



## **SUBMISSION OF VIEWS BY THE CARBON INSTITUTE**

*Supported by Youth4Nature*

31 March 2020

*Subject: Views and recommendations on the elements to be taken into account in the SBSTA Chair's dialogue on the ocean and climate change*

As a response to the call for submissions on views and elements to be taken into account in the upcoming June 2020 dialogue on how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action on the ocean and climate change, the Carbon Institute wishes to submit the following:

The Carbon Institute highly appreciates the work facilitated by the Chilean Presidency at COP25, particularly through the dialogue convened by the SBSTA Chair as described in 1/CP.25 Paragraph 27, in providing leadership and guidance on the ocean and climate change to Party and Non-Party stakeholders.

The Carbon Institute further wishes to recognize the SBSTA Chair and UNFCCC Parties in working toward ensuring an ambitious, equitable, just, and comprehensive outcome from the above dialogue at SB52.

The following submission reflects the views of the Carbon Institute on the priorities and pathways for comprehensive action on the ocean and climate change by the Conference of the Parties. This submission is supported by Youth4Nature.

### **1. SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT**

The ocean plays a central role in regulating the climate system by *producing oxygen, storing carbon, and absorbing excess heat*. In turn, changes in the climate have significant impacts on the ocean, including *ocean warming, acidification, deoxygenation, biodiversity loss, sea level rise, and altered currents and oceanographic conditions*, all of which have accelerated significantly in recent years, and all of which have significant impacts on people and economies.

The wide range of climate change impacts on the oceans demands urgent action and investment to protect marine environments, coastal zones, biodiversity, people and economies. These impacts and their solutions demand comprehensive and dedicated action from the UNFCCC. After the approval of the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), the urgency of timely, ambitious, and coordinated action to address unprecedented and enduring changes in the oceans is even more clear.

## 2. UNFCCC POLITICAL CONTEXT

There is ongoing discussion and work in various bodies and processes of the UNFCCC related to oceans and climate change.<sup>1</sup> Some existing activities include:

- The Nairobi Work Programme's 2019 and 2020 mandate on impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation for oceans and coastal zones;
- The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action's thematic coverage of oceans in enabling collaboration between governments, cities, regions, businesses, and investors;
- The SBSTA 50 Research Dialogue and its inclusion of the ocean-climate system;
- The COP25/SBSTA 51 Earth Information Day presentations on the state of the climate including the ocean and observational resources to support policy development;
- The Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) Executive Committee's work with the Technology Executive Committee on minimizing and addressing loss and damage in coastal areas;
- The inclusion of projects related to ocean and coastal areas in National Adaptation Plans under the Cancun Adaptation Framework
- The joint SBSTA-IPCC event at COP25 on the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate

However important, these incremental actions are not commensurate with the magnitude and urgency of action required on the ocean and climate nexus.

## 3. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

### 3.a Thematic priorities

The combined impacts of climate change on oceans, coasts, islands, communities, governments, and economies in 183 coastal and island nations must be addressed through an integrated perspective addressing, *inter alia*, the issues noted below.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, we must learn from shortfalls of capacity building and education in the past, and reinvigorate a more sustainable way of creating a new generation of professionals and young leaders who can address climate change and the oceans. All of these elements are intertwined and should be addressed holistically through a dedicated COP discussion:<sup>3</sup>

- *Recognizing the central role of oceans in climate* and the ecological, social, economic, and political implications of changes in this role
- *Accounting for ocean-based mitigation approaches while securing environmental integrity* (such as reduction of GHG emissions from ships, renewable energy, blue carbon)
- *Deploying a wide variety of adaptation measures to safeguard people, economies, infrastructure* in coastal and island areas, especially based on ecosystem approaches and

---

<sup>1</sup> In this submission document, we sometimes do not always spell out “oceans, coastal zones, and climate change”, but rather simply use “oceans and climate change”. This is simply for the purpose of writing more succinctly; coastal zones are key considerations for this topic.

<sup>2</sup> This is an indicative list only.

<sup>3</sup> See Roadmap to Oceans and Climate Action 2016-2021 <https://bit.ly/2fUUPrn>; Assessing Progress on Oceans and Climate 2018 <https://bit.ly/2RBnOOA>.

integrated coastal and ocean management institutions and in collaboration with disaster risk agencies

- *Fostering low carbon blue economies and coordinating with SDG14 activities*
- *Addressing the issues of human displacement* with appropriate legal frameworks and financial support
- *Encourage Parties to increase the designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)*, especially in areas where none yet exist
- *Providing adequate financing* to support the needed mitigation and adaptation actions
- *Building the capacity and education needed* to address the implications of all aspects of the climate and ocean nexus
- *Promoting coordinated research and observations* to facilitate more effective cooperation between nations on understanding ocean and climate change interactions and their societal implications
- *Increasing technology transfer* to support the dissemination of technologies that can help ocean adaptation and mitigation
- *Coordinating action* between ocean-oriented multilateral systems, intergovernmental organizations, Non-Party UNFCCC Observers, and UNFCCC Parties
- *Encouraging the inclusion of oceans* in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs) pursuant to the Enhanced Transparency Framework of the Paris Agreement

### **3.b. Priorities for equity and inclusion**

Throughout each of these discrete and coordinated goals, engaging youth and indigenous stakeholders and amplifying those voices throughout all UNFCCC processes is paramount to ensuring equitable, just, and responsive outcomes.

Transparent, accessible, meaningful and inclusive participation of frontline, marginalized, and indigenous communities at all the stages of policymaking, programme delivery, and project implementation within the ocean-climate nexus must be encouraged. The rights of local communities directly affected by ocean-based programmes and projects, and in particular indigenous peoples, must be upheld. Additionally, local and indigenous groups should have a level of ownership and leadership of ocean-based programmes and projects (and all other nature-based solutions) to create sustainable transformational change in their communities.

The transparent, accessible, meaningful and inclusive participation of youth must also be encouraged at all stages of policymaking, programme delivery, and project implementation within the ocean-climate nexus. This includes fostering meaningful “blue” employment for youth, providing institutional and financial support for youth-led ocean-climate initiatives, and addressing barriers often faced by youth to access high-level meetings and events where decisions about their future are made.

### **3.c. Procedural priorities**

The ultimate goal of ocean-motivated Parties should not be a “Blue COP26” but rather a “Blue Paris Agreement”—a long-term facilitative roadmap for multilateral action. An elevated COP process that has the following essential priorities is needed for oceans and coastal zones. This COP process should be:

- **Focused on implementation**
- **Sustained** between UNFCCC meetings
- **Embedded** throughout elements of the Paris Agreement and Rulebook
- **Financed** by funds run and signaled by the UNFCCC
- **Built** into Nationally Determined Contributions
- **Coordinated** with other conventions and non-Party actors
- **Reviewed** in the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF)
- **Assessed** for progress in the Global Stocktake
- **Included** as part of the regular review of the Paris Agreement to promote its effective implementation.

#### 4. UNFCCC PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Thorough and concerted consideration of oceans by the UNFCCC may also benefit the UNFCCC process itself. For the most part, oceans have not been a central focus of inventories, reports, contributions, or other elements of the UNFCCC. By bringing oceans to the COP, new partnerships and alliances could form around a topic that is central to both climate stability and survival of communities and countries. The oceans may provide new energy to the UNFCCC, not based on old lines of difference, but along new lines of cooperation.

**The Carbon Institute and Youth4Nature request that the SBSTA Chair consider two policy strategies for addressing the ocean-climate nexus, both detailed below:**

- 1) Recommending that an agenda item on oceans and coastal zones be adopted for COP26, or
- 2) Recommending that the COP facilitate the coordination of ocean and coastal measures adopted by the Parties as pursuant to Article 7.2(c) of the Convention.

A COP26 discussion and decision allows Parties to decide the best process and appropriate bodies to address the oceans and climate change nexus in the context of the UNFCCC. This gives nations the opportunity to collectively put all ideas for climate change and oceans into ***one coordinated system*** rather than disparate, discrete initiatives.

##### ***4.a. COP26 Agenda Item***

The policy rationale to have COP26 discuss a dedicated agenda item on oceans, coastal zones, and climate change is supported by UNFCCC Articles on the Objective of the Convention, Commitments of Parties, and mandate of the Conference of the Parties:<sup>4</sup>

- An agenda item will assist in meeting the **objectives** of the UNFCCC “*to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere...within a timeframe that allows ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change.*” Given the paramount importance of ocean-climate interlinkages, it is within the mandate of the UNFCCC to address oceans in the context of climate change.

---

<sup>4</sup> This is not an exhaustive list but is indicative of policy rationale in the UNFCCC for action on oceans and climate change.

- An agenda item on oceans, coastal zones and climate change can help Parties meet their **commitments** under Article 4 of the UNFCCC: “*all Parties...shall promote sustainable management and promote cooperation in the conservation and enhancements ...of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases, ...including coastal and marine ecosystems.*”

There may be, however, limited political appetite for an additional COP26 agenda item dedicated to the oceans and climate change. In this light, the Carbon Institute and Youth4Nature wish to encourage the SBSTA Chair to consider ways in which the ocean and climate change can be addressed through linkages with existing COP26 agenda items.

#### ***4.b. Facilitation of the Coordination of Measures Adopted by Parties under Article 7.2(c)***

The Carbon Institute and Youth4Nature do *not* encourage Parties to elevate oceans in the UNFCCC to debate and negotiate.

The Carbon Institute and Youth4Nature *do* encourage Parties to elevate oceans in the UNFCCC to act.

The hard-earned trust built by the transparency within the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement and the thorough and coordinated methodological nature of the UNFCCC bodies are promising foundations for collective pathways to stave off highly likely negative anthropogenic consequences. One way to raise ambition now is to help countries facilitate measures together on specific areas of common interest. Terrestrial and marine nature-based solutions must play a vital role in achieving countries’ contributions and meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

Under the Convention Article 7, Paragraph 2(c), the Conference of the Parties “*shall facilitate, at the request of two or more Parties, the coordination of measures adopted by them to address climate change and its effects.*” This language *requires* the COP to facilitate coordination of measures, whereas any request for an agenda item is subject to negotiations on whether and how a proposed agenda item moves forward.

Article 7.2(c) can allow a process through which a subset of interested Parties may voluntarily coordinate measures they have adopted on oceans and climate change with the support of the COP and its power to spur and sustain transparent action. One novel way to do this—and innovative political strategy is needed to raise ambition and to drive the UNFCCC towards action—is for two or more Parties to ask the COP to facilitate the coordination of measures on oceans and climate change. They are entitled to do so under Article 7.2(c) and COP is required to facilitate.

The key legal and policy innovation to Article 7.2(c) is that the COP must only facilitate the coordination of measures adopted by Parties. It is *not* given the mandate to facilitate negotiations. Measures adopted by Parties may fall into two categories: 1) measures taken at national or local levels (e.g. financing the restoration of coastal ecosystems or helping communities implement nature-based adaptation responses), and 2) measures taken by Parties under their responsibilities to the Convention (e.g. a country adopting and submitting ocean/climate measures in its NDC). This is not to say both types of measures adopted *should* be facilitated by an Article 7.2(c) process for oceans.



There was interest expressed from Party and Non-Party stakeholders at SB50 on considering an approach for oceans under Article 7.2(c).<sup>5</sup> As Parties discuss how to structure a durable and action-oriented process for oceans, Article 7.2(c) and related Convention language could create “coalitions of the willing” to facilitate (with COP) and coordinate (among themselves) key issues under the Convention.

## 5. SUMMARY

The Carbon Institute and Youth4Nature wish to reiterate some of our key views. There are viable, actionable, and politically realistic policy options to ensure the COP can comprehensively address the ocean-climate nexus. Bodies within the UNFCCC have made incremental and significant progress on the inclusion of oceans and coastal zones in the UNFCCC process, but the urgency and scope of the climate change impacts on the oceans demands dedicated and thorough action and investment from the UNFCCC to protect marine environments, coastal zones, biodiversity, people, and economies.

Moreover, throughout all stages of UNFCCC policymaking, programme delivery, and project implementation, the need for transparent, accessible, meaningful and inclusive participation of frontline, marginalized, and indigenous communities cannot be understated. These constituencies have consistently demonstrated innovation, resilience, and leadership in nature-based solutions and can play a key role in all future UNFCCC and Paris Agreement actions. Parties should support local action and economies to ensure sustainable resource use, especially among coastal and island communities. Parties should also leverage knowledge sharing with these communities, recognizing the role of the culture-nature nexus and traditional conservation practices to enhance action. Their expertise cannot be traded, or assumed, or used as political assets.

---

<sup>5</sup> Amerasinghe, Niranjali M. and Kristen Hite “Exceptionalism United?: Unpacking UNFCCC Article 7.2(c)” Sustainable Development Law & Policy, Spring 2010, 17-23, 58-59. The authors of this submission only make one remark on this excellent work. On page 22, the Carbon Institute believes the COP has broad legal latitude to facilitate the coordination of measures *without* a COP decision. COP can simply facilitate the coordination between those countries that have voluntarily assented to be facilitated, rather than requiring the consensus of the whole COP. This distinction is critical since future climate-adjacent issues could involve a range of Parties asking COP to facilitate various adopted measures. Facilitation should aim to improve the coordination of measures, with or without a COP decision, and as such should be based on the request by those Parties seeking facilitation.