
COMMENTARIES AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UN Decade of the Ocean for Sustainable Development

Lauren Rader¹, Kate Achilles², David Christopher³ and Diana Payne⁴

¹ Buckingham Browne & Nichols School, US

² NOAA, US

³ University of Delaware, US

⁴ University of Connecticut, US

Corresponding author: Lauren Rader (lrader@nmea.org)

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As part of this visionary blueprint for improving the lives of people all around the world, the UN outlined measurable goals to assess the impacts of the Agenda. NMEA has participated in important and relevant Decade activities when possible or invited, and NMEA will continue to play a role in UN Decade activities as they become available.

Keywords: sustainable development; United Nations; Ocean Literacy Summit; Decade of the Ocean

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As part of this visionary blueprint for improving the lives of people all around the world, the UN outlined measurable goals to assess the impacts of the Agenda. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a call to action by Member States for a global partnership on capacity building. The SDGs are related, thematic issues that cover a broad reach of issues that will help lead us to a more sustainable future. Each goal has specific targets and indicators that Member States have agreed to work towards attaining. The Goal of SDG 14: *Life Below Water* is to conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development. The goal addresses the following topic areas: ocean acidification, pollution and plastics, fishing practices and access, conservation, benefits to Small Island Developing States, scientific knowledge, and international law.

Historically, the UN highlights important global issues and puts context on a global scale through the strategic naming of timeframes. The first documented example was from 1960–1970, which the UN declared the Development Decade. Since that time, decades have been named for a variety of important issues. In 2019, the UN declared 2021–2030 as the *United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development*.

The National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) has participated in important and relevant Decade activities when possible or invited. In December 2019, President Kate Achilles attended a workshop in Venice, Italy hosted by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The focus of the workshop was the role of Ocean Literacy in the context of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The goal of the workshop was to ensure the Decade “promotes ocean literacy across the world to anchor mind-sets around the fundamental relationship humanity has with the ocean. It needs to be inclusive, participative, and interdisciplinary. During the workshop, representatives of the global community of Ocean Literacy will be called to discuss and support development of an Ocean Literacy Strategy for the UN Decade” (UNESCO Office in Venice, December 12, 2019, Twitter).

In January 2020, Kate (President), Lauren Rader (President-Elect), Ocean Literacy Chair Diana Payne, and Student Engagement Co-Chair Kathy Fuller, attended the Prep Meeting for the UN Ocean Conference at UN Headquarters in New York City. During this two-day conference, attendees heard from UN Delegates and Member State Representatives advocating to shape the agenda for the June 2020 kickoff of the Ocean Decade

in Portugal. NMEA had a global moment of recognition, when President Kate was recognized and given the opportunity to speak before the UN Body about our organization and the importance of Ocean Literacy.

Plans were made and schedules were cleared for NMEA representatives to attend the UN Decade Conference kickoff and supporting Ocean Literacy Summit in Portugal during the summer of 2020. And then the world shut down due to COVID-19. The organizers of the in-person event were able to pivot quickly and held the 1st Virtual Global Ocean Literacy Summit. NMEA was well represented by former Board member Sylvia Spaulding during one of the panel discussions. Additionally, several NMEA members attended the virtual event as participants. Most recently, NMEA leadership applied to the US Decade Delegation to be recognized as a US Nexus Member. This recognition allows NMEA a mechanism to disseminate our activities to broader audiences, and also to market other Nexus member activities to our membership. Our first Nexus posting is for a publication - *A Handbook for Increasing Ocean Literacy: Tools for Educators and Ocean Literacy Advocates*, is currently being organized by our Ocean Literacy Committee.

Most recently, Ocean Literacy leadership Diana Payne, Sarah Schoedinger, and Catherine Halversen, as well as NMEA members Meghan Marerro, Susan Haynes, Geraldine Fauville, Sylvia Spaulding, Harry Beidahl, Tsuyoshi Sasaki, Nicola Bridge, Russell Stevens, Evy Copejans, and Yolanda Sanchez, were part of a group that submitted a proposal to launch an Ocean Literacy Research Program: UN Decade Laboratory Satellite Activity Workshop proposal on co-developing an Ocean Literacy Research Program for the Decade.

Diana Payne and Catherine Halversen were also part of a group of international leaders who submitted a proposal to the IOC of UNESCO to officially recognize Ocean Literacy as part of the Decade. Their proposal *Ocean Literacy With All (OLWA): the change we need for the ocean we want*, an international collaboration to ensure the status of Ocean Literacy as a programme of the Decade was officially accepted on June 7, 2021. In addition, Catherine and Diana provided feedback on the UN Decade Ocean Literacy Framework on behalf of NMEA.

NMEA will continue to play a role in UN Decade activities as they become available. During this year's Mid-Year Board meeting, the entire NMEA Board participated in a brainstorming activity to identify action steps that could be taken by the organization. In addition to Nexus postings, other high profile activities include continuing to attend and play a role in meetings with global Ocean Literacy leaders, NMEA 2021 and NMEA 2022 events, webinars on Ocean Decade Events, a Special Issue of *Current*, and participating in global OL projects. All of these require a significant investment of time by NMEA leadership to implement. If you would like to be a part of planning and promoting our Ocean Decade activities, or are able to assist with responding to UN Decade proposals on behalf of the organization, please email the Board at NMEA@marine-ed.org.

Key Terms

Member States - sovereign entities or nations admitted into membership of the United Nations

Small Island Developing States - a distinct group of 38 Member States and 20 Associate Members of the UN that face unique, social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities (from UN Website)

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission – promotes international cooperation and coordinates programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, hazard mitigation, and capacity development in order to understand and effectively manage the resources of the ocean and coastal areas (from IOC Website)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization – a division of the UN that works to build peace through access to education, scientific purpose, and the recognition of cultural heritage.

For more information

UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

United States site for the UN Decade

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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