

# Ocean20 South Africa Summit Report

**4-5 November 2025  
Cape Town, South Africa**



**Solidarity**

**Equality**

**Sustainability**

The Ocean20 South Africa Summit, held from 4–5 November 2025 at The Avenue in Cape Town, marked a significant milestone in advancing inclusive and sustainable ocean action under the Ocean20 initiative. Convened under the South African Presidency, the Summit brought together representatives from G20 member states, partner states, policymakers, researchers, civil society, youth leaders, and private-sector innovators to reflect on progress and chart pathways toward an inclusive blue economy.

The programme was guided by Ms. Yanga Malotana, who served as Programme Director.



*Ms. Yanga Malotana leading the Ocean20 South Africa Summit programme.*

## Summit Day 1

The Summit opened with a cultural performance titled “The Soul’s Journey”, delivered in isiZulu by Ms. Mpume Mthombeni, offering an important moment of reflection on South Africa’s cultural and spiritual relationship with the ocean. The performance anchored the Summit in local heritage, reminding participants that the ocean is not only a site of science and policy, but also a space of identity, expression, and intergenerational memory



Cultural performance “The Soul’s Journey” delivered in isiZulu by Ms. Mpume Mthombeni, opening the Ocean20 South Africa Summit.

Following the performance, **Dr. Tammy Morris**, O20 Co-Chair, delivered the opening remarks, reflecting on the achievements of the year, from the April 2025 Ocean20 launch and its campaign to “take the ocean inland,” to the establishment of cross-sector partnerships that have embedded ocean priorities across national, regional, and global development agendas. She highlighted how these collective efforts have strengthened Africa’s voice in shaping the future of sustainable ocean governance.

**Prof Carlos M. Duarte, CEO of the G20 Global Coral Reef R&D Accelerator Platform (CORDAP)**, then provided a project update highlighting global efforts to protect and restore coral reef systems. He outlined the accelerating decline of coral reefs worldwide, noting that reefs support over one billion people and contribute more than USD 2.7 trillion annually to the global economy. Prof Duarte emphasised CORDAP’s role as a G20-mandated initiative advancing research, innovation and capacity building to halt biodiversity loss and restore degraded reef ecosystems. He also shared progress on CORDAP’s international programmes, including cutting-edge R&D solutions, expanded partnerships, and new investments aimed at strengthening coral resilience in a warming climate.

Throughout the venue, artworks celebrating the ocean and its role in sustaining people and ecosystems were displayed. This included art from school students who have participated in the South African Blue Schools programme, scientist artists exhibiting crochet craft of sea surface temperature in the Southern Ocean and the soon-to-be-launched Southern Ocean phytoplankton project, and prints of the winning photography from the [All Atlantic Ocean Photography competition](#) (need to check on exact working). A highlight was the display of the Ocean20 Celebration Tapestry as a culmination of the years’ activities. These installations created an environment that blended science, culture, and creativity, underscoring that ocean sustainability requires not only technical and policy solutions but also imagination, inspiration, and the voices of artists and storytellers.



*Ocean-themed artworks and installations displayed at the Summit, including contributions from Blue Schools learners, scientist-artists, and the Ocean20 Celebration Tapestry..*

The opening day further included an interactive Future Thinking and “Seeds” Workshop led by Prof. Laura Pereira (University of the Witwatersrand). Participants explored actions, innovations, and governance choices, referred to as “seeds”, that could shape positive, sustainable and inclusive ocean futures. The workshop, which incorporated a tour through the Two Oceans Aquarium, encouraged participants to link the ideas discussed in the workshop to real-world experiences and observations of the ocean.

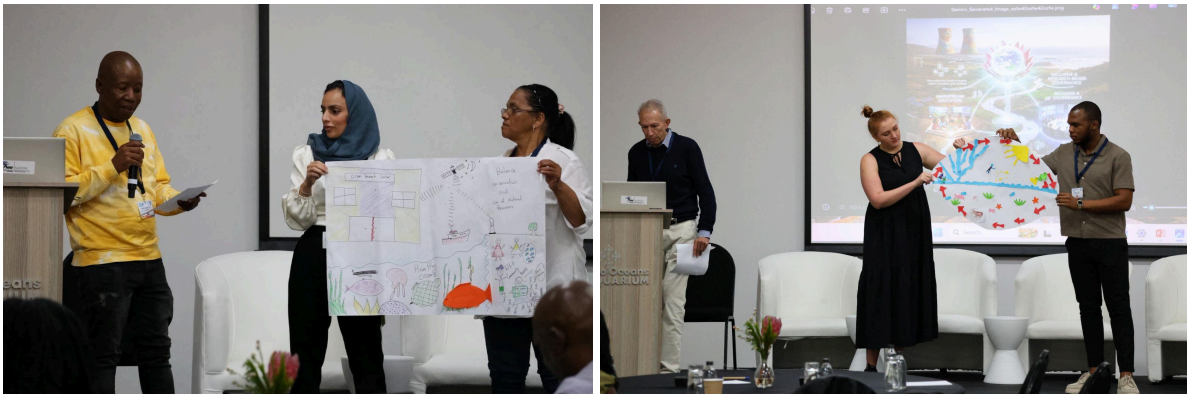


Participants engaging in the Future Thinking and “Seeds” Workshop led by Prof. Laura Pereira (University of the Witwatersrand).

The day concluded with a networking cocktail reception, which provided participants with dedicated time to build connections, continue discussions initiated in the workshop, and strengthen collaborative relationships across institutions, regions, and sectors.

### Summit Day 2

The last day of the O20 Summit transitioned from visioning to deep thematic engagement through four expert-led panel discussions. Following a creative feedback session on the outputs of the workshop on Day 1, the panel sessions explored key dimensions of the blue economy, women’s leadership in fisheries and aquaculture; regenerative tourism; marine spatial planning and ocean governance; and the future of early-career ocean professionals. Together, the panels highlighted the importance of inclusive governance, science-based decision-making, community-centered innovation, and cross-sector collaboration in shaping a sustainable ocean future. The discussions also reflected Ocean20’s core mission: to unite diverse voices and perspectives in designing just, resilient, and evidence-driven ocean solutions.



Participants attending the Ocean20 Launch at the ICSHMO Conference.

**Panel 1:**

**Women Steering the Blue Economy: Empowering Roles in Fisheries and Aquaculture**

**Panel members:** Ms. Mashebane Thosago, Ms. Nadia Scheffer, Ms. Mapule Mthimkhulu, Dr. Bernice Mclean, Mr. Poiho Ramotlatsi, Ms. Dimakatso Setati (Presenter)

**Panel moderator:** Ms. Mathema Makola



*Panel 1 panellists (left to right): Ms Mathema Makola, Mr Poiho Ramotlatsi, Ms Mapule Mthimkhulu, Ms Mashebane Thosago, Ms Nadia Scheffer, and Dr Bernice Mclean.*

**Ms Dimakatso Setati** from the **South African Network for Women Fisheries & Aquaculture (SANWFA)** opened the panel discussion with a presentation on the untapped potential of seaweed farming as a transformative livelihood opportunity for women and youth in coastal communities. She demonstrated how seaweed cultivation offers low-cost entry points into the blue economy while supporting food security, climate resilience, carbon sequestration, and circular value chains. Her presentation underscored that South Africa’s rich diversity of seaweed species creates opportunities for sustainable aquaculture, alternative livelihoods, and local enterprise development, particularly for women who are often excluded from mainstream fisheries.

The panel discussion led by Ms Mathemba Makola underscored that women are not peripheral participants in the blue economy, they are central drivers of innovation, sustainability, and community resilience. Speakers highlighted that although women have long played crucial roles in fisheries and aquaculture, their contributions often remain undervalued. The panel emphasised the need for intentional recognition and investment in women’s leadership across the entire value chain.

Panelists stressed that an inclusive ocean economy must be people-centred and grounded in co-development with those who depend on marine resources for their livelihoods.

Examples were shared of women-led initiatives, such as the **African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET)**, which serves as a collaborative hub where women in fisheries exchange best practices, share experiences, access innovative technologies, and collectively develop solutions to sectoral challenges. It also plays an important advocacy role, amplifying the voices of women and championing issues that directly affect their activities and livelihoods. This initiative demonstrates how women are “doing it for themselves,” leveraging networks, resourcefulness, and collective action to build sustainable enterprises.

Discussions further highlighted the importance of retaining value within South Africa by developing local technologies, strengthening supply chains, and ensuring investment directly benefits coastal communities. Training and capacity-building programmes, including those offered by SANWFA, were highlighted as critical in enabling women to enter and progress within these sectors.

Overall, the panel affirmed that Africa’s blue economy can only flourish when it is inclusive and when women, who are already leaders and knowledge holders, are equipped with the tools, partnerships, and enabling policy environments needed to scale their impact.

**Panel 2:**

**Regenerative Tourism: Engaging both the Public and Private Sector in Ocean Stewardship**

**Panel members:** Prof. Ameer A. Eweida, AEON Collective; Dr. Maryam Ficociello, Red Sea Global; Ms. Estelle van der Merwe, OCEAN Action Network

**Panel moderator:** Ms. Safiyya Sedick - NRF SAEON, South Africa



Panel 2 panellists (left to right): Ms Estelle van der Merwe, Prof Ameer A. Eweida, Dr Maryam Ficociello, and Ms Safiyya Sedick.

The panel highlighted regenerative tourism as an emerging approach that moves beyond sustainability toward actively restoring and enhancing marine ecosystems while supporting economic growth and community well-being. Speakers noted its strong alignment with the G20 and Ocean20 vision for inclusive and sustainable ocean economies, emphasising the role of science-based management, innovative financing, and cross-sector collaboration.

Discussions underscored that shifting from maintaining to regenerating ocean ecosystems requires strategic investment in youth and job creation, a deeper understanding of ecological thresholds and biodiversity value, and the active engagement of coastal communities through co-designed, locally relevant initiatives. Panelists emphasised that innovation in this space must lead to measurable outcomes and bankable projects that attract investors. Ensuring transparency and establishing long-term economic incentives were identified as key to increasing private sector participation. The Fish Net Recycling Project, led by OCEAN Action Network, was noted as a compelling example of circular economy innovation. This pioneering initiative demonstrates how sustained incentives can mobilise investment and create value within the sector by transforming discarded fishing nets by turning it into raw material for high value plastic products.

Overall, the session concluded that regenerative tourism and private sector engagement presents a viable pathway to restore ocean health while fostering resilient, thriving coastal communities and inclusive blue economies.

**Panel 3:**

**Enhancing the capacity of global ocean governance through Marine Spatial Planning and other tools**

**Panel members:** Ms Yan Li, China Oceanic Development Foundation; Dr. Shannon Hampton, Independent Consultant; Dr. Samantha Petersen, WWF-SA; Dr. Diane Foster, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute

**Panel moderator:** Ms. Safiyya Sedick - NRF SAEON, South Africa



*Panel 3 panellists (left to right): Dr Samantha Petersen, Dr Shannon Hampton, Ms Yan Li, Dr Diane Foster, and Ms Safiyya Sedick.*

The panel emphasised that the ocean is not only a shared resource but a shared responsibility where there is a growing need for integrated, inclusive, and science-based governance. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is a key tool to guide this integration enabling coordination across sectors and jurisdictions providing a framework for translating global ocean commitments into actionable, place-based decisions, while complementary tools such as ocean accounting can strengthen global and regional governance.

Speakers stressed that MSP should not be viewed solely as a technical exercise but as a process of institutional transformation and collaboration. When embedded within broader governance systems, MSP can unlock financial opportunities, strengthen institutional capacity, and enhance the resilience of coastal cities. Lessons from China’s implementation point to the value of nature-based solutions, whole-system planning, and maintaining ecological thresholds, while the ongoing development of MSP frameworks across several countries in Africa highlight the importance of peer learning and regionally adapted approaches over the replication of external models. The Western Indian Ocean, with its diversity of economic activities, was cited as a globally significant

region where MSP can serve as the backbone for integrated and climate-resilient ocean governance.

The panel also noted that ocean accounting offers a standardised means to quantify ocean value but must incorporate social and ecosystem service dimensions within spatial trade-offs. As the true value of the ocean often remains outside national accounts, there was a call for hybrid financing and partnership models that link public, private, and community actors and ensure that MSP delivers both ecological outcomes and social equity. Finally, platforms such as the G20 and Ocean20 can facilitate stronger integration of developing countries into global ocean data and planning systems, ensuring that local communities benefit directly from ocean governance processes.

**Panel 4:**

**Early career ocean professionals on the future of ECOPs**

**Panel members:** Ms. Sina Wallchuss; Mr. Khotso Mogotlane; Ms. Maggie Poulos; Ms. Philile Mvula

**Panel moderators:** Dr. Riesna Audh (NRF-SAEON) and Dr. Mia Strand (Nelson Mandela University)



*Panel 4 panellists (left to right): Dr Riesna Audh, Dr Mia Strand, Ms Maggie Poulos, Mr Khotso Mogotlane, Ms Philile Mvula, and Ms Sina Wallchuss.*

The final panel brought together Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) to reflect on the visions and themes developed during the Future Thinking workshop and to examine the evolving role of emerging leaders in shaping ocean governance. The session opened with an interactive poll led by Dr. Riesna Audh, designed to gain insight into “who is in the room.” The poll revealed a diverse audience ranging from undergraduate students and early-career researchers to senior

academics, practitioners, and established professionals. This diversity underscored a key message that emerged throughout the discussion - the challenges experienced by ECOPs often persist across career stages, and professional growth in the ocean sector is not linear nor strictly age-dependent.

Panelists and audience members highlighted several systemic barriers facing ECOPs, including a lack of transparency around career pathways post-degree, limited access to funding and long-term opportunities, and the undervaluing or overlooking of ECOP contributions in research, governance, and policy processes. One participant noted that many pressures, such as navigating unstable career structures or balancing competing expectations, continue even after transitioning into more senior roles, reinforcing the need for institutional reforms that address these challenges holistically.

A recurring theme was the importance of meaningful inclusion of ECOPs in national, regional, and global conversations on ocean sustainability. Panelists emphasised that young professionals bring critical knowledge, innovation, and lived experience that can strengthen policy development and ensure the longevity of ocean governance frameworks. Their participation should extend beyond token representation to genuine engagement in decision-making spaces.

The role of mentorship emerged as another central pillar. Participants stressed that structured, accessible mentorship mechanisms, across institutions, disciplines, and geographies, are essential for supporting ECOP development, building confidence, and enabling sustained contributions to the ocean sector. This includes mentorship that is both formal (guided programmes) and informal (peer and community-based support).

Overall, the discussion reinforced that cultivating the next generation of ocean leaders requires intentional investment, transparent career systems, supportive networks, and equitable access to opportunities. The panel concluded that empowering ECOPs is not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic priority for building resilient, innovative, and future-ready ocean governance systems.

## Handover Ceremony



*Ocean20 Communiqué being handed over to US delegate (left to right): Dr Gilbert Siko (DSTI), Dr Tammy Morris, Dr Diane Foster (Woodshole Oceanic Institute, USA), and Mr Imraan Patel (DSTI).*

The Ocean20 South Africa Summit concluded with a high-level closing session reflecting on the achievements of the South African Ocean20 Chairship and the collective momentum built throughout the year. Dr. Tammy Morris presented the final Ocean20 Communiqué, reaffirming the group’s commitment to equity, science-based decision-making, strengthened partnerships, and inclusive ocean governance.

Representing the incoming 2026 Ocean20 Chairship, Dr. Diane Foster (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution) delivered remarks on behalf of the United States. She commended South Africa for its leadership, noting that its Presidency “strengthened Ocean20 while deepening the world’s understanding that the health of the ocean is inseparable from the health of people and the planet.” She emphasised the United States’ commitment to carrying forward the Ocean20 vision, highlighting the importance of continuity through the G20 Troika and the need to “sustain momentum, deepen partnerships, and ensure that science continues to inform action” as the process moves into its next phase.

This was followed by a statement from Mr. Imraan Patel, Deputy Director-General of South Africa’s Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI). He reflected on South Africa’s historic role as the first African nation to host the G20 Presidency, stating that the past year had “elevated the voice of Africa” and demonstrated the country’s commitment to placing the ocean at the heart of sustainable development. He noted that Ocean20 had successfully connected communities, scientists, policymakers, and industry “from coastal towns to inland provinces,” reinforcing that “the ocean story is everyone’s story.” Mr. Patel also highlighted the importance of continued



collaboration, both through the Troika and through strengthened relationships across the global social sector.

The formal handover of Ocean20 leadership to the United States marked the conclusion of South Africa's tenure, closing a year defined by inclusive engagement, expanded partnerships, and a strong emphasis on equity, inclusion, and sustainable ocean development. Delegates expressed confidence that the groundwork laid in 2025—including the nine briefing notes and calls to action—would continue to inform global ocean priorities well beyond the end of South Africa's Presidency.

