

Item 3.1 of the Provisional Agenda

STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Two years ago, in April 2023, we gathered in Jakarta for the 14th Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC), hosted by the Government of Indonesia. The session was a great reminder of the joy and productivity of face-to-face discussions and interactions after a period of remote meetings during the pandemic. With continued enthusiasm and motivation, WESTPAC Member States, Officers, Advisory Group and Office engaged in intersessional activities in close collaboration with various stakeholders. It is my pleasure to share some of the highlights of these activities and the progress that has been made since then. I would also like to share my perspectives on the future of the Sub-Commission and the IOC and present potential opportunities for the Sub-Commission's growth and cooperation within the region and globally.

1. Co-designing, co-developing and co-delivering the science we need for the Ocean we want

As a regional subsidiary body of the IOC/UNESCO, a UN agency competent for marine science, WESTPAC is mandated to advance marine science development and cooperation in the region for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources. WESTPAC has been committed to co-designing, co-developing and co-delivering our science we need for the Ocean we want, and I am pleased to see that scientific activities in the Member States are more and more increasing in concerted efforts with the Sub-Commission. There are on-going about 30 WESTPAC programs, projects and working groups under the thematic action areas, namely, ocean-based solutions to climate change; marine biodiversity conservation, ocean ecosystem and blue economy; capacity development and ocean literacy.

2. Continuous leadership and engagement in mobilizing actions for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and beyond

WESTPAC has been taking the lead in the region, motivating and engaging experts, institutions, and countries in the preparation, implementation and development of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). As part of its efforts to develop, coordinate, mobilize, and implement the Ocean Decade related Actions and activities, the 2nd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference and the 11th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference took place in Bangkok, Thailand, from 22 to 25 April 2024. It was co-organized by WESTPAC and the Government of Thailand, with approximately 1,200 participants from over 40 countries within and outside the region. The Conference witnessed active discussions and engagements of the participants including the Early Career and Mid Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs, and MCOPs), featuring 25 scientific sessions, 13 Decade Action workshops, and 12 Decade Action incubators, with the aim of "Accelerating Ocean Science Solutions for Sustainable Development."

The Sub-Commission has adopted a co-designed, solution-oriented approach to the development and implementation of five WESTPAC-led UN Ocean Decade Actions with close cooperations of Member States and key stakeholders in the region. I welcome the recent registration of the "UN39: Ocean Solutions in the East Asian Seas", which builds on the accomplishments of multiple WESTPAC programs and working groups. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the WESTPAC Decade Coordination Office (DCO) for its excellent coordination and technical support.

This year marks five years since the launch of the UN Ocean Decade in 2021 and we are halfway to 2030. I look forward to seeing more Decade Actions developed based on the common interests of Member States, and more engagement with other relevant UN actions in the collective effort to achieve sustainable development by 2030 and beyond.

3. The future of the IOC-WESTPAC and the Ocean

I personally believe that the human resource is the backbone of sustainable development and that this is an essential component of the future of the IOC-WESTPAC and our Ocean. WESTPAC has engaged in capacity development, providing various training opportunities at its Regional Training Research Centers

(RTRCs) in close collaboration with Member States in response to the needs in the region. These efforts have led to tangible results including the growing number of scientific activities in the Member States and in the region involving more ECOPs. Furthermore, there are several new international agendas such as the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The ocean issues that we face are becoming vast and more complex than ever before. In order to address such issues, it is therefore vital for WESTPAC to secure, train and develop human resources both in the Member States and in the WESTPAC Office in a sustained manner.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the WESTPAC Office for their great enthusiasm and tireless efforts to support the region and the Member States. The WESTPAC Office plays a pivotal role in the overall development, implementation, coordination, and organization of the Sub-Commission's activities as well as the function of a regional Decade Coordination Office. Without their attentive coordination, the Sub-Commission would never have been able to make progress which we see today. However, I am concerned about the continued understaffed and overstretched situation at the WESTPAC Office in response to the pressing issues in marine science that have been increasing in recent years in our region. I would like to ask all Member States to keep this point in mind as an urgent issue to be solved.

The marine environment of the world and Asia is about to change dramatically. It is our mission to understand these changes, communicate them accurately to our stakeholders, and link it to policy and society to realize the future of the Ocean we want.