

## High Level Retreat: Towards a Brighter Future for the Ocean Sheraton Grand Incheon Hotel, Incheon, Republic of Korea 14-15 January 2025

### Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2025

Task 1.1.9.4

UN Ocean Decade Conference.

#### High level summary

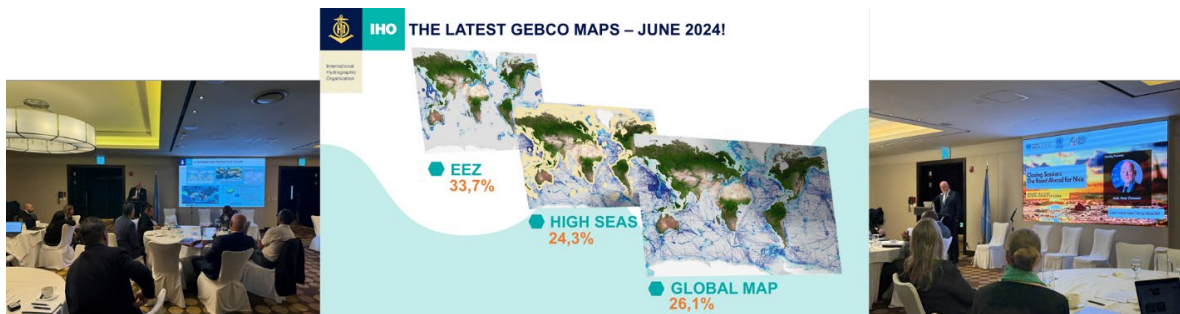
- In preparation for the United Nation Ocean Conference 2025 (UNOC3), the High Level Retreat sought to provide an informal yet substantive platform for principals of the Communities of Ocean Actions (COAs), representatives of the co-hosts, and key stakeholders to:
  - A. *Share Information on Recent Developments*, in order to exchange updates on ocean-related processes and initiatives since the last gathering highlighting progress, prospects and synergies with UNOC3;
  - B. *Foster Interaction with Stakeholders, Practitioners and Volunteer Commitments (VCs) Holders*, in order to facilitate direct engagement with those actively involved in implementing VCs and SDG14, allowing for an exchange of insights and experiences;
  - C. *Brainstorm Pathways Forward*, in order to collaboratively explore strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the COAs, with the ultimate aim of building a robust coalition for a successful and action-oriented UNOC3;
  - D. *Enhance substantive preparations for UNOC3*, in order to explore key substantive areas and identify emerging issues through in-depth interactive sessions, to inform and enrich the UNOC Ocean Action Panels.
- The participation of IHO was highly appreciated and provided an opportunity to provide feedback directly into the COAs and comment on the zero draft of the Political Declaration of UNOC3.
- The concept of “*Seabed Mapping*” was unanimously recognized as a key issue and that it should be duly considered for inclusion into the Political Declaration which will be the main output of UNOC3. Such a commitment would compel the International Community to achieving a fully mapped ocean by increasing funding, establishing a favourable policy environment and facilitating data sharing.

#### Details:

The High Level Retreat took place from 14 to 15 January 2025 at the Sheraton Grand Incheon Hotel located in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The Retreat was organized by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). 48 delegates (in person and via VTC) from the United Nations including the Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs (and Secretary General of UNOC3), the U.N. Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, Permanent Representatives of States to the U.N., high representatives of the two co-host Nations (France and Costa Rica), the two Political Declaration co-facilitator Nations (Cabo Verde and Australia), and experts from international organizations, associations, private funds and sectors involved in the next UNOC3 took part in the High Level Retreat. Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Samuel Harper represented the IHO.

The 2025 UN Ocean Conference will take place in Nice, France from 9 to 13 June, 2025, with the overarching theme “*Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean*”. The Conference, comprising an opening segment, ten plenary sessions, ten Ocean Action Panels (OAPs) and a closing segment, aims to support further and urgent action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and identify further ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14. The ten themes of the OAPs recently endorsed by the membership of the General Assembly covers key areas including sustainable fisheries, marine and coastal ecosystems conservation, regional cooperation, marine pollution, ocean-climate change-

biodiversity interlinkages, sustainable ocean-based economies, food from the ocean, science, finance and law of the sea. The Conference will adopt, by consensus a brief, concise, action oriented and inter-governmentally agreed declaration, which along with a list of voluntary commitments, will be referred to as the “Nice Ocean Action Plan”.



*IHO Director and U.N. Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean interventions*

The High Level Retreat aimed to review, reinvigorate, and reorganize the COAs by enhancing alignment of COA priorities with the objectives of UNOC3, by understanding of how members of COAs and stakeholders can individually and collectively contribute to UNOC3, including in deliberations and outcomes, by strengthening coalitions among key stakeholders committed to ocean conservation and sustainable use, and finally by developing clear and coherent messaging on thematic issues related to UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels.

IHO Director Sinapi provided a presentation on “*Seabed Mapping: The Key from Science to Policy to Practice for a Sustainable Ocean*” as the last intervention of the two-day Retreat. The presentation made the case for seabed mapping being an enabling activity underpinning many domains such as marine spatial data, coastal zone management, and the sustainable use of marine resources. In doing so, the concept of a ‘seabed mapping value chain’ was discussed. Finally, it was suggested that *Seabed Mapping* deserves a clear recognition from the International Community to become a priority for UNOC 3 and be so referenced in the political declaration, as it is a transformational activity that embodies the science to policy to action concept.

The Retreat was closed by the U.N. Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean that summarized the following main points to be included into the Political Declaration to be released at the end of UNOC3:

- Need of more concrete actions
- Need of governance framework to involve local communities
- Scaling governmental and private finance engagement
- Capacity Building for Small Islands Development States (SIDS)
- Strong emphasis in protecting Coral Reef and Seabed Mapping.

**Photo**



*High Level Retreat participants – 14-15 January 2025 – Incheon, Republic of Korea*