



# DECADE COORDINATION OFFICE FOR OCEAN DATA SHARING ONLINE HELP DESK EXPERT GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

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## 1. Context

Data, information and knowledge are recognized as essential elements for the success of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the ‘Ocean Decade’), and are crucial in protecting and conserving ocean ecosystems, while sustainably managing ocean resources. Despite increasing data from multiple sources, we still have major data and knowledge gaps to fill and challenges to address. In order to address the Ocean Decade Challenges, the Ocean Decade’s coordination bodies actively respond and contribute to long lasting solutions within and beyond the Decade’s 2030 timeline. In 2023, the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) launched the Ocean Decade Vision 2030, a strategic ambition setting process to identify what success looks like for each of the ten Decade Challenges. Among these, Challenges 7 and 8—on expanding the Global Ocean Observation System, and creating a digital representation of the Ocean respectively—are targeted to inform decision- and policy-making, and underpin all Decade challenges. Acting as an advisory role, the Data Coordination Group was created to inform and guide the progress towards a digital ocean ecosystem and delivered the Ocean Decade Data & Information Strategy<sup>1</sup>. This strategy helps to transform the way ocean data and information are produced, shared, managed and used globally and equitably. To address privately held data, the Corporate Data Group was created to enable private companies to unlock and share their ocean data for the benefit of ocean science.

## 2. About the DCO-ODS

The [Decade Coordination Office for Ocean Data Sharing \(DCO-ODS\)](#) works closely with Decade Coordination Bodies, Data Coordination Group, Corporate Data Group, and Vision 2030 Working Groups to support Decade Actions with data challenges. These include assisting decade actors with data and information challenges and opportunities, supporting capacity development, monitoring progress, mobilizing resources and facilitating new partnerships within the framework of the Ocean Decade.

## 3. About the Online Help Desk

The Online Data Help Desk, operating as an interactive feature of the DCO-ODS website, provides a user-friendly platform where visitors can seek answers to specific questions related to their data needs. It aims to empower individuals to adopt best practices in data utilisation, sharing and discovery. The help-desk will be supported by a behind-the-scenes **voluntary distributed team of data experts**, who will respond to users' inquiries, facilitated by the DCO to ensure a prompt and efficient resolution.

<sup>1</sup> <https://oceandatasharing-dco.org/read-ocean-decade-data-information-strategy/>



The Online Data Help Desk stands as a collaborative platform that reflects DCO-ODS's commitment to promoting accessibility, transparency and proficiency in data sharing in the public domain.

Simultaneously, the questions submitted to the Online Data Help Desk shall provide valuable analytics. This data-driven approach allows the DCO-ODS to understand the most common data concerns encountered by end-users, enabling continuous enhancement of the support services and better addressing the evolving needs of the ocean data-sharing community in the Decade.

## 4. Roles, responsibilities and Membership of the Expert Group

To support the mission of the Online Data Help Desk, the DCO-ODS is currently seeking volunteers to participate in the Expert Group. This Expert Group will be instrumental in providing informed and effective responses to end users' queries directed to them by the DCO. The Expert Group will carry out its work voluntarily in real-time or offline and both virtually and in-person (where possible) during important ocean events via a designated data help-desk booth.

### 4.1 Tasks

The data expert group, coordinated by the DCO-ODS, will contribute to collective knowledge exchange in the domain of ocean data sharing, and help implement the following tasks as part of the framework methodology and timeline for the Ocean Decade:

- Provide valuable insights and solutions based on their area of expertise.
- Support alignment with data principles such as FAIR, CARE and TRUST
- Whenever tagged, respond to user inquiries related to data use, sharing, and discovery within 5 working days by sub-group. During important events, experts may be asked to volunteer to support on-site/ offline, and respond in shorter turn-around-times.
- Collaborate with a diverse team of experts to enhance the support services.
- Contribute to the continuous improvement of the Online Data Help Desk.
- Review and provide input/feedback to the draft working/summary technical report prepared by the DCO-ODS, under the guidance of and with support from the sub-group lead and DCO-ODS.

### 4.2 Membership

Experts will be allocated in sub-groups according to their expertise in marine (data) science (e.g. marine biology, marine geology, physical oceanography, marine chemistry, ocean remote sensing, maritime activities, citizen science, marine environmental management, marine socioeconomics, etc.) or technical field (Cloud Computing, GIS, Artificial Intelligence, data processing, metadata, data product development, etc.). Experts will be nominated by the Lead of the DCO-ODS in consultation with the DCU, IODE project office and relevant entities, including other DCO/DCC. The final Expert Group database, comprising approximately 20 experts, will be managed and maintained by the DCO-ODS and updated regularly.

The composition of the Expert Group members will primarily be:

- Experts who are already affiliated with specific Decade Data Groups and IOC data management bodies: IOC-UNESCO [Data Coordination Group](#), the [Data Strategy Implementation Group](#), the [Vision 2030 Working Group 8](#), IOC's project office for International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE) and experts from its network of National

- Oceanographic Data Centres and Associated Data Units, and possibly also GOOS (Global Ocean Observing System), Regional Data Services (e.g. Copernicus Marine, EMODnet, ...);
- Experts who are already affiliated with specific Decade Coordination Bodies and activities: DCU, DCOs/Decade Coordination Center (DCC), Decade Implementing Partners (DIP), programme/project/activity/contribution
  - Decade Programmes and Actions
  - Other volunteer marine domain data experts

## 5. Mode of Operation

The term of the membership of the Expert Group will be for two years, but can be renewed after each two-year cycle. Every two years the Expert Group profile could be updated based on the evaluation of the group work, availability and community needs.

The Expert Group will hold semi-regular online meetings (at least every six-months), facilitated by the DCO to review feedback and direction. The chair of DCO-ODS will determine the appropriate time to meet based on the operational situation.

Each sub-group elects one sub-group lead nominated by the chair of DCO-ODS.

Every two years members will contribute to a working/summary technical report of the sub-group prepared by the DCO-ODS for evaluation of the service provided.

While there is no financial support provided to members of the Expert Group, experts will be profiled via the DCO-ODS website and will be contributing to the collective Decade ambitions, enshrined in the Data and Information Strategy and supporting FAIR, CARE and TRUST data sharing in the broader context of ocean sustainability. Additionally, being part of the data-sharing Expert Group offers the opportunity for members to exchange knowledge and best-practice, identify opportunities for collaboration and enhance their visibility as experts in their respective fields.

Members possess the autonomy to determine whether they would like to extend their term of engagement after two years.

Members may step-down at any time during the period but would be encouraged to help identify possible alternates.

### 5.1 Governance

The Expert Group will be managed and facilitated by the DCO-ODS, according to the Terms of Reference as outlined.

### 5.2 Development Plan

#### 5.2.1 Initial stage (Launch of online data helpdesk to UN Ocean Conference 2024)

- In the initial stage, all inquiries collected from the online helpdesk will be directed to the [oceandatasharing@unesco.org](mailto:oceandatasharing@unesco.org) email address and will be sorted manually.
- The inquiries will be redirected to subject-matter experts who have been identified and assessed for their competence to effectively address the respective questions.
- Information collected from the online question form can be exported from the back-end dashboard for manual analysis.



- Meanwhile, the DCO-ODS team shall explore available sources of IT Service Management (ITSM) tools that could assist in automating ticketing and question analytics.

### 5.2.2 Future development

- To optimise operational efficiency and maximise the capacity of the online data helpdesk, the DCO-ODS aims to identify a suitable ITSM software for integration in the next phase of development. This process will be guided by professional advice obtained via IODE, Decade Actions and data experts in the field.
- Following the successful integration of the ITSM software, data experts, already organised into sub-groups corresponding to their areas of expertise, will be synchronised with pre-defined categories within the automated ticket system of the chosen software. Consequently, when an inquiry is received, the system will seamlessly identify the relevant 'category' of the question and autonomously assign a ticket to all pertinent experts within the specific sub-group.
- This strategic assignment ensures that each expert is appropriately tagged to address queries in their respective domains, streamlining the data support process and optimising the overall functionality of the Data Helpdesk.