

Lessons learned from the second cycle of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

Input from the secretariat

A. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 74/19, requested the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole to consider the lessons learned from the second cycle of the Regular Process, including with regard to the duration of the cycle and its outputs, in line with the modalities set forth in paragraph 282 of resolution 70/235 and on the basis of input received from Member States and other participants in the Ad Hoc Working Group and the Group of Experts, as well as from the secretariat, and also requested the Bureau to inform the Ad Hoc Working Group of the views received and to circulate that information in advance of the thirteenth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

2. This document contains input from the secretariat regarding the activities undertaken during the second cycle, on lessons learned from the second cycle, and suggestions, where appropriate, with a view to improving the operation of the third cycle. It also aims to synthesize the input received from Member States and other participants in the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole and the Group of Experts. The structure of the document broadly follows the structure of the programme of work for the period 2017-2020 for the second cycle of the Regular Process.

B. Overview of the second cycle

3. In its resolution 70/235, the General Assembly decided to launch the second cycle of the Regular Process. The following year, in resolution 71/257, it decided that the second cycle would cover five years, from 2016 to 2020.

4. The overall structure and institutional arrangements for the Regular Process remained largely similar from the first cycle to the second. The Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole oversaw and guided the Regular Process and facilitated the delivery of the outputs of the programme of work for the period 2017-2020 of the Regular Process. The Bureau continued to put into practice the decisions and guidance of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole during the intersessional period. The work outlined in the programme of work was carried out by the Group of Experts, with the support of members of the Pool of Experts and the assistance of the secretariat.

5. Different from the first cycle, resources were secured, including from the regular budget of the United Nations, for the programme of work for the period 2017-2020 for the second cycle of the Regular Process. The need of dedicated resources to be allocated for the implementation of the second cycle was one of the main lessons learned from the first cycle. The budget for the second cycle included, *inter alia*, funding for two posts for the secretariat of the Regular Process, for the development and maintenance of a website, travel funds for experts to attend meetings

and regional workshops, and funds to edit and translate the outputs of the second cycle into all official languages of the United Nations.

6. In the second cycle, a more clearly defined mechanism for appointment to the Pool of Experts was developed, taking into account the lessons learned from the first cycle. This was later revised to further streamline and simplify the nomination process. This, along with the appointment of National Focal Points for the Regular Process, were essential to the establishment and growth of the Pool of Experts for the second cycle.

7. More activities were also carried out during the second cycle, including the production of technical abstracts from the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment (First world ocean assessment, WOA I), the holding of a two-day multi-stakeholder dialogue and the conduct of outreach and awareness-raising activities, including in the margins of several ocean-related intergovernmental meetings. The number of regional workshops held increased from eight to 12. Two separate meetings of the writing teams were also organized in New York.

8. The situation of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its impacts requested many activities during the last year of the second cycle being conducted in an adapted manner, including through the extensive use of web-based working methods. Many efforts were made by States, the Group of Experts, members of writing teams and the secretariat to minimize the impacts of the situation on the implementation of the second cycle. As a result, the implementation of the second cycle, in particular the preparation of the second world ocean assessment (WOA II), remained on schedule. It is noted, however, that the situation may have impacted the ability of some States to provide input during the State review process and of stakeholders to provide input on lessons learned. In view of these developments, the need for more extensive use of web-based working methods, in particular during the early stages of the third cycle, was highlighted.

C. Overall operation

Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

9. During the second cycle, the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole has been meeting once a year, with additional meetings as necessary. Until the end of the second cycle, the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole will have held 8 meetings during the second cycle. An average of 50 Member States participated in these meetings, varying from 31 (the Ninth meeting) to 63 (the Seventh meeting) Member States participating. The length of these meetings has varied from two (most meetings) to five days (the Seventh meeting). As the secretariat of the Regular Process, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) of the Office of Legal Affairs provided support to the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, within its available resources, including with regard to invitations to the meetings and the preparation of pre-session, in-session and post-session documentation. It also prepared the notes for the Co-Chairs and facilitated the appointment of the Co-Chairs by the President of the General Assembly.

10. Going forward, it is suggested that additional resources be made available to support the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, which should allow it to hold one calendar meeting with full conference services each year, with the flexibility to hold additional meetings

as necessary. Such support, together with better communication and increased outreach and engagement activities, may help increase the participation in the meetings and work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, and thus contributing to the strengthening of the science-policy interface embedded in the Regular Process.

Bureau

11. During the second cycle, the Bureau generally met monthly for up to 3 hours to put into practice the decisions of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole and to provide guidance during intersessional periods. The Bureau also made decisions by silence procedure between meetings.

12. The Bureau has been continuously improving its working methods over the course of the second cycle. Proposals made by Bureau members resulted in the use of the silence procedure for taking decisions between meetings, the development of procedures for notification of meeting, and the standardization of the summary records of the proceedings of its meetings. A practice was also developed in the latter part of the cycle whereby the Joint Coordinators remotely participated in at least part of the Bureau meetings to provide updates on the progress in the preparation of WOA II. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bureau meetings have been held successfully by virtual means.

13. The Bureau might wish to further review and improve its working methods and related practices on a continuous basis, while maintaining those which proved to be successful during the second cycle. Consideration might be given to codifying the working methods and related practices of the Bureau to facilitate the work of Bureau members and the secretariat.

Group of Experts

14. During the second cycle, the secretariat continued to provide support to the Group of Experts, including through administrative services such as the management of the voluntary trust fund and travel arrangements, technical support such as for the use of common online collaboration platforms, secretariat services for its in-person and virtual meetings, as well as facilitating communication between the Group of Experts and the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, the Bureau and the writing teams. In this regard, the following lessons learned are noted:

Constitution and composition of the Group of Experts

15. The General Assembly, in paragraph 287 of its resolution 70/235, requested the Secretary-General to invite the Chairs of the regional groups to constitute a group of experts, ensuring adequate expertise and geographical distribution, comprising a maximum of 25 experts, with no more than five experts per regional group. Currently, the Group of Experts consists of 19 members: five each from the African Group, the Asia-Pacific Group and the Western European and Others Group, three from the Eastern European Group, and one from the Latin American and Caribbean Group; 12 members are men and seven are women; and most members are natural scientists.

16. It has been very challenging for the Group of Experts to manage its increasing workload with its current size of 19 members, which has become a major impediment to the effective

functioning of the Group of Experts. Going forward, it would be helpful to review and adapt the procedures for the constitution of the Group of Experts, as appropriate, with a view to ensuring that the Group of Experts operates with full capacity, while ensuring adequate expertise, geographical distribution and gender balance. It would also be advisable to develop a list of required expertise in the Group of Experts to facilitate the nomination of experts.

Database on members of the Group of Experts

17. An online database was developed during the second cycle on the website of the Regular Process to provide detailed information on the expertise of the members of the Group of Experts, which helped enhance transparency in the work of the Group of Experts. The information in this database was maintained by the members of the Group of Experts, but not all members provided their information in this database.

18. For future cycles, it seems advisable that nomination of an expert to the Group of Experts be accompanied by a statement of qualification or curriculum vitae providing detailed information on the expert's qualifications and expertise in fields relevant to the work of the Group of Experts. The database on members of the Group of Experts can be maintained by the secretariat with information provided upon their nomination.

Workload of the Joint Coordinators

19. In accordance with the terms of reference of the Group of Experts, two coordinators, one from a developed country and one from a developing country, were appointed to jointly coordinate the tasks allocated to the Group of Experts. During the second cycle, the Joint Coordinators discharged this role in addition to many other tasks, including performing their functions as lead or co-lead members for several chapters of WOA II, as well as attending and reporting to the meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole and the Bureau.

20. It became evident during the second cycle that balancing these responsibilities and workloads, in addition to their other responsibilities, was very challenging for both Joint Coordinators. The Group of Experts therefore decided to appoint a third person as an advisor to the Joint Coordinators, whose role was largely to coordinate the efforts of the Group of Experts while the Joint Coordinators worked on the chapters they were leading or co-leading.

21. The experiences during the second cycle suggest that additional support for the Joint Coordinators would be needed going forward. It seems advisable that deputies to the Joint Coordinators be appointed to support the coordination of the Group of Experts. Strengthening the secretariat would also allow it to have the capacity to provide additional support to the Joint Coordinators.

Challenges related to in-person meetings

22. During the second cycle, the Group of Experts met in person up to twice per year. The Joint Coordinators were also invited to attend the meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole. The in-person meetings of the Group of Experts were held in the DOALOS conference room when it was available. The participation of members from developing countries in these meetings were funded by the Regular Process budget.

23. Some members of the Group of Experts had at times indicated that they found it difficult to attend these meetings due to funding, visa, travel authorization or other logistics challenges. Overall, securing funding to travel was the major challenge for members from developed countries, and administrative issues were the major challenge for members from developing countries.

24. Given the importance of these in-person meetings, it would be beneficial to consider measures that would further facilitate the attendance by members of the Group of Experts to these meetings, encouraging States to facilitate the travel by members of the Group of Experts, and establishing mechanisms to provide funding support for members of the Group of Experts from developed countries when necessary.

Challenges related to communication and online collaboration

25. During the second cycle, United Connections and Microsoft SharePoint were used successively to provide a platform for all members of the Group of Experts to connect and work jointly on documents. This greatly facilitated the work of the Group of Experts between in-person meetings. However, not all members of the Group of Experts were always able to use these platforms due to technical limitations such as limited internet speed and irregular internet access. As a result, communication and online collaboration between members of the Group of Experts still heavily relied on emails and teleconferences, which in many cases cost efficiency. Some members also indicated at times that they were not able to participate in teleconferences due to similar technical limitations.

26. Going forward, a common platform for communication and online collaboration that is accessible by all members of the Group of Experts would be needed, in particular in circumstances where more extensive use of web-based working methods is necessary. Additional resources should be made available to ensure that all members of Group of Experts would have adequate tools, necessary training and technical support to access and use such a platform.

Focal points

27. During the second cycle, States were invited to designate, by 31 May 2017, national focal points (NFPs) to facilitate the implementation of the programme of work for the period 2017-2020 of the second cycle, in particular with respect to the nomination process for additional experts to the Pool of Experts, swift communication between the scientific community, the Group of Experts, the Pool of Experts, the Bureau and the secretariat of the Regular Process and awareness-raising. During the second cycle, 67 States have designated NFPs, which significantly facilitated the nomination of experts from these States to the Pool of Experts and communication with them.

28. However, many States have yet to designate NFPs. The potential of NFPs in facilitating the overall operation of the Regular Process have yet to be fully realized. While the Terms of Reference for NFPs provided that the secretariat would hold regular virtual meetings with NFPs as needed and that communications between NFPs, the secretariat and the Group of Experts should be transmitted through a database that could be accessed electronically through the website of the Regular Process, no such meetings were held and no such database used due to

the limited capacity of the secretariat and that no resources were made available in this regard. Meanwhile, intergovernmental organizations were not invited to designate focal points in spite of their important role in facilitating communication with many experts, disseminating information and awareness-raising.

29. Going forward, it would be important to further strengthen the network of focal points, including by encouraging further designation of NFPs by States that have not done so, and inviting the secretariats of relevant United Nations specialized agencies, programmes, funds and bodies and the secretariats of related organizations and conventions to also designate focal points. It is suggested that the secretariat contact all NFPs for the second cycle to establish whether they would continue their role in the third cycle and, if not, whether their States have designated new NFPs. Starting from the third cycle, the designation of focal points should be for the Regular Process on a continuous basis rather than for a specific cycle. Efforts should also be made with a view to improving the functions of focal points, including through the development of terms of reference that outline responsibilities of focal points more clearly. Additional resources should be made available to strengthen regular communication and engagement of focal points, including through the means of newsletters, a webpage, and regular engagement activities such as virtual briefings.

Timetable and implementation plan

30. The second cycle runs from 2016 to 2020, but many activities of the second cycle, in particular the preparation of WOA II, only started in 2017. Main activities carried out in 2016 included the development of programme of work and resource requirements for the second cycle and the preparation of technical abstracts from WOA I. The preliminary timetable and implementation plan for the production of WOA II was adopted in March 2018. This was subsequently revised in light of the progress being made, with the final version approved by the Bureau in November 2019. No timetable and implementation plan were developed for other outputs of the second cycle or for the second cycle as a whole.

31. Going forward, programme of work and resources requirements for a cycle should be developed prior to the start of a cycle. It would also be beneficial to manage all outputs of a cycle, including activities to support these outputs, in an integrated manner. The development of a timetable and implementation plan for the whole cycle, rather than for individual outputs, might be useful. Such a timetable and implementation plan could include important milestones for all outputs planned for a cycle with built-in decision-making points where progress and bottlenecks would be jointly considered by the Bureau and the Group of Experts.

D. Output I: second world ocean assessment and related activities

Division of labour among the members of the Group of Experts

32. The preparation of WOA II was led by the Group of Experts as a whole, while some individual members lead the production of specific chapters or sub-chapters as the lead members. The division of labour among the members of the Group of Experts in this regard was uneven. For example, one member was assigned to lead the production of 15 chapters or sub-chapters, while some members were not assigned any. This resulted in extremely heavy burden for some

members to coordinate the production of chapters or sub-chapters under their purview, which also caused delays in the overall preparation of the assessment.

33. This uneven division of labour was largely due to the lack of experts among the members of the Group of Experts in certain areas, including taxonomy and social sciences. Several members of the Group of Experts expressed that they were uncomfortable taking on a lead role in relation to a chapter or sub-chapter for which they did not have the necessary expertise. While the system of having a lead and co-lead members was developed for the second cycle, the degree of collaboration among the lead and co-lead members largely depended on the inclinations of the lead member.

34. Going forward, it would be important to ensure that the Group of Experts encompasses a balanced and adequate set of expertise. It might be advisable in this regard to develop a list of required expertise among the members of the Group of Experts to facilitate the nomination of experts. The Group of Experts might wish to consider measures that would enable responsibilities to be more evenly divided among the members of the Group of Experts, including through strengthening collaboration among the lead and co-lead members.

Constitution of the Pool of Experts

35. The Pool of Experts provided members of the writing teams and peer-reviewers for the preparation and peer review of WOA II. As of July 2020, the Pool of Experts for the second cycle comprises 791 experts from diverse disciplines and geographical regions, including 87 experts from the African Group, 128 from the Asia-Pacific Group, 19 from the Eastern European Group, 134 from the Latin American and Caribbean Group, and 423 from the Western European and Others Group. Of all experts, 553 are men and 238 women.

36. The Pool of Experts for the second cycle included members of the Pool of Experts from the first cycle that confirmed their interest in serving for the second cycle. Due to a variety of factors, including those noted in the lessons learned from the first cycle, approximately 160 experts out of the over 600 members of the Pool of Experts for the first cycle confirmed their interest in serving for the second cycle. A number of these experts agreed to perform a specific task, such as serving as peer-reviewers.

37. The Pool of Experts for the second cycle also included additional experts appointed based on nomination by States or recommendation by intergovernmental organizations and in accordance with the mechanism for the establishment of the Pool of Experts for the second cycle. The period for States to nominate and intergovernmental organizations to recommend experts was originally intended to have an end date. It was necessary, however, to extend this process to cover the duration of the entire second cycle due to persistent gaps in needed expertise in the Pool of Experts.

38. The Mechanism for the establishment of the Pool of Experts for the second cycle did not include procedures for self-recommendation or recommendation of experts by members of the Group of Experts. In cases where the secretariat received “self-recommendations” from experts interested in being part of the Pool of Experts, or where the Group of Experts requested the

assistance of the secretariat to identify potential experts, the information of such experts were shared with the States of nationalities for their consideration of nomination.

39. For future cycles, it would be important to put in place more robust processes to engage potential members of the Pool of Experts. It seems advisable that the expertise needed in the Pool of Experts be identified at an early stage and be formulated in a manner that allows potential members, including members of the Pool of Experts from the previous cycles, to easily understand whether and how their expertise would match the needs. The time period for appointing experts to the Pool of Experts could be open-ended so as to fill gaps in needed expertise identified during the cycle or caused by withdraw of experts from the Pool of Experts. The mechanism for the establishment the Pool of Experts could also include procedures for self-recommendations, recommendations of experts by members of the Group of Experts, and recommendations by non-governmental organizations that participate in the Ad Hoc Working of the Whole. Measures should also be taken to encourage actions on improving gender balance in the Pool of Experts.

Establishment of writing teams

40. Except for Chapters 1 (Overall summary) and 2 (Approach to the assessment) for which the writing teams were the Group of Experts as a whole, the writing team for each chapter or sub-chapter of WOA II was composed of: a member of the Group of Experts (lead member); any additional members of the Group of Experts with relevant expertise (co-lead members); one or more experts responsible for the coordination of the work of the writing team (convenor or joint convenors), drawn from the Group of Experts or the Pool of Experts; and several other experts drawn from the Pool of Experts. The members of the writing team were selected by the Group of Experts, with some input from States and the secretariat where gaps were identified. The following lessons learned are noted in this regard:

Gaps in expertise in the Pool of Experts

41. The gaps in needed expertise in the Pool of Experts persisted throughout the second cycle, which caused delays in the establishment of writing teams for certain chapters or sub-chapters. In its document on Gaps in expertise in the Pool of Experts, the Joint Coordinators of the Group of Experts noted the need for additional experts from specific regions for a number of chapters or topics. Experts for the North and South Pacific regions and the Indian Ocean were the most in demand. The Joint Coordinators also noted that more expertise was needed related to gender studies and to socioeconomic aspects. Other issues that were identified during the second cycle included: the list of expertise sought in the Pool of Experts did not fully align with the expertise needed to draft the chapters or sub-chapters of WOA II; some of the expertise identified on the list of expertise was not sufficiently specific, in particular for socioeconomic fields; the regional categories might have been too broad; and expertise on traditional, indigenous and local knowledge was not strongly featured in the list of expertise.

42. Going forward, the Group of Experts might wish to consider measures that would help ensure adequate expertise in the Pool of Experts. Such measures could include: improving the description and categorization of expertise based on experience from the second cycle and input from members of the Pool of Experts from the second cycle; improving the structure and

readability of the list of expertise so that potential members of the Pool of Experts can identify their expertise more easily; breaking down large sea areas into smaller regions; encouraging the nomination of experts on traditional, indigenous and local knowledge; and creating a closer link between the expertise in the Pool of Experts and the expertise needed to prepare outputs, including by creating an initial list of expertise needed for each chapter or sub-chapter of any outputs to be produced, taking into account its focus and the need for interdisciplinarity and geographical balance.

Information on members of the Pool of Experts and the online database

43. During the second cycle, the nomination of an expert to the Pool of Experts was to be accompanied by a Personal History Form (PHF) and the curriculum vitae (CV) of the expert. In the PHF, the area(s) of expertise of the nominated expert and the sea area(s) that expertise covers were indicated. The PHF also indicated the category for which the expert was nominated: member of the writing team, commentator or peer-reviewer. A searchable online database was developed on the website of the Regular Process to provide detailed information on the expertise of the members of the Pool of Experts to facilitate the work of the Group of Experts, including in identifying potential members of writing teams. The maintenance of this database relied on each member of the Pool of Experts creating an account on the website of the Regular Process and updating their information when necessary.

44. It was noted, however, that not all nominations of experts were submitted with sufficient information. Some members of the Pool of Experts from the first cycle, after agreeing to serve for the second cycle, did not update the information they provided for the first cycle or provide information that was additionally requested for the second cycle. Some information received might have not been sufficiently accurate as some members of the Pool of Experts, when requested to participate in a writing team, responded that they did not have enough expertise to participate in drafting a chapter or sub-chapter even though relevant expertise was indicated in their PHFs. The online database was not up-to-date or complete due to that a large number of experts did not create an account on the website of the Regular Process, could not do so due to technical difficulties, did not provide sufficient information, or did not update their information when necessary. These challenges resulted in extra burdens for the members of the Group of Experts and the secretariat to manually process or chase information from nominated experts, which added to the difficulty in establishing writing teams in an efficient manner.

45. To ensure that information on members of the Pool of Experts is sufficient and readily accessible, it would be important to develop clear guidelines on the information to be provided upon the nomination of an expert to the Pool of Experts. Such guidelines should also apply to members of the Pool of Experts from the previous cycles that agree to serve for the new cycle. It might also be helpful to streamline the nomination process and the database registration process, including by using a single set of online forms for both nomination and database registration, given that personal information would be protected effectively in accordance with applicable standards. Additional resources should be made available to support the maintenance and improvement of the database on members of the Pool of Experts, including by strengthening the human and technical capacity of the secretariat. Measures could also be taken to promote two-

way communication between members of the Pool of Experts and the Group of Experts, including by enhancing information sharing on the process of and progress in the establishment of writing teams.

Minimum requirement on composition

46. As an effort to encourage interdisciplinarity and geographical diversity in the writing teams, a minimum requirement was set by the Bureau during the second cycle that each writing team should have at least one convenor and three other members. However, it was not possible for some writing teams to meet this requirement due to difficulties in identifying experts with required expertise. A number of writing teams, despite having met the minimum requirement, did not achieve interdisciplinarity or geographical diversity.

47. For future cycles, it would be advisable that clear guidelines on the composition of writing teams, including minimum requirements on the number of experts, interdisciplinarity, geographical and gender diversity, be developed at an early stage, taking into account the possible difficulties in identifying experts in certain areas. Such requirements should also take into account the need to integrate traditional, indigenous and local knowledge and science. Measures should also be taken to ensure that members of the Group of Experts are guided by such guidelines in establishing writing teams.

Preparation of outline(s)

48. The Group of Experts was first requested to develop an outline of WOA II for adoption by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole and later requested to also provide an annotated outline for WOA II. During the discussions on the annotated outline, the Joint Coordinator of the Group of Experts noted that “the annotated outline required inputs from writing teams and could only be prepared once all the writing teams were approved” (A/73/373, para. 11). For WOA II, the last writing teams were approved in April 2020.

49. Going forward, it might be useful to consider establishing a more coherent process for the preparation of outline(s) in parallel with the establishment of writing teams. For example, the Group of Experts, while undertaking to prepare preliminary annotated outline(s) for the outputs to be produced, could outline at an early stage what specific expertise would be needed for each topic to be addressed in the outputs to facilitate the initial identification of potential members of writing teams. The preliminary annotated outline(s) would then be amended with input from potential members of writing teams before being submitted for approval by States. Upon their approval, the annotated outline(s) would guide the final establishment of writing teams. With a view to ensuring that all work guided by the annotated outline(s) would be responsive to emerging priorities, evolving scientific understandings, as well as possible practical issues encountered at a later stage during a cycle, it might also be helpful to establish clear understanding on procedures for accommodating necessary adaptation in the approved annotated outline(s).

Regional workshops

50. Two rounds of regional workshops were organized in support of the second cycle. The first round of regional workshops, which consisted of five workshops, was held in 2017 to

inform the scoping of the assessment, raise awareness, provide information and receive feedback on WOA I, and generate interest from the scientific community in activities of the second cycle. A major contribution of the first round of regional workshops was to the elaboration of the outline of WOA II. The second round, which consisted of seven regional workshops, was held in 2018 to, inter alia, inform the collection of regional level information and data for the preparation of WOA II. A major contribution of the second round was that it provided an opportunity for the various writing teams to meet and start preparing their chapters. Guidelines, draft agenda and summary of discussions were developed for both rounds of workshops.

51. Participants in regional workshops during the second cycle were selected based on nominations of experts received from Member States of the United Nations, members of United Nations specialized agencies, as well as relevant organizations, funds, programmes and bodies within the United Nations system. Priority was given to nominees from the host country and from States from the region in question, including with regard to the funding of experts. In the first round, the number of participants in each workshop ranged from 17 to 51, with an average of 35 participants per workshop. The percentage of female participants in each workshop ranged from 29 to 52 per cent, with the average being 35.8 per cent. In the second round, the number of participants in each workshop ranged from 34 to 86, with an average of 53 participants per workshop. The percentage of female participants ranged from 28 to 50 per cent, with the average being 36.7 per cent. The late scheduling of regional workshops was identified as one of the main challenges that had constrained attendance by some of the experts during the second cycle, including the lead members and writing teams for the chapters tabled for discussion (A/74/315, para. 8).

52. Surveys sent to participants in the second round of workshops indicate that most found the segments on the structure of WOA II and the consideration of the chapters to be the most useful. When asked what topics they wished the workshops had discussed more, regional issues, capacity-building and the connections between chapters were among the most frequent answers. Comments provided on the organization of the workshops included the need for earlier planning and more time for experts to prepare, a desire for more information about the interrelations between workshops, as well as the possibility to participate remotely and to continue discussions after the workshop through a web-based forum.

53. One of the main reasons for the late scheduling of the workshops was the difficulty in securing offers to host for all workshops. Considerable time and effort were spent to ensure that each region would have at least one workshop, which led to concomitant delays in planning and scheduling. In the second round, in some cases, these delays hampered the ability of members of the Group of Experts or convenors of writing teams from attending, due to conflicting commitments and inability to secure funding for travel at short notice.

54. Hosting workshops in all regions is desirable, as it provides an opportunity for engaging experts from all regions and can help foster greater geographical balance in the Pool of Experts and the writing teams. Going forward, additional measures should be taken to ensure early planning and scheduling of regional workshops, including by adopting a more structured approach in identifying hosts. To avoid scheduling conflicts as much as possible, it might be

beneficial to establish a tentative timeline for the workshops, taking into account, inter alia, the availability of the members of the Group of Experts and dates of major scientific meetings. It might also be useful to further expand on the parameters for an offer to host in the calls sent to States, with information on certain essential legal provisions, such as on privileges and immunities, access to medical services and visas. This would allow potential host Governments to consider a clear set of requirements, which might also facilitate the early conclusion of host country agreements. Additionally, information materials could potentially be produced and disseminated to further elaborate on these needs and requirements.

55. Having co-hosts for regional workshops was greatly beneficial in the second cycle, and actively engaging intergovernmental organizations as possible co-hosts should be continued during future cycles.. The option of having a virtual workshop could be particularly important given possible persisting travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Database on recent and ongoing assessments

56. According to the programme of work of the second cycle, an online database on recent and ongoing assessments was supposed to be developed during the second cycle. However, due to the limited capacity and resources of the secretariat, as well as the lack of responses to the calls seeking relevant information, this database has not been made available online.

57. The database on recent and ongoing assessments is expected to be a useful tool for ensuring that the assessments prepared under the Regular Process are building on existing regional assessments. Information provided in such a database may also be useful for ensuring that the Regular Process and other relevant assessments at the global level support one another and avoid unnecessary duplication. For future cycles, it seems advisable that further measures be taken to support the development, maintenance and improvement of such a database, including by strengthening the capacity of the secretariat with necessary resources, and encouraging the provision of needed information by relevant processes.

Preparation of WOA II

Guidance for contributors

58. Developed at an early stage during the second cycle, the Guidance for contributors outlined tasks of different contributors for the preparation of WOA II. However, no updates were made to this document after its development, resulting in an enlarging gap between its guidelines and the evolving needs of contributors. For example, the role of “commentator”, which was envisaged and remained in the Guidance for contributors, was not used during the preparation of WOA II. Feedback from contributors also indicated mixed opinions on the usefulness of many guidelines contained therein, including views that some guidelines seemed overly specific and some not sufficiently clear.

59. For future cycles, it would be important to ensure that all contributors participating in the preparation of the outputs would have clear understanding on relevant processes, roles and standards, etc., as well as clear instructions on how they are expected to contribute. The guidance for contributors should be developed at an early stage and updated on a continuous basis with input from its users. Additional resources should be made available to facilitate information

sharing in this regard, including through the preparation and dissemination of information materials.

Communication with, within and between writing teams

60. During the second cycle, communication with and within the writing teams primarily took place electronically, and the specific method of communication was determined by each individual lead member or convenor. Due to budgetary implications, the members of writing teams were not provided with access to a common online collaboration platform for their work on WOA II. The writing teams for each chapter worked independently unless lead members decided that collaboration would be beneficial. In 2019, in view of a number of incidents where lack of effective communication caused significant delays in the preparation of some chapters or sub-chapter, and upon requests by the Group of Experts, the secretariat took on a more active role in supporting communication with, within and between writing teams. This was, however, restrained by the limited capacity and availability of resources for the secretariat in this regard.

61. Going forward, additional resources should be made available to improve communication with, within and between writing teams, including by providing all members of writing teams with access to a common online collaboration platform for their work on the outputs of the Regular Process. Noting that the work of writing teams is within the primary purview of the lead members and convenors, it might also be helpful to clarify the functions of the secretariat in supporting the communication with, within and between writing teams, and ensure that the secretariat has necessary human and technical capacity to perform these functions.

Review process for WOA II

62. The review process for WOA II had two stages: peer-review, completed by experts drawn from the Pool of Experts that did not take part in drafting the chapters they were reviewing; and review by States, where Member States are invited to review and provide comments on the first and second drafts of WOA II. Dedicated webpages were created for the process of review by States on the website of the Regular Process.

63. It is noted that there were challenges in identifying peer-reviewers for certain chapters. Due to the delay in the preparation of WOA II, some peer-reviewers were requested to provide comments in a very short period. Non-member States and intergovernmental organizations have not been invited to review the first and second drafts of WOA II.

64. A multi-stage and multi-stakeholder review process can help reinforce the science-policy interface embodied in the Regular Process. It can also help ensure the accuracy, legitimacy and policy-relevance of these outputs, and thus improving their overall quality. It is suggested that similar multi-stage review processes be adopted for the review of outputs of the Regular Process in its future cycles. Such processes could include peer review, a review by competent intergovernmental organizations and a review by States. Clear guidelines on the identification of peer-reviewers and modalities of each stage of the review process should be developed at an early stage during the cycle. It might also be helpful to create a general webpage on the review process to provide relevant information.

E. Output II: Regular Process support for other ocean-related intergovernmental processes

Technical abstracts

65. Three technical abstracts of WOA I were prepared by the Group of Experts to provide support to other ongoing ocean-related processes. These technical abstracts were on: the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction; the ocean and the Sustainable Development Goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and the impacts of climate change and related changes in the atmosphere on the oceans. While such efforts and the technical abstracts received positive acknowledgment, it was noted by some participants in the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, as well as some members of the Group of Experts, that the preparation and finalization of the technical abstracts took a significantly longer time than originally expected and thus delayed the preparation of WOA II. It was also noted that the length of the technical abstracts could have been shorter for optimizing their utilization by relevant stakeholders.

66. Going forward, it might be beneficial to manage all outputs of a cycle, including activities to support these outputs, in an integrated manner, including through the development of a timetable and implementation plan for the whole cycle (see para. 31 above). It might also be useful to prepare shorter types of documents, instead of technical abstracts, to outline process-specific and policy-relevant information from the assessments prepared during the previous cycle if it is so decided by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.

Interaction with other ocean-related processes

67. Various efforts were made during the second cycle to enhance the interaction between the Regular Process and other ocean-related intergovernmental processes, with a view to providing support to these processes, promoting synergies and avoiding unnecessary duplication of work, including among the assessments prepared under the Regular Process and these processes. Intergovernmental organizations were invited to nominate experts for the Pool of Experts. Some intergovernmental organizations also provided data, information and resources for the preparation of WOA II. The secretariat attended a number of major meetings on other ocean-related assessments or intergovernmental processes, and organized a series of briefings and side events in the margins of these meetings, to provide input to these assessments or processes, raise awareness of the Regular Process and promote cooperation and coordination. However, the interaction between the Regular Process and other global assessments or ocean-related intergovernmental processes is yet to be satisfying. Calls continued to be made by participants of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole and members of the Group of Experts for further strengthening such interaction.

68. Activities should continue to be carried out with a view to ensuring that other ocean-related processes are informed by the work of the Regular Process. Going forward, it would also be paramount to ensure strong linkages and synergies between the Regular Process and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). Communication between the Regular Process and key ocean-related processes should

be further strengthened and maintained on a regular basis. Possible coordination mechanism among the secretariats of such processes might be adopted, including through the UN-Oceans. Further events may be organized with a view to promoting inter-processes dialogue on the state of the marine environment, including socioeconomic aspects.

F. Outreach and awareness-raising

69. During the second cycle, the secretariat has engaged in outreach and awareness-raising activities, including through the regional workshops, briefings or side events on the Regular Process for States and other stakeholders in the margins of intergovernmental meetings, and the production of brochures on the Regular Process. A website dedicated to the Regular Process was developed during the second cycle, which facilitated the sharing of information with and engagement of stakeholders in the Regular Process.

70. While the secretariat has undertaken outreach and awareness raising activities whenever and wherever possible, it is recognized that constraints related to inter alia the financial situation of the United Nations and a lack of necessary expertise reduced the ability of the secretariat to carry out outreach and awareness raising activities during the second cycle. Additionally, while the secretariat designed and produced text for the website, developed brochures on how stakeholders could contribute to the Regular Process, and attempted to develop a communication strategy, a lack of professional expertise in communication may have reduced the effectiveness of these efforts.

71. The importance of outreach, awareness raising and effective communication with stakeholders has been repeatedly highlighted, including in the context of the multi-stakeholder dialogue and capacity-building partnership event held in 2019. One of the possible outcomes and building blocks of the third cycle, endorsed by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole at its twelfth meeting, is the development of an outreach and engagement strategy. With this and the challenges encountered during the second cycle in mind, it would be highly beneficial for the secretariat of the Regular Process to be strengthened with a communications expert who could lead the development and implementation of such an outreach and engagement strategy, including in identifying communication needs of stakeholders, improving internet presence such as the website and social media, developing communication materials and organizing outreach and awareness-raising events. Having access to such expertise could also improve the work of the secretariat on developing briefing materials and trainings for focal points and relevant stakeholders, in an effort to further broaden the reach of the Regular Process through them.

G. Capacity-building

72. As one of the core objectives of the Regular Process, capacity-building is a cross-cutting component of the second cycle. The capacity-building inventory prepared by the secretariat during the first cycle continues to be updated during the second cycle with information provided by States, intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations, with a view to providing up-to-date and easily accessible information on capacity-building needs and opportunities.

73. Capacity-building was also undertaken as part of the regional workshops during the second cycle through presentations and discussions on inter alia, theory and practice related to integrated assessments.

74. A two-day multi-stakeholder dialogue and capacity-building partnership event was held in 2019, in order to provide an opportunity to build awareness and collaboration with respect to capacity-building in support of the Regular Process, including with respect to building capacity to participate in, and make use of, integrated assessments. Of the 27 moderators and panelists selected for the event, three moderators or panelists were nationals of States in the African Group, six of the Asia-Pacific Group, two of the Eastern European Group, six of the Latin American and Caribbean States Group and six of the Western European and Others Group; 13 were women and 14 men. The outcome document which contained conclusions from this event was approved by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole during its twelfth meeting. One of the conclusions was that it would be important to develop a coherent capacity-building programme for conducting marine assessments, in particular integrated assessments, and that an initial step in preparing such a programme needs to include encouraging national and local authorities to analyse the capacity-building needs that they have prioritized in their particular contexts (A/74/315, Annex I).

75. The Regular Process special scholarship fund was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/71 to support training programmes for developing countries. No contributions have yet been made to this fund. In its resolution 74/19, the General Assembly recalled the potential of the special scholarship fund to support training programmes for developing countries, including through cooperation projects among various stakeholders, in order to strengthen the human and institutional capacity of those countries to carry out integrated assessments, and encouraged States, international financial institutions, donor agencies, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and natural and juridical person to make financial contributions to that fund.

76. Going forward, it would be worth considering the ways in which capacity-building could be further enhanced during the future cycles. Taking into account the discussions and conclusions of the multi-stakeholder dialogue and capacity-building partnership event, it seems advisable to focus on building the capacity of States to strengthen the science-policy interface during the third cycle. It might also be beneficial to consider ways in which the capacity-building inventory may be adapted to further serve the needs of stakeholders, and how contributions to the special scholarship fund could be encouraged.

H. Work of the secretariat

Staff

77. During the second cycle, the secretariat of the Regular Process availed itself of three posts, namely: one Professional staff position (P-4), which was approved by the General Assembly in December 2015 to support the Regular Process; one Professional staff position (P-3) and one General Service staff position, which were approved by the General Assembly in December 2016 for the duration of the second cycle. However, in order to ensure the implementation of the programme of work for the second cycle, the Division had to supplement

the secretariat of the Regular Process with one Professional staff member (P-2) and, on occasion, an additional General Service staff member. Notwithstanding these additions, it was noted that the workload of the secretariat was much greater than previously anticipated. This required the secretariat to work regularly beyond its capacity and beyond regular working hours in order to achieve the goals of the second cycle of the Regular Process.

78. Going forward, it would be important to ensure that the secretariat is equipped with reasonable human resources that are sufficient and necessary for supporting the effective implementation of future cycles.

Trust fund administration

79. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/71, the Secretary-General established the Regular Process voluntary trust fund for the purpose of supporting the operations of the first five-year cycle of the Regular Process, including for the provision of assistance to members of the group of experts from developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing States. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/70, it was further requested that the Secretary-General administer the voluntary trust fund beyond the first five-year cycle and for the duration of the operations of the Regular Process. Contributions to the trust fund may be made by States, international financial institutions, donor agencies, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and natural and juridical persons. Contributions to this voluntary trust fund during the second cycle supported, inter alia, the travel of members of the Group of Experts from developing countries to a number of meetings, including those of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, the Group of Experts and the writing teams.

80. The discussions within the regional workshops and the multi-stakeholder dialogue and capacity-building partnership event indicate that it would be advisable to develop a specific set of needs-based activities which could be undertaken with assistance from the special scholarship fund. This is seen as important so as to facilitate contributions to the special scholarship fund, particularly from donors who are unable to make voluntary contributions to trust funds which have relatively broad objectives.