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Lisbon launches the most decisive decade for the ocean (and for the human species)

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Last week the Portuguese capital hosted the UN Ocean Conference which, with more than 7,000 attendees, sought to launch a new chapter of global action to protect the big blue.



The ICM-CSIC was part of the Spanish delegation attending the conference / ICM-CSIC.

Nobody wanted to miss the meeting, whose main objective was to initiate a new chapter of global action to protect the big blue.

The [Institut de Ciències del Mar](#) (ICM-CSIC) from Barcelona was part of the Spanish delegation, representing the Ministry of Science and Innovation. Representatives from other ministries, such as the Ministry of Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and the Urban Agenda, also attended the meeting.

The great ocean challenges

In total, more than 7,000 people from almost 150 countries attended the conference looking for innovative solutions for a more sustainable management of the ocean. Threats to ocean health, ecology, economics and governance dominated many of the sessions, but other issues such as ocean acidification and pollution, illegal fishing and habitats and biodiversity loss were also addressed.

But it could not be otherwise, since seas and oceans generate approximately half of the oxygen we breathe and have absorbed much of the excess heat we have generated since the beginning of the industrial revolution, which makes them our greatest ally in the fight against the climate crisis.

António Guterres, the UN general secretary, inaugurated the conference by declaring an "ocean emergency" that, he warned, must be stopped as soon as possible because, as he said, "we cannot have a healthy planet without a healthy ocean". "We have to turn the tide," stressed.

"There are less than 10 years left to reverse the current ocean trend," warned the UNESCO Director-General **Audrey Azoulay**, who called on the international community to "urgently" step up action to better understand and protect the oceans. Also, she regretted that "the ocean still in the blind spot of public awareness and policies".

well as a huge source of resources that until now we have used irrationally, with the risks that this entails".

Vanessa Sarah Salvo, the Institute's Head of International Relations, who was able to present the *Ocean Cities Network* Programme at the Spanish delegation's side-event, underlined the fact that the round table discussions put special emphasis on the need for collaboration between actors from different sectors and disciplines in the search for effective solutions.

Finally, **Eve Galimany**, researcher at the ICATMAR and the ICM-CSIC, celebrates the fact that the summit has helped to put science in the spotlight and show the world that it is essential to carry out a more sustainable management of the resources provided by the ocean to improve the marine ecosystems' health.

The summit's key points

The most repeated words during the UNOC22 were "international, multidisciplinary and intergenerational collaboration", "urgency" and "we don't have time". This is because if we do not act now, coral reefs will probably be gone before the end of the century, and essential coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and wetlands will continue to degrade, among many other things.

In this regard, some small island states (commonly known as SIDS) that still have pristine systems, such as Palau or tiny Tuvalu, raised their hands in Lisbon to condemn the "massive destruction" and loss of human life caused by rising sea levels and the disappearance of fishing activity.

Pollution, in the spotlight

Pollution, particularly plastic pollution, was the focus of almost every session during the summit. It is estimated that, if we continue to dump as many tonnes of plastic into the sea as we do now -around 8 tonnes every year-, by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea.

developed by the *Ocean Cities Network* to reduce pollution. This international network of cities is coordinated by the ICM-CSIC and aims to promote more sustainable ocean cities where political decisions will be based on scientific data.

Finally, there was time to celebrate the fact that, after 20 years of negotiations, the [World Trade Organization](#) has reached an agreement with member states to end subsidies for the most destructive and impactful fishing gear in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Acidification, another hot spot

Among the milestones and agreements of the conference, it is worth highlighting the United States' adherence to the [International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification](#) (OA Alliance), an international alliance to protect coastal communities from acidification and other climate impacts. In this regard, the CSIC presented what is being done by the Interdisciplinary Thematic Platform 'Oceans' to minimise and combat acidification.

Some economic instruments that already exist and are available to users to tackle this and other ocean threats were also presented, such as the World Economic Forum's [Problue](#) fund, and cases such as the "Hermandad" marine reserve in the Galapagos Islands, which since last March has 5.5% more protected surface area managed jointly by Ecuador, Panama, Colombia and Costa Rica, were discussed.

Conference milestones

The conference laid the groundwork for a consensus on the International Oceans Treaty, an agreement to regulate international waters, underwater mining and protect at least 30% of the oceans by 2030. This text will be negotiated in New York at the end of August.

We are, as states Guterres, facing an "ocean emergency", and given the close relationship between our future and that of the ocean, there is nothing we can do but fight this emergency. "Our ocean, our future, our responsibility", says the final

equitable planet for many more years.

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