

Ocean20 United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) Side Event Report

Nice, France

09 June 2025



From left to right - Erik Giercksky, Tamaryn Morris, Tanya Brodie-Rudolph, Herland Cerveaux, Seiglinde Gruber, Janice Trotte-Duhá, Yuna Sellami, Zandile Ndhlovu, Bernice Mclean and Juliet Hermes.

Introduction

On 9 June 2025, the [Ocean20](#) social engagement group of [South Africa's G20](#) presidency presented a side event at the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) held in Nice, France. The objective of the session was to highlight the progress made through the Brazilian and South African Ocean20 initiatives, gain traction in terms of Ocean Actions with high level delegates to the UNOC-3 and engage with G20 countries attending the event.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Dion George, Minister for the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries in South Africa, welcomed the chance to address delegates at the Ocean20 side event and commitment of his department in realising the goals and aspirations of the Ocean20 social engagement group. South Africa has a deep connection to the ocean surrounding the country and remains committed to sustainable ocean economy initiatives.

Ms Sanda Ojiambo, CEO and Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, began her remarks with a question to the audience - what if responsible sustainable business practices were the only viable choice? She went further to commend Ocean20 in terms of amplifying African leadership for the ocean, progressing ocean actions through reporting and accountability and highlighting the role blue finance mechanisms can play in the sustainable use of ocean resources.

Ms. Zandile Ndhlovu, Founder and Director of the Black Mermaid Foundation, created a picture of life as a young African woman connecting to the ocean, engaging with its power and training young minds to connect to and look after the ocean as part of their legacy. Her interactions were incredibly inspiring for the audience.

Ocean20 Introduction and Goals for the Side Event

Dr. Tammy Morris, Ocean20 SA Lead Coordinator from **NRF-SAEON**, showcased the events that have taken place thus far through Ocean20 South Africa's year, including the inception of Oceans20 in Brazil and resultant [Communiqué](#), the renaming to Ocean20 to signify One Ocean along with the [Framework Document](#), the [Launch Event](#) which took place on 2 April 2025 in Cape Town and the subsequent [Innovative Technologies for Coastal Resilience](#) workshop on 3 April 2025. The most recent Ocean20 [Inception Meeting](#) (26-28 May 2025) showed how One Ocean needs Many Voices to tell its story, and combined interactions with inland river-based communities to co-create a vision where the ocean becomes a source of inclusive opportunity, not exclusion. The success of these events thus far have shown what we know to be true already - you cannot protect what people feel disconnected from. In light of this, the goals for the UNOC-3 side event were to establish and foster partnerships and collaborations by creating a sustainable future for the ocean through tangible ocean actions.

"It is through the African philosophy of Ubuntu - I am because we are - that we are learning to speak not over one another, but as one."

Panel Discussion: Ocean20 in Action - Uniting voices for shared outcomes of One Ocean

Chaired by **Mr. Erik Giercksky**, Head of the Action Platform for Ocean for the UNGC, the panel brought together representatives from youth, academia, ocean conservation, innovation and business. Key points discussed included:

- **Youth in ocean sectors:**

Ms. Yuna Sellami, a Policy Assistant for the EU Commission, noted that the youth are keen to be engaged and encouraged established researchers, government officials and ocean advocates to take a risk on early career professionals as fully fledged members of teams.

- **International perspective:**

Dr. Janice Trott-Duhá, Director of Infrastructure and Operations at the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Oceânicas, Brazil, emphasized the incredible collaboration between Brazil and South Africa's Ocean20 initiatives and the need to position both countries as leaders in South-South collaborations and within the global blue economy.

- **Business engagement:**

Ms. Ayla Bajwa, Group Senior Vice President of Sustainability, DP World, highlighted the value of Blue Bonds and the progress DP World has made in issuing the first-ever Blue Bond in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The funds will be used for sustainable projects across maritime transport, port infrastructure, eradication of marine pollution and similar projects.

- **Start-ups and innovation:**

Dr Herland Cerveaux, Managing Director of OceanHub Africa, showcased the role of ocean innovators and start-ups in the Blue Economy.

- **African perspective:**

Dr. Bernice Mclean, Senior Program Officer and Blue Economy Lead at the African Union Development Agency (AUDA), highlighted the growing role of Africa in the Blue Economy and the role collaborations have in developing sustainable practices further.

From many voices to collective action

Dr. Sieglinde Gruber, Active Senior Advisor to the EU Commission, launched an initiative around inter-generational dialogues which will be jointly convened between the EU Commission and the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA) in September 2025.

Mr. Erik Giercksky, highlighted the recently launched [Ocean Investment Protocol](#), a framework for financial institutions, policy makers and industry leaders to lead the growth of

the sustainable ocean economy to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14 — Life Below Water — and other related SDGs.

Ms. Tanya Brodie Rudolph, co-lead for the [Toward IPOS](#) (International Platform for Ocean Sustainability) project, officially launched the IPOS project, noting that South Africa would be a signatory to the project later on that day at the cocktail event launch.

Closing Remarks

Prof Juliet Hermes, Ocean20 SA Co-lead and NRF-SAEON Egagasini Node Manager, closed the event. She thanked the organizing team, partners and speakers in preparing for this side event, and invited stakeholders to continue shaping the Ocean20 roadmap through direct collaboration.

“As we look beyond 2030, our call is for equitable resourcing, locally driven capacity strengthening, co-created knowledge, and partnerships that empower — not prescribe. This is not charity. It is justice. It is sustainability. It is Ubuntu.”

Photo Gallery



Left, Opening address by (left) Dr Dion George, Minister for Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DFFE), South Africa (photo: Ken Findlay); (right) Ms Sanda Ojiambo, CEO of the United Nations Global Compact and Assistant Secretary-General for the UN (photo: Janice Trotte-Duhá).



Opening address by Ms Zandile Ndhlovu of the Black Mermaid Foundation (photo: Janice Trotte-Duhá).



Panel discussion, from left to right, Erik Giercksky (standing), Yuna Sellami, Janice Trotte-Duhá, Herland Cerveaux, Ayla Bajwa and Bernice Mclean (photo: Sieglinde Gruber).



Left: Sieglinde Gruber during the launch of the inter-generational dialogues (photo: Sieglinde Gruber). Right: Tanya Brodie Rudolph during the launch of the Toward IPOS project (photo: Janice Trotte-Duhá).