

UNOC3: Recognition, Readiness, and the Road Ahead

Co-Design Reflections from OOSC



Some members of the Co-Design team were on site during the One Ocean Science Congress (OOSC) and the Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) held in early June in Nice, France. Over two intense weeks filled with panels, side events, high-level meetings, and milestone announcements, one message echoed across sectors and stakeholders: *The ocean is finally gaining the recognition it deserves.*

A Sea Change in Awareness

From heads of state to industry executives and civil society voices, the importance of a healthy, resilient, safe and productive ocean was a unifying theme. What stood out this time was the recognition that ocean observing systems and the data they provide are critical to achieving that goal.

Whether discussing digital twins, carbon accountability, biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions or climate resilience, the message was consistent: *We need more observations* and more importantly, *we need sustainable observing systems*, ones that do not rely solely on the shoulders of the scientific community on short-term funding, and a handful of governments.

A new tide of high level recognition for the ocean observing systems has emerged, thanks to the longstanding efforts of GOOS. Many are now realizing that these systems are not just scientific tools but critical infrastructures with real world outcomes. It is precisely because of their importance that concerns are growing: such vital infrastructure is at risk when funding is uncertain, fragmented or short-term.

Broadening Support and Unlocking Investment

A consistent message throughout the discussions was the need to expand the network of actors engaged in sustaining ocean observations. This includes integrating new users and elevating those who are already operating. Meaningful participation from these groups is no longer a “nice-to-have” but it is *essential for long-term resilience*.

At the same time, the industry is interested in exploring new pathways, from blue finance, to decision making tools, technology and also being a part of taking observations. The promise of not only continuing but also improving forecasting, more efficient maritime operations, and climate preparedness is compelling. What they need in return is certainty: evidence that the science community is ready to deliver actionable insights and scalable results in an organized manner, even if the answers need to be broken into steps.

Co-Design: Frequently Cited, Rarely Implemented

Co-design was frequently mentioned throughout the two weeks, underscoring its growing visibility as a process to increase impact in ocean discourse. Yet often this was an aspiration rather than reality. There is still a significant gap in exploring how co-design processes can shift institutional practices, reshape investment and impact, and become a norm rather than a novelty.

This challenge is closely linked to the challenge of stakeholder engagement. Despite almost *universally acknowledged as essential, it remains significantly underfunded*. If we are serious about inclusive, actionable ocean solutions, it's time to recognize that meaningful engagement requires dedicated resources, spent on effective processes. Effective participation does not happen by invitation alone - it demands sustained investment in relationships, dialogue, and co-creation.

Mairead (Storm Surge Exemplar): “What really stood out to me was how often people emphasized the need for observations. While there's a recognition of the power of digital twins and similar innovations, the common thread is always: we need good data to underpin these.”

Richard (Carbon Exemplar): “The idea of making the observing system more resilient and sitting on a broader set of shoulders is something that's on everybody's mind.”

Tammy (Boundary Currents Exemplar): “There's a lot of push from a financial perspective, with industry realizing they need to help fund these sustained observations in order to have better forecasts and efficient shipping.”

Moving Forward Together

The spirit of co-design lies not in perfect solutions but in purposeful collaboration and in a shared purpose. We are building momentum toward fit-for-purpose ocean observing systems, designed through collaborative processes and grounded in deep reflection on who needs them, who shapes them, and who will be left behind if we fail to act now. It is becoming increasingly clear that true inclusion is not just a ‘nice to have’ but a foundational prerequisite for resilience.

GOOS has been a major player globally in building a community around ocean observations, fostering partnerships and collaboration that were on full display during both conferences. Community-led

projects, local partnerships, people finding innovative ways to make things work - often with limited resources- are powerful examples of Co-Design in action.