

Small Islands & Sustainable Development Goal 14

Q&A with Peter Thomson

President of the United Nations General Assembly



Many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) believe they should be called 'Large Ocean States' because they have vast ocean spaces within their Exclusive Economic Zones. These ocean areas are, on average, around 28 times greater than their actual land space.

The 14th of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources. However, most SIDS still lack the capacity to collect and use the data needed to build effective ocean policies and strengthen the sustainable management of their ocean resources.

On 13 June 2016, the United Nations General Assembly elected Fiji's Peter Thomson to serve as President of its seventy-first session, which runs from September 2016 to September 2017. In this brief Q&A we ask Mr Thomson about the importance of building greater capacity in ocean science in all SIDS.

Why is it important for Small Island Developing States to build capacity in ocean science?

Many SIDS are custodians of some of the world's richest biodiversity and marine resources but they continue to face the major challenge of insufficient human and institutional capacity in ocean management, research, and data collection. Building capacity in ocean science will enable SIDS to make informed decisions on how to conserve, protect, manage and sustainably use the ocean and its resources. This is an essential component of our action to implement and report on SDG14.

Marine science and technology can contribute towards more informed decision-making on a broad range of ocean and marine resource issues. Scientific activities provide the necessary data and information to allow SIDS to effectively designate managed and protected areas, enhance integrated coastal management, and strengthen the sustainable management of their marine resources.

Why is it important to support efforts by SIDS to meet SDG14?

The adoption of SDG14 as part of the 17 universal SDGs of the 2030 Agenda was a watershed moment for the momentum needed to push action to reverse the decline in the health of our ocean. SDG14 demands the authoritative assistance and knowledge the IOC provides in ensuring the effective management of ocean resources and coastal ecosystems. Therefore IOC's efforts in the implementation, follow up and review of SDG14 will be crucial, especially for SIDS given their existing capacity and resource constraints.

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A key opportunity is the upcoming UN Ocean Conference on the implementation of SDG14 which will be held from 5-9 June 2017 at the United Nations in New York. It is hoped that this conference could be a game changer in reversing the decline of the health of our oceans. It will bring to the UN key decision-makers and stakeholders including: UN Member States; civil society; the private sector; and philanthropic organizations, to produce the projects and partnerships that will ensure the implementation of SDG14. This provides an ideal opportunity to present IOC's critical role in addressing ocean issues to key decision-makers.

How can IOC support SIDS to measure their performance against SDG14?

The IOC has an important role to play in key areas needed for implementing SDG14, particularly capacity development and technology transfer. Tracking progress on the SDGs requires collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of a large amount of data and statistics at the national, regional and global level. This will be difficult for many countries, even for large developed states, so it will be particularly challenging for SIDS given their existing capacity constraints.

It is important to identify the specific needs through discussions with those institutions already working to build the capacity of SIDS to measure their performance on SDG14. In the SAMOA (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action) Pathway document these states have called for the support of the international community through launching new partnership initiatives or scaling up existing initiatives. They have asked for assistance in the provision of appropriate financial

and technical support and capacity building to improve the data collection and statistical analysis required to enable them to effectively plan, follow up on, and evaluate the implementation of internationally agreed development goals.

In the SAMOA Pathway SIDS have highlighted the need to undertake marine scientific research and develop technological capacity through the provision of technical assistance and the establishment of dedicated regional oceanographic centres. SIDS can also benefit from building capacity to use ecosystem valuation as a tool for the protection and management of fragile ecosystems in coastal areas. Supporting greater cooperation on scientific ocean research among SIDS and developing ocean science programmes in universities will also be important steps in institutionalising the capacity building support within all SIDS countries.

How can SIDS develop the scientific capacity needed to strengthen national ocean policies?

It is important that the development of strong national policies is driven by the countries themselves. IOC assistance should be welcomed and encouraged but the lack of ocean science experts is just one factor. We need to look at how IOC support for capacity building in SIDS assists with implementation of the SDG14, and at the same time helps with implementation of the other SDGs. Given the important role the ocean plays in addressing the environmental, economic and social dimensions of SIDS' sustainable development needs, emphasis should be given to the need for a more coordinated approach at the national level to address oceans issues.