of the "A *Global Ocean Free from the Harmful Impacts of Pollution: Roadmap for Action*" launched in 2024 by Back to Blue, an initiative of Economist Impact and The Nippon Foundation. It also considers the developments and recommendations of other relevant initiatives, including the global partnerships of the GPA, the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management, the Global Wastewater Initiative, and the Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML).

5 This proposed UN Ocean Decade programme will pursue its bold vision by convening a partnership of multidisciplinary, multisectoral stakeholders and generating evidence-based actions needed to address marine pollution. In building this partnership, the programme will synthesise diverse stakeholder perspectives to foster knowledge-sharing and coordinated global action. By strengthening the scientific evidence base, delivering decision-ready information, and promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration, the programme will contribute to safeguarding the ocean and securing its sustainable future.

6 The programme will be supported by a multi-level governance structure designed to promote collaboration, transparency, and inclusive participation. At its core is a global Taskforce Steering Committee, responsible for strategic oversight and ensuring alignment with the UN Ocean Decade and relevant global frameworks. This Taskforce will be composed of representatives from key UN agencies, regional bodies, scientific institutions, and implementation partners.

\* Re-issued due to substantive revision of the original submission.

7 Supporting the Taskforce are four expert stakeholder groups are envisaged, each focused on a core dimension of the programme: Science, Data & Technology, Policy, and Business & Finance. These groups would serve as platforms for co-design, bringing together knowledge generators and users to guide the development of outputs such as the Global Ocean Pollution Assessment, the Online Interactive Data Interface, the Global Ocean Pollution Action Plan, and Decision-Maker Guidance. These stakeholder groups enable targeted expertise and cross-sectoral dialogue, ensuring that the programme remains scientifically robust, policy-relevant, and action-oriented.

8 A dedicated coordination team led by IOC-UNESCO and UNEP will lead the programme and provide secretariat services. This team will manage day-to-day operations, facilitation of communication across the programme structure, implement capacity development, coordinate research and content production, mobilize funding, and oversee monitoring, reporting, and stakeholder engagement. In addition, a broader network of independent implementation partners will be engaged to contribute specific expertise to individual programme activities.

### **Scope of work**

9 GESAMP can provide valuable support and scientific advice for the growing programmes of work on ocean pollution and its impacts. This information will form the knowledge base for policy instruments and tools which deal with ocean pollution.

10 The overall objective of the proposed GESAMP Working Group on ocean pollution is to serve as the 'expert stakeholder group' on the science of ocean pollution. Under the Terms of Reference for the Working Group (see Annex 1), it will provide scientific guidance to programme implementation, guiding the development of a permanently recurring Global Ocean Pollution Assessment and a global protocol for pollution monitoring (where such do not exist) and data management, interacting with the programme's other expert stakeholder groups (Data & Technology, Policy, and Business & Finance), and contributing to a Global Ocean Pollution Action Plan where relevant. The WG is foreseen to organize itself into sub-groups as needed to address specific groups of pollutants.

11 The Working Group would develop chapters of the Global Ocean Pollution Assessment as well as reviews of the known impacts of ocean pollutants and their cumulative effects. This work is envisaged to be supported by a group of post-doctoral researchers with grant funding made available by the UN Ocean Decade programme.

12 The Working Group is proposed to absorb, be the legacy of, the current WG 40 Plastics and microplastics in the ocean, co-led by IOC-UNESCO and UNEP. Neither IOC-UNESCO or UNEP have the funds to fully sponsor WG 40 and have not been successful in recent years to attract extra-budgetary funds for WG 40. IOC-UNESCO and UNEP therefore wish to terminate WG 40 and integrate the work on plastics in the new WG.

13 To guide interventions within this wide range of areas and stakeholders, the GESAMP Working Group should ideally draw upon the expertise of a broader set of UN bodies including IAEA, IMO, FAO, WHO, WMO, ISA and other relevant organizations and experts.

### **Inter-agency cooperation**

14 It is envisioned that the Working Group will support the mandates and programmes of work within UNEP, IOC-UNESCO and other agencies related to ocean pollution, with emphasis on its sources and impacts on ocean health. The Working Group will help address data-gaps, including those that have been highlighted by the programmes 'data expert stakeholder group'. It will seek to identify areas of scientific interest that will benefit concerted research initiatives including those that i) might reduce the costs of monitoring pollutants and impacts ii) are securing the consistency of scientific advice, and iii) are facilitating the coordination of UN agency activities, on ocean pollution, in the wider international context.

## Administrative arrangements

15 The Working Group will be set up with the following structure and initial sponsorship, with further sponsorship contributions welcome upon establishment.

Name of Working Group:	Working Group on Ocean Pollution
Co-lead agencies:	IOC-UNESCO and UNEP
Sponsoring agencies:	tbc
Budget:	USD \$330,000 over five years
WG Technical Secretaries:	Mr. Henrik Enevoldsen (IOC-UNESCO) and Heidi Savelli-Soderberg (UNEP)

## Resource considerations

16 The core source of funding will be the UN Ocean Decade programme entitled 'A Global Ocean Free from the Harmful Impacts of Pollution by 2050' via UNESCO-IOC, while UNEP is expected to provide in-kind expertise and support. Other sources of funding can be identified if the Working Group is developed with additional inter-agency leadership. The workplan of the Working Group will be supported by a group of post-doctoral researchers with grant funding made available by the UN Ocean Decade programme.

17 Tentative five-year budget:

Seven in-person GESAMP meetings

- Costs for appr. 15 experts, travel/DSA, venues: USD \$45,000/workshop
- Costs of WG chair to attend GESAMP sessions

Total budget: USD \$330,000

## Tentative work plan

18 The working methods of the Working Group will be a mix of physical and on-line meetings and intersessional work/correspondence. The proposed timeline is as follows:

.1 Identification of two WG Co-chairs and WG members: November-December 2025

### Global Ocean Pollution Assessment

- .1 First assessment meeting of the WG: February-March 2026;
- .2 Deliver findings for 1<sup>st</sup> global assessment by September 2026;
- .3 Second assessment meeting of the WG: February-March 2027;
- .4 Deliver findings for 2<sup>nd</sup> global assessment by September 2027;
- .5 Third assessment meeting of the WG: February-March 2028;
- .6 Deliver findings for 3<sup>rd</sup> global assessment by September 2028;
- .7 Fourth assessment meeting of the WG: February-March 2029;
- .8 Deliver findings for 4<sup>th</sup> global assessment by September 2029;
- .9 Fifth assessment meeting of the WG: February-March 2030; and
- .10 Deliver findings for 5<sup>th</sup> global assessment by September 2030.

### Global Protocol for Pollution Monitoring and Data Management

- .1 First protocol meeting of the WG: Sept-Oct 2027;
- .2 Second protocol meeting of the WG: Sept-Oct 2028; and
- .3 Deliver recommendations for global protocol by June 2028.

### **Proposed Terms of Reference**

19 The following Terms of Reference are proposed for the working group:

- .1 Supporting the UN Ocean Decade Programme entitled 'A Global Ocean Free from the Harmful Impacts of Pollution by 2050 and its global Taskforce Steering Committee with scientific guidance and advice including:
  - .1 Interacting with the programme's other expert stakeholder groups on Data & Technology, Policy, and Business & Finance;
  - .2 Contributing to a Global Ocean Pollution Action Plan; and
  - .3 Participating in a scientific advisory group for a Global Ocean Pollution Conference.
- .2 Contribute to developing structure and process for a recurring Global Ocean Pollution Assessment including:
  - .1 Identify and prioritize a set of pollutants deemed most important or relevant, the state and impacts of which is to be detailed in each iteration of the recurring Global Ocean Pollution Assessment;
  - .2 Identify data gaps on the identified pollutants;
  - .3 Combine existing knowledge and data sets from published data, literature and other sources applying data mining techniques to support the assessment;
  - .4 Lead the preparation of the respective chapters of the recurring Global Ocean Pollution Assessment. This includes reporting on the concentration of those pollutants in relation to threshold values identified under the global monitoring protocols developed by the programme (see 3) and detailing the extent of global ocean pollution and its impacts on ecosystems, economies and human health; and
  - .5 Identify and invite co-authors to participate in the preparation of the individual chapters of the Assessment.
- .3 Preparing a globally consistent protocol for pollution monitoring, data collection, storage and sharing, in alignment with FAIR principles and existing protocols. This includes identifying threshold values that can be reported against via the Global Ocean Pollution Assessment; and
- .4 In relation to ToR 1 to 3 above recommend on priorities for further work:

- .1 Consider what useful additional work might be done by the Working Group beyond that listed above; and
- .2 Identify additional partners to coordinate with in addressing the recommended priorities.

**Proposed profile for Working Group members**

20 The expertise required by the Working Group includes:

- .1 scientists with expertise in aspects of ocean pollution and its impacts on marine environments (ecology, ecosystems, fisheries, biodiversity), economies and human health, multiple stressors including climate change and biodiversity loss; and
- .2 social scientists with expertise including environmental and/or natural resource economics.

**Action requested of GESAMP**

21 GESAMP is invited to consider the information provided and take action as appropriate.

---