

Ocean's Past Initiative

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Ocean Decade Heritage Network

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In 2017, the United Nations (UN) announced the launch of a new initiative, the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030 (the 'Ocean Decade'), which has the tagline 'the science we need for the ocean we want'.

The Ocean Decade is intended to support 'efforts to reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health and gather ocean stakeholders worldwide behind a common framework that will ensure ocean science can fully support countries in creating improved conditions for sustainable development of the Ocean' (<https://en.unesco.org/ocean-decade>).



2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development

The outcomes of the Decade are expressed in terms of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs -- <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>); the Decade complements SDG 14 "Life below Water", aimed at protecting marine ecosystems, but the point is being strongly made that the Ocean Decade is intended to contribute to delivering all 17 SDGs.

The Ocean Decade is currently in its preparatory phase: the 'zero draft' of its Implementation Plan has recently been circulated for comment. Although some planning events have been disrupted by covid-19, the Implementation Phase – the Decade itself – is due to be launched in January 2021.

Early documentation noted that 'Ocean Science' should be interpreted broadly as encompassing social sciences and human dimensions, but only cursory reference was made to cultural heritage and none to archaeology or history as disciplines. Even now, any sense that 'the ocean we want' requires a historical understanding of the ocean we have is underdeveloped in Ocean Decade documentation.



The Ocean Decade Heritage Network (ODHN) was set up in 2019 to increase recognition of the historical dimension to the marine environment in the Ocean Decade, to ensure that archaeology could be included among the ocean sciences that would be promoted and encouraged by the Decade, and to increase awareness and engagement by archaeologists in preparing and implementing the Decade. The initial focus was the inclusion of a group of archaeologists in the First Global Planning Meeting for the Ocean Decade held in Copenhagen in May 2019. The meeting was hosted by the National Museum of Denmark – providing opportunities to underline the historical dimension to the oceans – and included a side event on cultural heritage.

For further details see: Trakadas, A., Firth, A., Gregory, D. *et al.* The Ocean Decade Heritage Network: Integrating Cultural Heritage Within the UN Decade of Ocean Science 2021–2030. *J Mari Arch* **14**, 153–165 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11457-019-09241-0>

ODHN now has well over 100 members from around the globe and we encourage more people to join. Although the initiative arose from marine archaeologists, ODHN takes a broad view of its areas of interests, welcoming anyone whose interests lie in better understanding the human history of the oceans, how this is represented by tangible and intangible heritage, and how an appreciation of the past can be mobilised in improving the sustainability of human interactions with the sea.

ODHN's focus currently is on influencing the preparatory phase of the Ocean Decade by attending regional workshops (e.g. on the Arctic and Mediterranean), introducing archaeological/historical perspectives to other ocean scientists, and raising awareness of the Ocean Decade among archaeological and historical disciplines. Although the Ocean Decade is a global campaign, much of its implementation is likely to take place through regional and national programmes, so we anticipate our network having a big role to play in encouraging 'local' connections too.

We expect that ODHN's role – influencing, raising awareness and encouraging connections – will need to continue throughout the Ocean Decade and perhaps even beyond; but we can already see that ODHN is having an impact. There is already greater awareness of the historical dimension of the marine environment and greater visibility for the disciplines that address this in the organisation of the Ocean Decade. Please add to the effectiveness of ODHN by joining us!

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