



9th Our Ocean Conference Greece 2024

CONCEPT NOTE

Greece will host the **9th Our Ocean Conference in 2024**. The Conference is scheduled to take place in Athens, at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, on the 16th and 17th of April. The Our Ocean Youth Leadership Summit will be held parallel to the main conference, starting the day before, on the 15th of April.

The Our Ocean Conference was first launched under the initiative of the U.S. Department of State in 2014. Since then, it has gradually become a forum for dialogue that brings together governments, international organizations, academia, the private sector, and NGOs that share a common vision for the protection of the oceans and take action to support this vision.

So far, until the last Our Ocean Conference that was held in Panama, the conference has managed to gather more than 2160 commitments worth almost US\$ 130 billion, distributed in the six thematic areas addressed in the conference.

Greece, a country with an extended coastline of thousand kilometers and hundreds of islands, as well as a nation with a long tradition of seamanship, not only recognizes the need for prompt reaction but has already taken bold and concrete measures in this direction such as the establishment of concrete conservation targets for the marine protected areas and the ambitious decarbonization project for the small islands.

By hosting the 9th Our Ocean Conference Greece reaffirms its commitment to transition to a “Blue economy” to harness the advantages of a new balance between economic growth, social cohesion, and sustainability as well as addressing some key challenges such as biodiversity loss, unsustainable fishing, marine pollution especially from plastics, and unsustainable maritime transport.

The Oceans are the foundations of life on Earth and the “heartbeat” of our planet. They serve as habitats for rich marine biodiversity, yet they belong among the most fragile ecosystems. Oceans are essential to food security and sustainable development. They also play a pivotal role in climate regulation, acting as carbon sinks, and as lungs to our planet, since they are generating most of the oxygen we breathe. It is our mandate to preserve the ecological balance of marine ecosystems and keep them healthy and resilient. Thus, it is evident that ocean health contributes to the overall health of our planet. At the same time, a stable climate maintains marine ecosystems’ health. Oceans and climate are thus inextricably interconnected, while the UN Climate Change Conferences increasingly acknowledge the ocean-climate nexus.

In addition to their ecological importance, oceans underpin the global economy. Industries ranging from tourism to fisheries and shipping rely heavily on the ecological balance and the vitality of marine ecosystems. Emerging industries such as the development of new forms of offshore renewable energy sources, marine biotechnology advancements, and circular marine industry strongly indicate that the common future of our economy is a blue,

sustainable, and inclusive economy.

The upcoming 9th Our Ocean Conference (“OOC-9”) aspires to bring together governments, the private sector, civil society, research institutes, and local authorities and communities, young and indigenous voices from all over the world, to stimulate creative dialogue and demonstrate their interest in identifying solutions and committing to specific actions for the sustainability of the oceans and their resources. This participatory approach and the commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals to protect our oceans, our climate, marine biodiversity, and sustainable economy underscore a shared responsibility to ensure that our oceans will continue to fulfill the needs of present and future generations. At the same time, the involvement of youth, as key agents for change, will also be a vital element of OOC-9. By involving young voices, the conference aims to harness fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, to drive meaningful progress towards ocean sustainability.

The six areas of action on which the Conference focuses are:

(a) Marine Protected Areas. An effectively managed network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with well-defined conservation measures that address the pressures of ocean-based activities, such as tourism, shipping, fishing, and aquaculture, is an essential instrument for safeguarding biodiversity and maintaining marine ecosystems.

(b) Sustainable blue economy. It can serve as a key tool to achieve sustainable use of the ocean and marine resources for sustainable growth of economic sectors that rely on the ocean, such as tourism, shipping, fishing, and offshore wind energy, that will bring prosperity and employment creation, while preserving ocean ecosystem health.

(c) Climate-ocean nexus. Strengthening the nexus between the ocean and climate change is of paramount importance for bringing forth solutions in a holistic manner. Ocean plays a key role as climate regulator and can serve as a vehicle for clean transition, whilst climate actions aim to preserve a healthy state of the ocean.

(d) Maritime security. Safeguarding the ocean from piracy, illegal trafficking of goods and people, illegal fishing and pollution and other illegal activities at sea is a key challenge that needs to be effectively addressed and to bring about innovative and creative efforts to improve maritime security.

(e) Sustainable fisheries. To reap the benefits of a resilient ocean, it is essential to incorporate sustainable fisheries policies through adequate fishing methods, surveillance of prohibitions and restrictions and other integral solutions to effectively tackle overfishing that poses a direct threat to marine biodiversity.

(f) Marine pollution. It may include eutrophication, marine litter, and chemical pollution and occurs from either seaborne or land-based activities and imposes significant threat to the ocean health. A more holistic approach with joint efforts is crucial to prevent and control anthropogenic pollution that ends up in the ocean.

Within these 6 main areas of action, Greece will particularly place emphasis on four aspects as horizontal elements cutting across the six areas of action of the Conference:

(i) Sustainable tourism in coastal areas and islands ensures an optimal balance between tourism development, marine environment conservation and overall sustainability of host communities, and can be a core driver to build resilience to climate change challenges.

(ii) Green shipping encompasses a range of environmentally friendly actions to enforce emission control, to promote decarbonization, and to move towards a more sustainable shipping management with the aim to minimize the overall impact on the marine environment.

(iii) Reduction of marine plastic and microplastic pollution is an imperative task since this type of pollution, derived from either sea or land-based sources, negatively affects marine ecosystems, and may, through seafood consumption, harm human health.

(iv) The green transition in the Mediterranean, a sea connecting three continents, serving as a crossroad where culture, people, and civilizations meet, is a key challenge for Mediterranean countries and can deliver significant benefits for marine ecosystems.

It is noteworthy that OOC-9 will be the first Our Ocean Conference that will convene after the adoption of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National

Jurisdiction under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (the “BBNJ” Treaty) covering more than two-thirds of the oceans. OCC-9 will be a suitable venue to discuss the means of implementation of the goals of the Agreement. Further, the 9th Our Ocean Conference aims to keep the ocean issues on top of the global political agenda and is expected to make a considerable direct contribution to the upcoming ocean-related high-level events at the UN level. In particular, the OOC-9 aspires to contribute to the High-Level Preparatory Event of the 3rd UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) to be held in Costa Rica in June 2024, only two months after the OOC-9 in Athens, and most importantly to the 3rd UNOC itself to be held in Nice, France, in June 2025, in order to pave the way for transformative action for the protection and sustainable management of seas and oceans, globally, in support of SDG 14.

The Greek Government is actively seeking solutions towards improving policy, governance, technology, and finance, through accelerated action for a clean and healthy ocean, where protection and sustainable use go hand in hand. OOC-9 recognizes the importance of extensive mobilization and active involvement of all related stakeholders. From governments and civil society organizations to the private sector, active involvement is sought primarily through the submission of Voluntary Commitments. This extensive mobilization is expected to be catalytic for identifying innovative solutions and supporting ocean science and funding, which will constitute key outcomes of the 3rd UNOC.

The key outcome of the OOC-9 event will take the form of new, concrete commitments from the global actors, which are voluntary, measurable, impactful actions with a clear timeframe, along with announcements on the successful implementation of previous Our Ocean commitments. Through collaboration on a global scale, Greece envisions a future where the oceans thrive as resilient and vibrant ecosystems, ensuring their well-being for generations to come, and through shared global action, we aspire to achieve an outcome that will meet the level of ocean ambition the world needs today.

In our days the global community acknowledges the serious and multiple threats and pressures that our oceans are facing, and that immediate and effective actions are needed. The 9th Our Ocean Conference in Greece takes the lead in providing the momentum for these actions to be scaled up.

**After all,
it is Our Ocean,
An Ocean of
Potential!**

