



**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)**

**Fourteenth Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub-
Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC-XIV)**

Jakarta, Indonesia, 4-7 April 2023

Item 3.1 of the Provisional Agenda

STATEMENT OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS

Thanks to your trust and expectations, I, Kentaro Ando from Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, and Fangli Qiao from the First Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources of China, were elected as co-chairpersons at the 13th WESTPAC Intergovernmental Meeting in April 2021, which was held virtually due to the impact of the Coronavirus. Over the past inter-sessional period, our performance as the Co-chairpersons hasn't been easy. As a result of the pandemic, we had to attend many meetings virtually, so in many cases discussion at remote meetings could not go in depth.

IOC/WESTPAC, as a regional subsidiary body of the IOC- an UN agency competent for marine science, is mandated to advance marine science development and cooperation in the region. With the ever-increasing demands of member states for scientific inputs to address their ecological, social and economic needs, more and more efforts were required from the WESTPAC to meet the demands, and furthermore, promote and engage member states and all stakeholders to join the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. As a result, many WESTPAC programs, projects, and working groups were actively engaged in the Ocean Decade, with tremendous progresses made. Furthermore, as a follow up to the last session's decision, a Decade Coordination Office (DCO) is being established as an extension of the current WESTPAC Office.

In my capacity as the WESTPAC co-chair, I attended the IOC Open-Ended Intersessional Working Group on IOCINDIO, and has continued to participate in and contribute to the discussions. WESTPAC has been joining the OEIWG as regional subcommittees targeting adjacent seas, which will be important for the future of WESTPAC. I also participated in meetings on the revision of the IOC's data policy. The new data policy was discussed at the IODE General Assembly in March and will be submitted to the next IOC General Assembly. The new data policy will be also important for the future of WESTPAC. Meanwhile, my co-chair, Fangli Qiao has actively joined the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Advisory Board member.

Please allow us to share our perspectives based on the achievement made during the intersessional period.

1. Develop science we need for our ocean we want

Almost ten years before, there were about 12 programmes or projects in WESTPAC. As a regional sub-commission, that number was adequate, but now there are around 30 programmes, projects

and working groups, and is more than doubled. This is mainly due to the increasing importance that Member States have been attaching to marine science recently and the great efforts of the WESTPAC Office in developing, and mobilizing the engagement of member states in ocean science cooperation. The ocean is too vast for any single a country or a group of countries to understand alone, so international cooperation is essential. For that reason, the importance of WESTPAC has been more evident than ever. WESTPAC must continue to be developed stronger to coordinate, and advance marine science development and cooperation for the region.

Our uniqueness is that WESTPAC provide a suitable platform to work together from north and also from south, through big effort of mutual understandings among different cultures, languages, histories, and religions. One important principle is “keep communicating.” Because of different backgrounds each other, communication is quite important in this region. Through the efforts of many enhanced communications, now we have around 30 marine scientific actions. In particular recently, there are more actions in which the South-East Asian Member States play a key role, which never happened in the past.

In line with increasing number of actions for WESTPAC, quality of marine science has been upgraded. But still our quality of marine science is needed to be further improved to catch up its top. Ocean issues relevant to societal benefits and impacts needs better marine science which contributes to its solutions. And, keeping good and better service to society, the quality of our marine science shall be improved. To do so, WESTPAC has had the international science conferences in a past. WESTPAC shall continue such efforts to improve our science in future.

2. Continuously take a lead in the region in mobilizing actions for the UN Decade of Ocean Science

The UN Decade regional kick-off conference, organized by the WESTPAC, and hosted by the Thai government was held in November 2021. This was held virtually, but it was broadcasted major parts of the conference on YouTube. A total number of the viewers were counted more than 3,000. At the session of the high-level segment during the conference, high-level officials from the governments of WESTPAC member countries made powerful statements for promoting the UN Decade. In addition to this high-level Segment, seventeen (17) incubators, based on the activities of WESTPAC's programs, projects, and working groups, as well as other activities related to UN Decade in the Asian region were taken places. This incubator was set up as a place to discuss how to engage stakeholders, design together, collaborate, and produce results together.

Through the incubators, one program and three projects were proposed at the second call of the UN Decade Actions in January 2022 through the WESTPAC office. As a result, they are all registered with UN Decade Action. To introduce, they are UN-21 Accelerate Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific and its Adjacent Areas, UN-22 Stem the tide of Asia's riverine plastic emission into the ocean, UN -23 Accelerating capacity development transformations in the Western Pacific - Regional Network of Training and Research Centers (RTRCs) on Marine Science and UN -24 Explore the strongest ocean current in the Western Pacific: the 2nd Cooperative Study of Kuroshio and Adjacent Regions – from its sciences to human well beings. It should be highlighted that it was owing to the joint efforts of a number of individual scientists, institutions and countries that those Sub-Commission led actions have come into shape. We look forward to your further engagement into their implementation. Moreover, it is important for WESTPAC to extend own activities and collaborate with the other field of research and with the other regions. WESTPAC will continue contribute to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for further science we need.

To support these UN Decade programme, projects, contributions and activities, the UN Decade Coordination Office targeted to the region was established within the WESTPAC office with the assistance of the Thai government. Once the function of this UN Decade Coordination Office is on track, it will provide a good support for the many UN Decade Actions in the region. Co-chairpersons appreciate the government of Thailand to host the new office.

3. Enhance collaborations with other Ocean Decade actions

Our activities have been increasing year by year, and interactions with relevant regional commissions will be needed and enhanced. To obtain win-win relations with other activities in IOC, our programme, projects, and working groups will need to have a wider perspective than Asia. WESTPAC is already attractive from the others, and will be expected to contribute beyond our scope.

4. Strengthen the WESTPAC office

Due to the COVID pandemic, the officers and advisory group members have had many meetings mainly by remote. In October 2022, when the coronavirus has calmed down, the first face-to-face advisory group meeting was held in this period in Phuket, Thailand. In this meeting, advisory group reviewed the activities of the WESTPAC Projects, Programs and Working Groups to date and make recommendations for improvement. The intensive discussion by the face-to-face meeting was much effective than many remote meetings before.

Finally, it is needless to say that the recent increase in activities and actions is solely due to the joint efforts of the governments, institutions and individual experts in our member states, and in particular the WESTPAC Office. The WESTPAC Office plays a pivotal role in the overall development, implementation, coordination, and organization of the WESTPAC activities. Moreover, the office was granted a new function as a Decade Coordination Office, which has been overstretched and understaffed. In such a setting, we will have more ocean issues in our front in future, and need more marine scientists to work on ocean issues. Also, in response to the rapid increase in activity and actions, WESTPAC needs strong supports to the office from member countries in any possible ways.