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JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Synopsis of consultation activities

Accompanying the document

**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL,
THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet - Joint Communication on the EU's
International Ocean Governance agenda**

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INTRODUCTION

This synopsis collates the information on consultation activities carried out in 2020-2022 for updating the 2016 [Joint Communication by the European Commission \(EC\) and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy \(HRVP\) on the International Ocean Governance \(IOG\)](#).

The IOG Agenda offers a coherent frame for the EU's contribution towards healthy, clean, secure, safe and sustainably managed oceans. The adoption of the Agenda in 2016 triggered international cooperation to improve governance to protect the oceans, strengthen international research and develop a sustainable blue economy. [The progress report on the IOG Agenda published in March 2019](#) confirmed timely delivery of most actions of the Agenda and confirmed the Agenda's value for concerted and targeted EU action. This support was echoed by the [European Parliament's resolution in 2020 on the European Green Deal](#), which highlighted the importance of fostering the role of the EU as a global leader in ocean governance. The update of the IOG Agenda is included in the Commission's work programme 2022 (PLAN/2021/11284) and in President von der Leyen's 2021 letter of intent.

This synopsis report compiles and analyses information on consultation activities carried out over the years from 2020 to 2022. They include the activities of the IOG Stakeholder Forum, the targeted online consultation on the IOG, as well as the consultation of stakeholders in relation to the Commission's 'Call for Evidence' document in early 2022.

The IOG Stakeholder Forum, the targeted online consultation on the IOG and the responses to the 'Call for Evidence' document confirmed the relevance of the Agenda, supported its renewal and presented recommendations for its development to ensure the EU's continued leadership in achieving global sustainability objectives. This document provides an overview of these consultation activities as well as analysis related to the recommendations by the stakeholders and conclusions on how they were taken into account in the update of the IOG Agenda.

1. CONSULTATION

The consultation strategy consisted of various types of stakeholder engagement activities organised from 2020 to 2022. The activities included online conferences, meetings, workshops, a targeted online consultation as well as consultation on a 'Call for Evidence' document on the EC's initiative to update the IOG. The aim was to enable all interested stakeholders and experts to have their say.

The [International Ocean Governance Stakeholder Forum](#) was established by the EC and the HRVP in 2020. The Forum was intended to serve as a platform for all stakeholders to share their expertise, understanding, experiences and good practices on ocean governance and it carried out activities in 2020 and 2021. It involved a consortium of consultants, including scientific institutions and think tanks, to support the organising of the consultation activities of the IOG Stakeholder Forum.

Stakeholder involvement activities of the IOG Stakeholder Forum included three main online conferences:

- [International Ocean Governance \(IOG\) Forum virtual event on 22-24 April 2020](#),
- [The second virtual IOG Forum event](#) on 14-16 December 2020,
- [The third and final virtual meeting of the IOG Forum](#) on 20 April 2021

In addition to, or in association with the conferences, thematic online working group discussions, webinars and workshops were organised, focusing on thematic challenges, practical experiences, solutions and pre-conditions for success.

A [targeted online Consultation on International Ocean Governance was conducted in EU survey](#) between 15 July and 15 October 2020 targeting stakeholders within and beyond Europe. The consultation aimed to identify relevant actions in the light of challenges and opportunities to deliver global sustainability objectives for the ocean, in particular, the Sustainable Development Goal on the ocean (SDG14) under the 2030 Agenda, in support of the European Green Deal. The targeted online consultation complemented the International Ocean Governance Forum.

In addition to the activities of the Stakeholder Forum and the targeted consultation, [a study on the implementation of SDG14 by the EU and its Member States](#) was published in May 2021. The study provided background information on the status of implementation of the Sustainable Development 2030 agenda and progress of implementing SDG14 on life under water and supported the development of recommendations based on the output from the IOG Stakeholder Forum.

In 2022, following EC's better regulation rules, a '[Call for Evidence](#)' document "[Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet, an update of the international ocean governance agenda](#)" was published with the objective to update the 2016 IOG Agenda. The intention was to inform the public and stakeholders about the initiative and to offer a possibility to provide feedback and participate effectively. The 'Call' was open from 18 January to 15 February 2022 in the EC's Have Your Say portal.

2. RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATIONS

The IOG Stakeholder Forum events in 2020 and 2021 brought together up to 350 ocean stakeholders and experts per meeting, including EU Member States, international organisations, the private sector, civil society and science actors. Altogether, the IOG Stakeholder Forum provided a platform for about 1000 actors for interactive dialogue to share and discuss challenges, practical experiences, solutions and pre-conditions for success.

The contributions obtained through the IOG Stakeholder Forum activities in 2020-2021 were compiled by the consortium in [a final report](#) with recommendations for priority EU actions. The final report with recommendations is the main outcome of IOG Stakeholder consultation activities. It was developed through a co-creative process with experts from the EC and the EEAS. In addition, the thematic groups of the IOG Stakeholder Forum made available three thematic discussion papers 1: [Improving the International Ocean Governance framework](#), 2: [Reducing pressure on the ocean and seas and creating the conditions for a sustainable blue economy](#) and 3: [Strengthening international ocean research, data and knowledge](#).

The targeted online Consultation on International Ocean Governance in 2020 received 123 contributions from a broad range of stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, business representatives, associations, NGOs, and academia. 79% of the responses came from the EU, including international organisations based in the EU, and 21% originated from non-EU countries. The results of the targeted consultation on IOG are presented in the [Summary of the results of the targeted consultation on International Ocean Governance \(2021\)](#). This consultation also fed the work of the IOG Stakeholder Forum and contributed to its recommendations for action.

Altogether 52 responses were received in response to the ‘Call for Evidence’ document “Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet, an update of the international ocean governance agenda”. Most of the responses were from non-governmental organisations and EU citizens but responses were received also from one public authority, one research institution, two environmental organisations and an UN agency. A summary of the responses to the Call for Evidence report is available at [Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet, an update of the international ocean governance agenda \(europa.eu\)](#). Overall, the feedback received confirmed the support to the updating of the IOG Agenda and recommendations for action covered largely the same topics addressed also by the IOG Stakeholder Forum and the targeted consultation.

3. MAIN RESULTS

Responses by the stakeholders to the consultations by the IOG Stakeholder Forum and the targeted online consultation confirmed that the EC and the HRVP are taking an important step by updating the International Ocean Governance Agenda. They also confirmed that the EU should play a strong role in strengthening international ocean governance, while highlighting the need for further action at home and abroad. Many contributions underlined the importance of updating the Agenda to ensure EU’s support towards achieving global sustainability objectives pertaining to the ocean. This leadership was proposed to *inter alia* build on external partnerships and targeted initiatives backed by solid delivery within the EU.

Whilst perceptions varied on how this could be achieved, the majority of the contributors made a clear call for the EU to:

- Lead by example through effective and timely delivery of its own maritime, marine conservation and sustainable resource use policies, including fisheries policy;
- Give a clear priority to ecosystem conservation and restoration for improving the overall status of the marine environment through reinforcing action for climate change resilience, reversing biodiversity loss and halting and removing pollution;
- Drive a sustainable blue economy by paying equal regulatory attention to all sectors, promoting transparent and inclusive decision-making and strengthening social sustainability considerations;
- Facilitate, support and promote cooperation among and within sectoral policies to ensure policy coherence at and across all levels, notably at regional scale;

- Foster the effective use of spatial management tools and instruments for ensuring sustainable and ecosystem-based balance between different uses, which should be sustainable, and the conservation prerequisites;
- Ensure evidence-based policy making by strengthening ocean research and scientific advice in response to policy-needs backed by sustainable funding, coordinated infrastructures, the development of operational integrated ocean services and data collection, facilitated through tailor-made science-policy interfaces, digital innovative infrastructures and existing space programs;
- Promote and upscale the coordinated and coherent use of critical enablers such as financial support and investment, capacity building and ocean literacy to empower and mobilise today's and tomorrow's actors and stakeholders on the transition to sustainability.

Responses to the 'Call for Evidence' document on the EC and HRVP's joint initiative to update the IOG in the beginning of 2022 further confirmed the support of stakeholders to the broader aims of the EC and HRVP to safeguard ocean health, release the sustainable potential of the blue economy and to tackle effectively climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and other impacts from human activities and illegal activities at sea by promoting a shared and integrated management approach at all levels.

The input to the 'Call' contained proposals and recommendations for actions that related to governance (e.g. secure an ambitious new global legally binding treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) and conclude WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies disciplining harmful subsidies), rendering fisheries and aquaculture sustainable, increasing sustainability of shipping, extending the networks of marine protected areas, improving the protection of species and restoring ecosystems, regulating, restricting or banning exploitation of sea-bed resources like sea-bed mining, making marine tourism sustainable, increasing marine renewable energy, incorporating the crucial role of the ocean on climate regulation in climate action, enhancing evidence-based policy through better linking research, science and observation to decision making, as well as improving maritime security.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings were fed into the process of updating of the Joint Communication on International Ocean Governance. The actions set out in the Joint Communication are integral to the EU's response to the 2030 Agenda, and notably SDG 14 and related SDGs. They are also coherent with the call for action from respondents to the consultation activities carried out from 2020 to early 2022.

The contributions received in the context of the consultations cannot be regarded as the official position of the Commission and its services and thus do not bind the Commission, nor can the contributions be considered as a representative sample of the EU population.