



Regional Workshop for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable
Development 2021-2030
Venice, UNESCO-IOC, 21-23 January 2020

**Opening Remarks by Mr. Gaetano Leone
UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan-Barcelona Convention Secretariat Coordinator**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

On behalf of entire UNEP/MAP system, I am honoured to warmly welcome you to the *Regional Mediterranean Workshop for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030*. We are happy and excited to be a co-sponsor and co-organizer of this event in such a magnificent Mediterranean city.

We are at the very beginning of what we can define a “super-year” for the oceans, culminating with the 2020 United Nations High-level Conference to support the implementation of SDG14, in June in Lisbon.

There is an evident opportunity offered to us working on sustainability, seas and oceans by the deep attention of the international community to marine ecosystems and marine governance. Let us also build on the increasing recognition that, in an interconnected world like ours in the 21st century, regional realities and approaches have profound significance and unique effectiveness.

The fact is that the present state of marine environment is characterized by rapid changes of the ocean in ways that are not yet fully understood or predictable, with the rise in unsustainable resource extraction, pollution and habitat destruction, as well as the increasing threats over critical marine ecosystem services that benefit humanity.

At the same time, we have learned from the Global Ocean Science Report of UNESCO that Ocean Science accounts for only between 0,04% and 4% of total research and development expenditures worldwide. The report recognizes that global ocean science is a “big” and multidisciplinary science, which requires large human resources and costly equipment. National inventories on ocean science capacity exist only in a few countries.

Bearing in mind these key findings of the Global Ocean Science Report, the preparation of the Decade`s Implementation Plan offers an opportunity to establish new cooperation and

partnership modalities to facilitate access to data and equipment and know-how transfer. The Decade needs to go beyond scientific capacity development, by creating a new awareness at the policy and civil society level, identifying alternative funding and increasing international collaboration.

The Decade must also be a means to harvest innovative ideas towards better understanding of the whole ocean system. Therefore, the effective use of unprecedented achievements in science and technology, is indispensable to ensure that growing development demands and a healthy ocean co-exist in harmony.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Policy measures can only be effective if they are based on sound knowledge informed by science. Guided by this premise, UNEP/MAP has mobilized and allocated resources to ensure the participation of the representatives of the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention at the Mediterranean Workshop, both from policy and science communities. In addition, UNEP/MAP and MAP components, namely MEDPOL, SPA/RAC, Plan Blue and INFO /RAC, are here to provide their contribution to the success of the Mediterranean Workshop.

Only few weeks ago we were in Naples for the very successful 21st Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 21). A host of legally-binding decisions aiming to address the plight of Mediterranean ecosystems found to be reeling under the combined pressure of the unsustainable pursuit of growth and climate change were adopted in Naples. Negotiating and adopting decisions is in itself an ambitious process, but this time the Contracting Parties went further in expressing their concern about the ever more evident environmental degradation patterns in the Mediterranean, and in voicing commitment to reverse the trend.

The Naples Ministerial Declaration urges the implementation of cross-cutting flagship and pilot initiatives “as strategic generational and transformational trends for the protection of the environment of the Mediterranean, contributing to its sustainable development”, such as “the enhancement of a regional science-policy interface to base policies on scientific expertise, to have a strategic decision-making process with a sound scientific basis”.

This why we are here! I am pleased to inform that the MAP system is ready to contribute to the discussion of all 6 Working Groups of the Mediterranean Workshop. To that effect the MAP system wishes to put forward a set of ideas and possible partnership activities, in line with UNEP’s position to support development and uptake of policy-oriented research across several societal outcomes of the Ocean Decade. Let me recall some of them:

- The core ambition is to support the synergistic, cost-effective achievement of several ocean-related SDGs. ***Nature-based solutions for ocean and coastal sustainability*** is proposed as unifying theme, linking environmental, social and economic disciplines.

- **To deliver truly transformative impacts** of multi- and trans-disciplinary ocean science on economies and ecosystems, the activities to be defined in the Decade's Implementation Plan must be explicit and ambitious.
- **Land-ocean connections** need to be better recognized that requires much science beyond what is done IN or ON the ocean. The vulnerability of the coast is a very concrete sustainable development challenge.
- **On the basic research side**, the focus should be on areas where the biggest knowledge gaps and uncertainties exist, as well as on developing and testing new technologies to make baseline data collection cheaper and more efficient.
- There is a need to clarify **the science-policy interface at the national level**, as well as to ensure effective coordination between UN agencies at the regional and national levels.
- Strengthened **Regional Ocean Governance** is needed, including the prominent role of UNEP and Regional Seas.
- By the end of the Decade a goal should be '**no ocean data left behind**'. The research community cannot continue to spend resources and not fully use the data collected. Providing visibility is not sufficient. Data should be used, and it is necessary that all data that is funded is made available.
- The Decade will need access to information beyond the scientific community and will need to work closely with local communities to understand their needs.

Along these lines, UNEP/MAP would like to put forward for consideration of the Mediterranean Workshop very specific Mediterranean priorities. My colleagues will present and explore them with you in the six working groups of the next three days.

At UNEP/MAP, we are well aware of the duty to cooperate to promote marine scientific research. A current initiative, which is in many ways unique, is the "Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change" (MEDECC) that the MAP systems co-leads and supports. This network of scientific experts aims at gathering, updating and consolidating the best scientific knowledge about climate change in the Mediterranean basin and render it accessible to policymakers, key stakeholders and citizens. To date, MedECC counts more than 600 scientific members from 35 countries, including 19 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and it is supported in partnership by UfM and UNEP/MAP through its Plan Bleu RAC. The contribution of this initiative to a better understanding of climate change and its impact in the Mediterranean is undeniable.

MEDECC is just an example. Our contribution to the success of the Decade and of this Workshop is testament to our interest and commitment to a stronger science-policy relationship. We are at the disposal of the Mediterranean community to join hands and explore ways in which our contribution can be best suited to the needs of this region.

I wish to us all a very successful meeting.

Thank you.