

OCEANOBS'29

First Assembly Meeting of the OceanObs'29 Program Committee

Joint Program Committee and International Advisory Committee
Workshop Summary

HONG KONG · MAY 2026

GLOBAL OCEAN SUMMIT 2026

Summary

The inaugural OceanObs'29 Program Committee workshop launched a multi-year effort to shape the future of global ocean observing. Building on the Global Ocean Summit 2026 and looking toward the close of the UN Ocean Decade, the committee began defining a vision for OceanObs'29 as a platform for sustained observation, ocean intelligence, inclusive partnership, and societal impact. The work ahead will focus on translating that vision into a clear program, strong communications, meaningful engagement, and lasting outcomes for the global ocean observing community.

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Overview



OceanObs'29 Program Committee members were formally introduced during the inauguration and appointment ceremony at the Global Ocean Summit 2026.

The inaugural OceanObs'29 Program Committee workshop was held in Hong Kong in May 2026 in connection with the Global Ocean Summit 2026. The workshop brought together members of the newly formed OceanObs'29 Program Committee, International Advisory Committee representatives, early career ocean professional leadership, and coordination partners to begin shaping the vision, structure, and work plan for OceanObs'29.

The timing and setting were significant. By meeting alongside the Global Ocean Summit 2026, the Program Committee was able to begin its work in direct conversation with a broader community focused on ocean science, innovation, policy, investment, and societal benefit. This connection reinforced one of the central themes of the workshop: OceanObs'29 should not be planned as a stand-alone scientific conference, but as part of a larger global movement to make ocean observing more visible, more useful, more inclusive, and more connected to the decisions society needs to make.

The workshop marked the formal launch of the Program Committee's work toward OceanObs'29, which will be hosted in China in 2029. Participants used the meeting to build shared understanding, identify priorities, clarify the committee's role, and begin developing the architecture for a multi-year planning process. The discussion was broad, substantive, and deliberately forward-looking. It focused not only on what should happen at the 2029 conference, but also on what the global ocean observing community needs to accomplish before, during, and after OceanObs'29.

This summary captures the major discussion themes, emerging areas of agreement, and near-term actions from the workshop. It is intended as a working synthesis to support continued Program Committee planning.

Why OceanObs'29 Matters Now



Program Committee and International Advisory Committee members worked through emerging priorities for the OceanObs'29 planning process.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that OceanObs'29 comes at a pivotal moment. The United Nations Ocean Decade will be nearing its close in 2030, the current Sustainable Development Goals framework will also be approaching its endpoint, and governments, industries, coastal communities, and international organizations are asking more of the ocean observing system than ever before.

Ocean observing is no longer only a scientific enterprise. It is increasingly essential to, for instance, climate resilience, marine biodiversity protection, disaster preparedness, fisheries management, shipping and insurance, coastal resilience, marine carbon dioxide removal, blue economy development, and public safety. The workshop discussion reflected a strong shared view that OceanObs'29 must help the world understand ocean observing as critical infrastructure. Recognizing it as such means creating a sustained, interoperable network which must be continuously co-designed with end-users to guarantee that the data we collect directly answers the most urgent socio-economic questions of our time.

There was a strong awareness of the pivotal moment we face with respect to technological revolution - with the opportunities (and challenges) presented by low-cost sensors, AI and data interoperability. The ocean observing system of the past will not be the system of the future. We need to provide an optimised basic network for purpose recognising the need also for scientific endeavour.

> **Society cannot manage, protect, predict, or benefit from the ocean without observing it.**

A recurring message was that society cannot manage, protect, predict, or benefit from the ocean without observing it. Participants noted that people may not connect emotionally to the technical language of observing systems, platforms, sensors, or data streams, but they do connect to the outcomes those systems make possible: safer coastlines, better forecasts, healthier fisheries, more resilient marine economies, reduced risk, and better decisions.

This framing is important for the next phase of planning. OceanObs'29 will need to speak clearly to scientific communities, but also to governments, funders, Indigenous communities, early career professionals, industry, finance, technology providers, and the public. The committee recognized that the language of OceanObs'29 must be accessible, practical, and grounded in real-world value.

Connection to the Global Ocean Summit 2026

Holding the Program Committee workshop alongside the Global Ocean Summit 2026 created an opportunity to connect OceanObs'29 planning with a wider set of ocean priorities. The Summit context helped reinforce that ocean observing sits at the center of many global conversations, including ocean innovation, climate action, biodiversity, regional capacity, data systems, and investment.

Core Vision Emerging from the Workshop

The workshop produced an emerging vision for OceanObs'29 as more than a conference. Participants described it as a journey, a community-building process, and a major opportunity to shape the ocean observing system needed for 2040.

A working vision emerged around the idea that OceanObs'29 should help define the core of a sustained, global ocean observing and data system that is scientifically strong, operationally useful, regionally relevant, technologically adaptive, and designed for societal benefit.

Several themes were central to this vision:

- **Ocean observing should be understood as an essential public-good system.** It supports research, safety, policy, conservation, governance, economic planning, and community resilience.
- **OceanObs'29 should focus on outcomes and impacts, not only observations.** The conference should help connect observing systems to benefits - decisions, services, forecasts, risk reduction, and public value.
- **Science must remain foundational,** but OceanObs'29 should be focused specifically on sustained observing systems and their impact, innovation, data, services, and implementation rather than serving as a broad ocean science conference.
- **To maximize the effectiveness of ocean observations,** it is essential to consider not only the observations themselves but also the enabling technologies that enhance their value—such as data processing and management, quality control and calibration, data dissemination, and application systems that utilize observational data, including ocean prediction systems. Equally important is the engagement of all stakeholders across the ocean-observation value chain, from national and local governments to operational centers, private-sector partners, and the broader public. Their collective involvement will be vital to the success of OceanObs'29.
- **The planning process should be inclusive from the start.** Participants emphasized the need to engage underrepresented regions, small island developing states, African ocean professionals, Indigenous communities, early career professionals, women leaders, disabled scientists, and communities facing language and access barriers.
- **OceanObs'29 should produce practical implementation pathways.** Participants were clear that the process should not only generate ideas, declarations, or publications. It should help define what happens next, who needs to act, and how progress can be tracked.

Major Takeaways from the Workshop

1 OceanObs'29 should make ocean observing visible and relevant

A major takeaway was that ocean observing is often invisible to the people and institutions that rely on it. The committee discussed the need to show, and create a narrative around, how observing systems support concrete benefits, including early warning, fisheries and aquaculture management, development of marine renewable energy, coastal resilience, safe navigation, carbon monitoring, biodiversity protection, marine hazard response, and economic planning.

Participants emphasized that OceanObs'29 should tell better stories about ocean observing. These stories should connect observations to people, communities, decisions, and outcomes. They should also help new audiences understand why ocean observing matters and why they should engage.

2 The program architecture needs to start from desired outcomes

The Program Committee discussed whether OceanObs'29 should be organized around pillars, themes, societal challenges, observing system components, or desired conference outcomes. The group did not attempt to finalize the full structure during the workshop, but there was strong agreement that the architecture should be developed soon because many other decisions depend on it.

The committee discussed possible organizing concepts such as sustained observing, prediction, ocean intelligence, resilience, equity, technology, innovation, data interoperability, science, storytelling, and societal impact. Participants also noted that the structure must be clear enough to guide abstracts, publications, partnerships, communications, and session design. A practical takeaway was that the committee should work backward from the goals of OceanObs'29, which also link to the evolution of GOOS.

3 Communications will be central to success

The communications breakout emphasized that OceanObs'29 needs a stronger, clearer, and more professional public identity. Participants discussed the need for a core message, updated website language, consistent social media presence, shared slides, talking points, and a communications toolkit that committee members can use in their own networks.

The group also discussed developing audience-specific value propositions. Different audiences interact with ocean observing in different ways. Some generate observations, some use data, some fund systems, some set policy, and some depend on the outputs. A communications agency or dedicated communications staff support was identified as a likely need.

4 Inclusion should be designed into the conference, not added later

The underrepresented groups' discussion emphasized that inclusion must be embedded into the structure of OceanObs'29. This includes plenaries, panels, sessions, publications, outputs, logistics, communications, and measures of success.

Participants stressed that the committee has three years to remove barriers before they become problems. This includes planning early for visas, funding, travel support, language access, communication timelines, and session representation. The goal should be to make inclusion feel like the normal way OceanObs operates, not a special add-on.

5 Indigenous engagement must be cross-cutting

A significant thread throughout the workshop was the need for meaningful Indigenous engagement. Participants emphasized that Indigenous engagement should not be isolated in one session or breakout group. It should cut across program architecture, communications, strategic partnerships, data, knowledge systems, community benefit, and implementation.

Participants also discussed the legacy of OceanObs'19, including the Indigenous delegation and declaration. The workshop recognized that OceanObs'29 should build from that foundation and avoid treating Indigenous participation as symbolic. Early planning is needed to determine appropriate protocols, including how Indigenous communities and local cultural representation may be included in the opening ceremony and throughout the conference.

6 Community publications need a new strategy

The community publications discussion focused on how OceanObs'29 should learn from the large OceanObs'19 publication effort while avoiding unnecessary repetition. Participants agreed that the term "white papers" should be retired in favor of community papers, topical publications, policy briefs, synthesis products, and other outputs that can serve different audiences.

Topical publications will provide bottom-up overviews of the current status and future directions of specific observing systems and related activities. In contrast, community papers will adopt a top-down perspective to articulate the present state and long-term vision of key thematic areas essential to the future ocean observing network. Together, these complementary approaches aim to strengthen the collective voice of the community in sustaining and advancing the global ocean observing network.

A key recommendation was that all major publications should address real-world value, use, implementation, or impact where relevant. Participants also discussed the need to support publication costs for authors from underrepresented regions or low-income contexts, and to coordinate with UN Ocean Decade products to avoid duplicating effort.

7 Strategic partnerships need a clear value proposition

The partnership discussion clarified that OceanObs'29 will require both financial support and broader strategic alignment. The committee discussed three major support needs: planning and coordination, community engagement and participation, and products and communications.

Participants emphasized that funders should not be asked simply to support a meeting. They should be invited to support a larger vision: sustained ocean observing for safety, security, climate resilience, economic value, and the public good. OceanObs'29 is the convening mechanism, but the investment case is the future observing system (and GOOS).

8 Early career engagement should be active, structured, and evolving

The workshop included substantive discussion of the ECOP strategy. The ECOP leadership team has identified a preliminary group of approximately 15 early career professionals to invite into the OceanObs'29 ECOP committee, with flexibility to add members as gaps and needs become clearer.

Participants supported moving forward quickly, recognizing that many applicants have been waiting for follow-up. The ECOP committee should have room to self-organize while maintaining clear links to the Program Committee. Ideas discussed included rotating co-chairs, in-person training opportunities, a possible November workshop in China, and annual ocean observing training courses linked to Chinese training programs and IOC capacity development.

Work Plan and Next Steps

The workshop closed with a strong emphasis on maintaining momentum. Participants recognized that the committee has three years until OceanObs'29, but that the real planning window is much shorter. Several participants suggested setting an 18-month internal milestone to assess progress and adjust the approach.

Immediate next steps include:

1. Finalize and circulate the Program Committee terms of reference.
2. Develop a clearer statement of OceanObs'29 goals, vision, and public-facing messages.
3. Update the OceanObs'29 website and digital presence to reflect the outcomes of the Hong Kong workshop.
4. Develop a communications toolkit, including talking points, a short slide deck, and a one-page overview.
5. Create a calendar of major events where OceanObs'29 should have visibility between now and 2029.
6. Begin shaping the program architecture, including themes, outcomes, and possible session models.
7. Advance the ECOP committee invitations and integration plan.
8. Draft an inclusion and access strategy, including priority groups, representation criteria, and support needs.
9. Develop the community publications strategy, including publication types, timelines, guidance, and potential journal or outlet partnerships.
10. Identify strategic partners and resource needs for planning, coordination, communications, travel, participation, and outputs.
11. Plan a virtual meeting in July to continue decisions and finalize near-term assignments.

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