

## The World Ocean Assessment and its relevance to IPBES

*This report was drafted by Jake Rice, (member – Group of Experts [GofE] for the Regular Process), and representative of IPBES at the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole for the Regular Process (AHWGW) meeting which approved the WOA. It was prepared for participants of the IPBES meeting to scope a global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services, in response to a request from the IPBES secretariat.*

### 1-Background information

The first World Ocean Assessment (WOA) was completed at the end of 2014. After review by experts and States and subsequent revision, the WOA has just been presented to the UN Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole for the Regular Process in September 8-11, 2015, for their consideration and drafting of recommended paragraphs for the UN annual Omnibus Resolution on Oceans and Law of the Sea (OLS)<sup>1</sup>. It was produced by a Group of Experts, called “Group of Experts of the Regular Process”, entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly, and composed of up to 25 members (Member States of the UN), representing all regions of the world. This Group of Experts was assisted by a Pool of Experts, nominated by States, through the regional groups of the UN General Assembly. The Outline for this assessment has been approved by the UN General Assembly, on the basis of a recommendation from the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole for the Regular Process (AHWGH). The UN General Assembly has already approved the overall objective, scope, principles and best practices for the work of the Regular Process.

### 2-Structure of the WOA

The WOA report will become available on a UN website once the Omnibus LOA Resolution is adopted by the UN General Assembly.

It is made of two Parts, called A and B here:

#### **Section A: the 55 chapters of the assessment**

The structure of Section A of the WOA comprises six Parts with a total of 55 chapters. The Chapter structure assigned to it by a UN General Assembly Resolution, is based on a consensus after discussion by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole for the Regular Process (AHWGW - that functioned much like the IPBES Plenary)

*Part I is the Executive Summary:* covering in approximately 30 pages everything in the rest of the WOA and consolidating findings of the WOA into 10 “Emergent Themes”. It was not called a “Summary for Policy Makers” as for IPBES, and “Emergent Themes” were used instead of “issues” or “recommendations”, because the WOA had any policy analysis explicitly excluded from its scope.

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<sup>1</sup> As the only body with full governance authority for ocean areas beyond the limits of national jurisdictions (ABNJ), the United Nations General assembly annually adopts a Resolution on Oceans and Law of the Sea, which contains new policy and management decisions for ABNJ as negotiated and adopted by States.

*Part II is the background and context:* It consists of four chapters, with about 50 pages in total. Motivation for the assessment, history of the UN Regular Process, operational methods and structure of the rest of the WOA are explained.

*Part III is a summary of the ecosystem services provided by the ocean:* It consists of six chapters and nearly 150 pages. Trends data are few, since data on Ecosystem Services could not be found for the seven regional seas or global scales. Rather the services are described in narrative, with local illustrations.

*Part IV is the in-depth examination of one of those services:* The ocean as a source of food. This emphasis was specified by UNGA. Part IV consists of six chapters and over 200 pages. Small scale and large scale fisheries and mariculture are addressed, with more data on larger scale fisheries. Livelihood aspects of fisheries and aquaculture are discussed, but not as thoroughly as large scale fishery issues.

*Part V is a review of status, trends and impacts (environmental and social) of all the other (not food-related) uses of the oceans by humans.* This comprises 17 chapters, each varying in length from a few pages (de-salinization, undersea cables and pipelines) to well over 50 pages (land-based run-off, contaminants) – in total over 350 pages.

*Part VI is marine biodiversity – status and trends* both by region (one chapter, but with seven sub-chapters of more than 50 pages each), and then 22 more chapters focused of specific species groups and habitats considered to be potentially under threat (groups like marine mammals, marine reptiles and elasmobranchs; habitats like cold and warm water coral reefs, mangroves, etc.). In total it is over 500 pages.

### **Section B Executive Summary**

Although the WOA was not mandated to conduct a policy analysis or present options, it was instructed to prepare an overall Executive Summary to highlight the “Emergent Themes” from the assessment; themes that integrated the information in the separate chapters. These Emergent Themes were:

- A. Manifold problems are linked to climate change and linked issues (acidification etc.);
- B. Marine biota is experiencing higher mortality and/or lower reproductive success in many parts of the world’s oceans;
- C. Food security and safety from marine sources is at risk;
- D. Biodiversity hotspots are magnets for human activities, increasing pressure on areas of highest biodiversity value;
- F. Most ocean and especially coastal areas are facing increased and conflicting demands for ocean space;
- G. Cumulative impacts are a key issue whereas management is sectoral;
- H. There is an uneven distribution of benefits from the ocean;
- I. Integrated management is essential – and that needs more and better information to succeed;
- J. Many coastal areas are receiving excessive inputs of harmful material, and of many types;
- K. Lack of knowledge about integration should not lead to delay in implementing known solutions.

### **3- Outcome of the AHWGW discussion**

Approximately 15 paragraphs were drafted and negotiated at the meeting of the AHWGW. These will be proposed for incorporation in the 2015 Omnibus OLS Resolution of the UNGA. In the past all AHWGW

paragraphs have been accepted verbatim in the Resolution, possibly because many delegates to the AHWGW meetings are the same delegates who attend the negotiation and adoption of the annual OLS Resolutions. However details of final language must await the UNGA process.

Strong positive language was used in accepting the WOA.

Very strong positive language was used in thanking the Group of Experts for the Regular Process and the equivalent of the CLAS and LAs for the constituent chapters.

States and Intergovernmental Organizations were encouraged to take note of the WOA and make use of it as appropriate in their ocean activities.

The First Cycle of the Regular Process will be declared complete at the end of 2015 (assuming the OLS resolution accepts the AHWGW text) and the term of the Group of experts will be completed. However the Second Cycle will commence immediately in 2016, with the appointment of a new Group of Experts as an initial step (noting the value of continuity between the outgoing and incoming GofEs). The first cycle took six years. The second cycle is unlikely to take fewer than five years.

Collectively the WOA does a very sound job of covering the subject matter of Chapter 3 of the IPBES template for Regional Assessments (i.e. Status, trends and future dynamics of biodiversity and ecosystem services). It provides partial coverage of the subject matter of Chapters 2 (Nature's benefits to people and quality of life) and 4 (Direct and indirect drivers), but only on trends of some drivers and some individual benefits. There is much that IPBES could cover about relationships among the trends in the WOA and informing the potential outcomes of alternative policy options.

#### **4- Personal Observations on the Regular Process, the WOA and their Future**

Global ocean governance is an extremely divisive issue at the UN level at present. To some extent the scope of the WOA was caught in the tensions of the debates on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction. This led to a high degree of risk aversion to give the WOA a broad scope of operations. It took three meetings of the AHWGW to achieve consensus on the mandate of WOA 1, and, in the end, all mention of policy or management in the WOA was explicitly scoped OUT of the mandate. Even the tabulations of aggregated trends in biodiversity or benefits by type of policy or management measures, a task central to IPBES, was out of scope to the WOA.

This constraint was limiting on the WOA, and enforced stringently. That means that the WOA in its Part VI has done an extremely thorough job on much of what is the subject matter of Chapter 3 of the IPBES Regional Assessment template (Status and *individual* trends), but in a piecemeal way. It has done at best a partial job on the subject matter of Chapters 2 and 4 in Part V and IV of the WOA. The parts included were to quantify status and trends of individual socio-economic benefits from individual industries and activities. There is partial information on benefits from Chapter 2 of IPBES Regional Assessments, and some of the trends in human uses in Parts IV and V of the WOA may be considered drivers in Chapter 4 of IPBES. However there was no analytical linkage between Parts V and VI of the WOA (central to Chapter 4 of IPBES), and aside from general scene-setting material in Part I and the Executive Summary, almost no discussion of human well-being and particularly of trade-offs among individual benefits (central to Chapter 2). The subject matter of Chapters 5 (scenarios) and 6 (options for governance) of the IPBES Regional Assessments are not touched at all.

Consequently there is great scope for the IPBES to add value to WOA efforts. It should consider taking the status and trend data of the WOA from Parts IV, V, and VI as a starting point. Repeating the work of assembling the information would be time-consuming and costly, and add little value. It would likely degrade quality and quantity, in fact, because one or two teams of a dozen to 20 IPBES experts would be trying to do the job covered by more specialized teams of experts for more than 40 separate chapters of the WOA. Rather, if IPBES decides to undertake an ocean assessment, it should start to fill the major void left in scope of the WOA, which is: not addressing policy issues in any way.