

Ocean20 South Africa Launch

Report

Cape Town, South Africa

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Introduction

On 2 April 2025, South Africa officially launched its Ocean20 initiative during the 14th International Conference on Southern Hemisphere Meteorology and Oceanography (ICSHMO) at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC2). As part of its [G20 Presidency](#), South Africa convened a cross-sectoral community of ocean stakeholders ranging from government and researchers to youth, industry, and civil society, to begin defining a collaborative, inclusive roadmap for ocean sustainability.

[Ocean20](#) forms part of the G20's social engagement tracks and places a strategic focus on solidarity, equality, and sustainability, calling for action in ocean governance, climate resilience, blue economy development, and intergenerational marine leadership.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Angus Paterson, Deputy CEO of the National Research Foundation (NRF), opened the proceedings by welcoming participants. He shared his experience as a marine biologist, emphasizing the vital role oceans play in sustaining ecosystems, economies, and communities. He noted the increasing need to centre society and sustainability in marine science investments.

A **video message from Minister Blade Nzimande**, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), followed. He reinforced South Africa's commitment to ocean science and highlighted South-South cooperation with Brazil under the G20. He underscored the importance of ocean literacy, regional partnerships, and the sustainable use of marine resources to drive inclusive development across Africa.

Mr. Ashley Johnson, Acting Chief Director from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), connected the Ocean20 mission with broader environmental mandates, from climate adaptation to biodiversity. He highlighted the ocean's central role across all Sustainable Development Goals and South Africa's potential to become a leading maritime nation.

Mr. Erik Giercksky, Head of Oceans at the UN Global Compact, brought the private sector perspective, stating that business needs clarity, science-based targets, and standards to drive investments into the blue economy. He emphasized the urgency of connecting business innovation with sustainability.

Youth and Women20 Statements

Ms. Yanga Malotana, a youth representative from the University of Pretoria, delivered a compelling Ocean Youth Statement, drawing from her personal experiences along South Africa's Wild Coast. She challenged attendees to honor local knowledge, community resilience, and Indigenous relationships with the ocean, declaring:

"Youth do not need permission to lead... Inclusion is not a charity; it's about survival."

Prof. Narnia Bohler-Muller, from the Human Sciences Research Council and head of delegation for the South African Women20 engagement group, shared a recorded message advocating for the inclusion of women in ocean economy strategies, conservation efforts, and marine innovation.

Ocean20 Objectives

Reflections from Brazil – Dr. Janice Trott-Duhá (INPO)

Dr. Janice Trott-Duhá from Brazil's Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Oceânicas (INPO) reflected on the origins of Ocean20, highlighting Brazil's 2024 experience leading the initiative (then named Oceans20). She emphasized the success of Brazil's participatory ocean dialogues involving 6,000+ participants across 34 countries and handed over South Africa's "nautical chart" to navigate Ocean20's future. The resultant Communiqué from Brazil's Oceans20 work is available [here](#).

Ocean20 SA Framework – Dr. Tammy Morris (NRF-SAEON)

Dr. Tammy Morris, Ocean20 SA Lead Coordinator from **NRF-SAEON**, introduced South Africa's [Vision and Framework](#) for Ocean Actions in 2025. The initiative will:

- Use a **quadruple helix model** involving academia, business, civil society, and government.
- Focus on **targeted, practical, and inclusive interventions**, such as low-cost coastal technologies, blue finance, and citizen science.
- Align with **global frameworks** (e.g., SDGs, BBNJ Treaty, UN Decade of Ocean Science).
- Extend efforts across **Africa**, in partnership with the **African Union**.

A "[Call for Ocean Actions](#)" was launched to mobilize stakeholders. Early initiatives include:

- **ECON-SA**: A network for early-career ocean professionals across South(ern) Africa.
- **Low-cost sensor technology for Coastal Resilience**: Advancing locally made, affordable ocean sensors. The first workshop around this was held on 3 April 2025, at the ICSHMO Conference and in collaboration with the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA).
- Engagement with the **UN Global Compact** on various potential Ocean Actions including shipping decarbonisation.
- Engagement with the **International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS)**.

Creative Insight – Sea Change Project

Jannes Landschoff (Sea Change Project) shared a heartfelt story about South Africa's kelp forests, blending scientific research with personal connection and biodiversity education. This was followed by a screening of "*Mother Nature in the Boardroom*", a film challenging decision-makers to include nature as an active stakeholder in marine policy and investment.

Panel Discussion: Potential Ocean Actions

Chaired by **Dr. Gilbert Siko** of the DSTI, the panel brought together representatives from government, youth, academia, ocean conservation, and business. Key points discussed included:

- **Youth unemployment and opportunity in ocean sectors:**
Ms. Yanga Malotana highlighted the need to connect ocean opportunities (like offshore wind) to local employment, especially for non-graduates and rural youth. She noted that although climate change ranks low in youth priorities, it offers direct solutions to top concerns: unemployment, education, and safety.
- **Local government engagement:**
Ms. Malotana emphasized the need to build decision-making capacity at municipal levels, where budget execution and implementation often fail due to a lack of awareness of ocean priorities.
- **Value chain development:**
Odwa Mtati (South African International Maritime Institute; SAIMI) described SAIMI's work in defining the oceans economy and mapping value chain opportunities for SMMEs and Black- and women-owned businesses.
- **Ocean literacy and early exposure:**
Mr. Mtati introduced the *Dive In* platform and app, developed to expose learners and young professionals to blue economy careers well before graduation.
- **Call for partnership and action:**
Panelists and audience members were encouraged to move beyond discussion and contribute directly to action planning under the Ocean20 framework.
- **International perspective:**
Mr. Giercksky and Dr. Trott-Duhá emphasized collaboration with the G20's B20 business track and the need to position South Africa as a leader in the global blue economy.

Closing Remarks – Juliet Hermes (NRF-SAEON)

Juliet Hermes, Ocean20 SA Co-lead and NRF-SAEON Egagasini Node Manager, closed the event with a call to action. She echoed the guiding principles of South Africa's G20 Presidency—**solidarity, equality, and sustainability**—and urged participants to ensure that the ocean is not just a subject of conversation, but a **recognized voice in decision-making**.

"The ocean cannot simply be a topic of discussion. It must have a voice at the table too."



She thanked Brazil, partners, and the organizing team, and invited stakeholders to continue shaping the Ocean20 roadmap through direct collaboration and submissions.

Recommendations

The Ocean20 South Africa launch set the stage for a bold, inclusive year of action on ocean sustainability. With a strong focus on intergenerational leadership, regional partnership, innovation, and community empowerment, the initiative signals South Africa's commitment to shaping a globally relevant, locally grounded marine future.

Ocean20 South Africa should look to develop a “Cape Code” for Heads of State as part of the G20 Summit in November 2025. A mechanism to ensure no one country, region or community is left behind is to ensure Ocean Actions include partners in the global South, Africa, Youth and Women representatives. Three recommendation to consider including into the summit document include:

- **Scale financial de-risking mechanisms** to enable more long term profitable economic ocean investments, building on existing and emerging financial initiatives, like green and blue bonds, investment frameworks and funds.
- **Next Generation Partnership for Knowledge.** A number of strong initiatives are established, in the making or emerging as part of the UN Ocean Decade and other collaborative efforts, which could be leveraged to collate best practices on sustainable ocean development.
- **100% Ocean for Humanity:** Building on the good progress of many initiatives, a 100% Well Managed Ocean is called for, where governments are asked to have ocean plans not only for the 30% protected areas, but for all of the ocean space within their EEZ's, to effectively manage all activities, economies and the use of ocean space.

As South Africa carries the Ocean20 torch forward, all sectors are invited to contribute to building an ocean economy that is **just, innovative, and sustainable**.

The Ocean20 Inception Meeting will take place on 28 May 2025 in Mbombela, Mpumalanga. The meeting will progress the initial Ocean Actions established, and begin preparation work for the Communiqué which will be presented to the G20 Heads of State Summit.

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Photo Gallery

