



Ocean and Human Health Conference Statement

Preamble

This conference, organised by the Portuguese National Decade Committee (NDC), with the collaboration of the NDCs from Belgium, Cape Verde, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, United Kingdom, and USA, together with a diverse group of national and international institutions, brought together experts in ocean natural and social sciences, medicine, representatives from the health sector, law, indigenous and other practitioners, and civil society, to jointly discuss common interests around action concerning current and emerging issues on the connections between the Ocean and Human Health¹.

There is increasing evidence, supporting long held indigenous knowledge, on how Ocean and Human Health are intrinsically linked. The Ocean is central to global climate regulation and provides vital resources that support human health, including seafood as a major source of protein, polyunsaturated fatty acids, and novel pharmaceutical molecules with significant therapeutic potential derived from marine organisms. Ocean areas also promote the “blue gym” effect, whereby mental and physical wellbeing is enhanced through, for example, the provision of spaces for physical activity and leisure. This is in addition to social, and economic benefits, as well as cultural benefits that include a greater recognition of the ancestral / familial / spiritual relationship and responsibility of many indigenous communities to their ocean. However, adverse impacts from contaminants and unsustainable resource use are among a range of factors that compromise Ocean and Human Health, and food security. Climate change can intensify these issues, contributing to biodiversity loss and marine ecosystem imbalance, increasing the risks to human health.

These concerns are being jointly addressed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 challenges 1 (Understanding and beat marine pollution) and 10 (Restore society’s relationship with the ocean), and by the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 14 (Life Below Water). It is important to state however that the issue of Ocean and Human Health is relevant to many of UN Ocean Decade Challenges, SDGs, as well as to a wide range of international policies, treaties and conventions. Therefore, the Barcelona Statement of the 2024 UN Ocean Decade conference calls for a better understanding of the impact on human health from marine pollution across the land-sea continuum and the connections between ocean health and human health – recalling the Lisbon Declaration 1998 on “Ocean governance in the 21st century” and the Lisbon Declaration 2022 “*Our ocean, our future, our responsibility*”. However, this issue was not addressed at the 3rd UN Ocean Conference, during which the States and governments did not make any commitments linking human health and ocean health.

While the subject of Ocean and Human Health has been addressed in several countries during the last decades and several overview reports were produced, Ocean and Human Health issues deserve considerably more attention and concerted, coordinated, multisectoral and transdisciplinary action at the regional, national, and global level.

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7415384704843239424/?actorCompanyId=103924359>

Conference Recommendations

The Ocean and Human Health Lisbon conference 2025 reaffirmed that the Ocean is central to our health, the air we breathe, the food we eat, the stability of our climate, and the wellbeing, identity, and resilience of people on our planet. The Conference discussions provided first-hand experience, evidence and case studies of the benefits that the ocean offers in terms of human health and physical and mental wellbeing, including through marine-derived pharmaceuticals and other biomaterials, food safety and security, and the natural balance of the Earth system that protects and nourishes the world's human population. It further highlighted that challenges and risks for human health are real and significant, and that there is a need to drastically decrease the impact of human activities, such as through better controlling and reducing the input of pollutants (e.g. plastics, pharmaceutical compounds, pesticides and excess nutrients, toxins), or tackling overfishing and its impacts on food security, or addressing Sea Level Rise through strategies for climate mitigation and adaptation. These threats are producing anxiety across communities, including in the younger generations.

This event highlighted the healthcare sector as an underappreciated yet important ally in ocean protection. The conference partner NDCs agree to seek active engagement of the health sector in domestic Ocean Decade related activities and urge their constituencies to actively pursue Decade Actions within Ocean and Human Health in the second half of the Ocean Decade. Although there is no specific Ocean Decade challenge on Ocean and Human Health, its relevance is clearly recognized in the vision 2030 documents for Challenges 1 and 10.

In this context, the NDCs involved in this Conference recommend:

- The launch of a Decade Call for Action dedicated to Ocean and Human Health, supported by a reference network of professionals and projects;
- Explicit inclusion of Ocean and Human Health in calls for abstracts and the organization of other participation modalities (e.g. special sessions) at the 2027 UN Ocean Decade Conference;
- Active involvement of Ocean Decade structures, including NDCs, Decade Coordination Offices, Decade Collaborative Centres, and Decade Implementation Partners, in raising public awareness and sharing knowledge on Ocean and Human Health;
- Stronger engagement of the medical and public health communities at international (e.g. World Health Organization), regional and national level;
- Enhanced interministerial and intersectoral collaboration at national level, based on a concrete transdisciplinary and multilateral cooperation, identifying opportunities, gaps, needs, and integrated courses of action.

This conference showed that to properly address this topic, not only scientific but also human societal needs must be taken into consideration, strengthening the integration of ocean and health research, policy and practice.

The strong collaboration between the partner NDCs demonstrates a shared commitment to improve our understanding of the connection and relationship between the Ocean and Human Health and its integration into national, regional and global frameworks. As a follow-up to this conference, these NDCs will jointly develop an updated **Policy Brief on Ocean and Human Health**, addressing key opportunities for action at global, national, regional, and community levels.

The study of the Ocean and Human Health links diverse disciplines in the framework of the One Health concept and provides a clear path towards its follow-up in the UN Ocean Decade Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2027 and contributes to building momentum for the UN Ocean Conference in 2028.

The “Ocean and Human Health International Conference” Partner National Ocean Decade Committees (NDCs):

NDC Portugal

NDC Belgium

NDC Cape Verde

NDC France

NDC Germany

NDC Ireland

NDC Japan

NDC New Zealand

NDC Norway

NDC United Kingdom

NDC United States of America