

National Ocean Decade Committee for Belgium NDC-BE

Annual Report 2025



National Ocean Decade Committee for Belgium Annual Report 2025

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Citation: Lescauwaet, A.K, Jimenez, J.S., Mirgaux, S., Verreet, G., Lefever, K., De Beule, K., Calcoen, S., Copejans, E., Susini, M.L., Haerens, P. Robbens, J. Morales, P., Rappé, K., Maelfait, H., Janssen, C., Diopere, E., Grégoire, M., Tyberghein, L., Di Nitto, D., Van Puyvelde, K., Mees, J. (2026). National Ocean Decade Committee for Belgium Annual Report 2024. Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ): Oostende. 24pp



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organisation of the NDC-BE

The Ocean Decade National Committee for Belgium (NDC-BE) is established as an open group, focusing on an active contribution to the Ocean Decade (OD). The committee consists of a core group and an open meeting. The core group and core group members formally represent organizations, administrations, and authorities at the federal, regional (sub-national) and local level that contribute with concrete actions to the OD challenges to achieve the OD objectives. Participation to the open meeting is voluntary and based on willingness to contribute with active communication and outreach, exchanges during the open meetings, and promotion and awareness raising on the Ocean Decade outside the meetings and in participants' networks.

Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) is given mandate to provide secretariat support to the NDC-BE. VLIZ supports the secretariat with a 1FTE programme specialist (also covering the Ocean Decade secretariat for Flanders) and a part-time dedicated specialist in International Relations. The NDC-BE is supported by 18 active members, representing the diversity of ocean actors and stakeholders in Belgium.

Following the **operational guidelines**¹ of the IOC-UNESCO (2021) for the NDCs, the core activities of the NDC-BE are clustered in four core roles:

- Supporting national members in the co-design and co-delivery of Decade Actions (DA)
- Mobilizing resources and contributions
- Engaging with National Decade Committees operating in other countries
- Communications, outreach and raising awareness on the OD.

Key Achievements in 2025

In its third year of operation, the NDC-BE has **significantly expanded Belgium's Ocean Decade portfolio**:

- **66 actions** initiated, completed or prepared by 2025
 - **53 activities** implemented in 2025
 - **13 additional activities** already planned for 2026
- **81 Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)** actively involved in the activities either leading or participating in organization, management or direct beneficiaries (grants)
- **International collaboration strengthened with 6 countries** across **3 continents** (Colombia, Peru, Kenya, Chile, Portugal, Canada)
- Actions reached audiences up to **1000+ people**, including engaged citizens, students, scientists and practitioners
- Priority Belgian Ocean Decade themes strongly addressed:
 - Ocean observation & prediction
 - Ocean data management & sharing
 - Ocean literacy & citizen engagement
 - Capacity development & knowledge exchange

NDC Belgium has taken a **leading role in connecting local expertise with the international ocean decade community by taking a leading role in the global network of NDCs**, working closely with Portugal, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Chile, Colombia and Madagascar, and engaging with **decentralized decade structures** as Decade Implementing Partners (JPI Oceans, European Marine Board, EMODnet, EuroGOOS), the Decade Coordination Office for Ocean Data Sharing.

These relationships have been translated into **tangible results**, including:

- International participation of **UK and Colombian** institutions on the **Scientific Committee of the World Conference on Marine Biodiversity 2026**
- A pilot project in Rapa Nui under **Co-Management 2030+** (Belgium–Chile partnership)

¹ UNESCO-IOC (2021). [National Decade Committees Operational Guidelines](#). UNESCO, Paris. (IOC Ocean Decade Series, 24).

- The first webinar targeting **FAIR, CARE and TRUST principles for ocean observation** by EuroGOOS, VLIZ and EU4Ocean
- **FAIR oceanographic data collection** and protocols for ocean observation in the Ocean Decade at the Magallanes region (Magallanes university, IMBRSea, VLIZ)
- Development of the **Colombian Register of Marine Species (CoRMS)** in cooperation with WoRMS data management team (INVEMAR, VLIZ) and release of a full operational **Peruvian Register of Marine Species**.
- **Scientific exchange on plastic research** between IMARPE (representing the REMARCO network) and VLIZ (representing the INSPIRE consortium as Mission Ocean and Ocean Decade project)
- Joint PhD project on **biogeochemical modelling** between VLIZ and UQAR (Canada)
- Ocean Decade session at the **WIOMSA conference 2025** in cooperation with WIOMSA ECOP network and IOC Africa
- First international conference on **Ocean and Human health** (Lisbon, December 2025)
- Participation at the **GOOS Regional Alliance South Pacific (GRASP)** meeting
- Participation in joint sessions at the **UN Ocean Conference 3** and the **One Ocean Science Congress**
- Shared knowledge and common strategic priorities, creating a solid base for **expanded joint actions in 2026**

New Ocean Decade projects in 2025

by NDC-BE members and their partnerships were endorsed in Belgium in 2025

1. Co-management 2030+ by NGO Connect to conserve, Fisheries Development Institute in cooperation with NDC Chile and VLIZ (approved on 07/03/2025)
2. EDITO for DITTO by EU DG MARE (approved on 07/03/2025)
3. Digital Twin of the Ocean: Animal Tracking via Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) and in cooperation with European Tracking Network-VLIZ (Jan Reubens) (approved on 07/03/2025)
4. Boosting seaweed farming with genetic resources via SBEP and in cooperation with ILVO (Tom Ruttink) (approved on 07/03/2025)
5. Rare Earth Element Reduction in Ocean Green Energy via SBEP and in cooperation with VUB (Jan Helsen) (approved on 07/03/2025)
6. FOODIMAR via SBEP and in cooperation with Ghent University (Jo Dewulf) (approved on 07/03/2025)
7. Ostend Group on Ocean and Human Health (in preparation for 9th call)

A higher amount of project proposals was developed in 2024 for call #7 and #8, resulting in successfully endorsement announced at the beginning of 2025

These add to the existing and previously endorsed actions (see annexes).

Engagement and actionable support

- Capacity Development Facility, coordinated by the Decade Coordination Unit and in cooperation with IODE Project Office – Capacity Development team, VLIZ participates in the Steering committee. The CDF is a platform supporting the Ocean Decade by assessing opportunities for matchmaking (offer-demand; gaps) with the capacity development needs from the decade actions (Funded by government of Flanders through Flanders UNESCO Trust Fund FUST)
- Collaboration and engagement with the Decade Coordination Office (DCO) for Ocean Data Sharing under IODE Project Office
- Ocean Decade Data Coordination group: with active membership of the VLIZ Marine Data Center, dr. Lennert Tyberghien, director of the VLIZ Marine Data Centre and member for the core group NDC-BE.
- VLIZ coordinates the Belgium node of the Early Career Ocean Professionals Programme under the Ocean Decade.

Growing Ocean Decade Community in Belgium

Since 2022, Belgium has built a strong implementation ecosystem, now consisting of:

- 4 Decade Implementing Partners: EMODnet, European Marine Board, JPI Oceans, EuroGOOS
- 1 Decade Coordination Office (Data Sharing)
- 1 and first Grant-making Facility in the Ocean Decade (Sea As a Good Cause – VLIZ Philanthropy)
- ECOP Belgium Node

The NDC-BE and DIP-VLIZ have aligned strategies, and work plans to maximise efficiency, impact and visibility.

Looking ahead

The National Decade Committee for Belgium will further strengthen its role by:

- Expanding bilateral cooperation with National Decade Committees to deliver co-designed projects with global, regional and local impact
- Deepening capacity development pathways, ensuring ECOPs are empowered to lead and shape future ocean science and innovation
- Scaling partnerships with the Global South, advancing shared commitments to equity, resilience and the Leave No One Behind principle
- Enhancing visibility and accessibility of ocean knowledge, data, and innovation for the benefit of all communities
- Mobilising new funding, including philanthropy and mission-driven investments, to accelerate implementation of endorsed Decade Actions

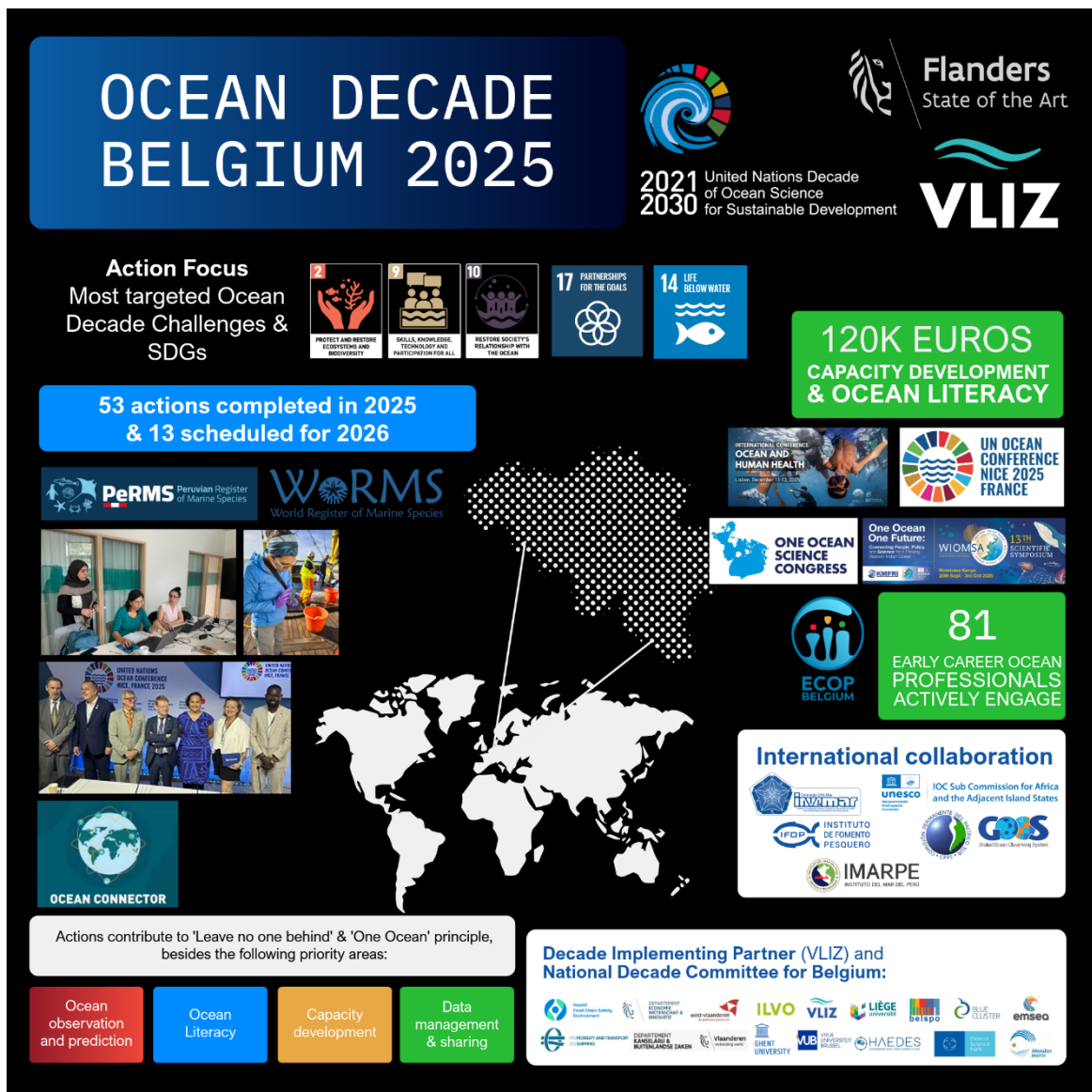


Figure 1 2025 Snapshot of ocean decade actions by National Decade Committee for Belgium and Decade Implementing Partner (VLIIZ)

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Ocean Decade: context

The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 (the 'Ocean Decade') aims to generate transformative ocean research at all levels to achieve a well-functioning ocean in support of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), connecting people and our ocean. The Ocean Decade is guided by an Implementation Plan (IP) to achieve the vision 'the science we need for the ocean we want' through Decade Actions (DA). There are four types of DA: programmes, projects, activities, and contributions. Activities that meet the specific criteria as identified in the IP can be endorsed as part of the collaborative effort to meet the Ocean Decade's vision and mission.

The Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) acts as a primary office for the implementation of Ocean DA. It collaborates with National Decade Committees (NDC) and Decentralized Coordination Structures: i) Decade Coordination Offices (DCO), ii) Decade Collaborative Centres (DCC) and Decade Implementing Partners (DIP) and iii) existing international and regional organizations and networks. The governance and coordination for the Ocean Decade is described in the implementation plan. The UN Ocean Decade is for everyone to participate in and aims to 'Leave no one behind'. (See References for further information on the Ocean Decade implementation).

NDC-BE in the Ocean Decade: vision & mission

The NDC-BE adheres to the Ocean Decade mission, seeking to co-design and co-develop transformative ocean science solutions for sustainable development, connecting people and our ocean.

To this purpose the NDC-BE subscribes to the broadly identified OD Outcomes to be achieved:

- **A clean ocean** where sources of pollution are identified and reduced or removed.
- **A healthy and resilient ocean** where marine ecosystems are understood, protected, restored, and managed.
- **A productive ocean** supporting sustainable food supply and a sustainable ocean economy.
- **A predicted ocean** where society understands and can respond to changing ocean conditions.
- **A safe ocean** where life and livelihoods are protected from ocean-related hazards.
- **An accessible ocean** with open and equitable access to data, information and technology and innovation.
- **An inspiring and engaging ocean** where society understands and values the ocean in relation to human wellbeing and sustainable development.

NDC-BE: structure, organisation and role

The Ocean Decade National Committee for Belgium (NDC-BE) is established as an open group, focusing on an active contribution to the Ocean Decade (OD). The committee consists of a core group and an open meeting. The core group and core group members formally represent organizations, administrations, and authorities at the federal, regional (sub-national) and local level that contribute with concrete actions to the OD challenges to achieve the OD objectives. Participation to the open meeting is voluntary and based on willingness to contribute with active communication and outreach, exchanges during the meetings, and promotion and awareness raising on the Ocean Decade outside the meetings and in participants' networks. Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) is mandated to provide secretariat support to the NDC-BE. VLIZ supports the secretariat with a 1FTE programme specialist (also covering the Ocean Decade secretariat for Flanders) and a dedicated specialist in International Relations.

Following the **operational guidelines**² of the IOC-UNESCO (2021) for the NDCs, the core activities of the NDC-BE are clustered in four core roles:

- Supporting national members in the co-design and co-delivery of Decade Actions (DA)
- Mobilizing resources and contributions
- Engaging with National Decade Committees operating in other countries
- Communications, outreach and raising awareness.

² UNESCO-IOC (2021). [National Decade Committees Operational Guidelines](#). UNESCO, Paris. (IOC Ocean Decade Series, 24).

The membership of the core group is defined and agreed on by approved terms of reference. The core group consists of the NDC-BE secretariat and representatives from the following entities (Figure 2):

- Belgium National Focal Points for IOC UNESCO
- Federal and Regional authorities and administrations with competences and active contributions related to marine research, nature conservation, public works and maritime economy (POM, Province of West-Flanders, BELSPO, FPS Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, RBINS..)
- VLIZ Core Scientific Committee (university associations and research performing organisations (Ghent University, University of Antwerp University, VUB, UHasselt, INBO, ILVO, WatLab, AoE..)
- University from the French-speaking regions (University of Liege)
- Private sector (Flanders Blue Cluster..)
- Early career scientists who are leading an Ocean Decade Action

Membership of the core group is renewed on an annual basis, and/or defined by the duration of specific OD actions and contributions. A description of procedures is included in the Terms of References (link in [References](#)).

In 2022, Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) was formally endorsed as a Decade Implementing Partner (DIP). Aiming for efficiency and impact, the NDC-BE and the Decade Implementing Partner (DIP) VLIZ have aligned their strategy and workplans in as much as possible to complement and strengthen each other mutually (see NDC-BE handbook, NDC-BE work plan, VLIZ-DIP Ocean Decade strategy). This is also reflected in the number, diversity, and scope of the endorsements of Ocean Decade actions (DA) achieved by NDC-BE (see below). VLIZ is secretariat to the NDC-BE and VLIZ- DIP is also participating as an active member to the NDC-BE.



Figure 2 Organization of the NDC-BE with core group and open meeting

Ocean Decade engagement in numbers

Overall Activities in 2025

A total of **66 Ocean Decade Actions** were initiated, completed, or prepared by Flanders and Belgium. This includes:

- **53 actions** initiated and/or completed in 2025, and
- **13 additional actions** prepared or scheduled for implementation in 2026.

These actions collectively engaged **81 Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)** as direct beneficiaries and strengthened partnerships with **six countries across three continents**. Individual actions reached up to **1000+ participants**, ranging from engaged citizens to ocean professionals.

The NDC Belgium also played an **active and increasingly visible role** within the global NDC network coordinated by the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU), and engaged with four other NDCs (Portugal, Netherlands, UK, Germany, Chile, Colombia), four Decade Implementing Partners (DIP) (JPI-Oceans, European Marine Board, EMODnet, EuroGOOS) and the Decade Coordination Unit on Data Sharing.

The NDC for Belgium has successfully addressed the four core roles of NDCs (as established in the guidance for NDCs and as set forward in the NDC-BE strategic plan) in its 3rd year of operation:

- The core-members and secretariat of the NDC-BE supported (inter)national members in the process of co-design and co-delivery of decade action (DA) proposals and actions (see detailed list of 2025 Ocean Decade Actions in annex I)
- The core-members and secretariat of the NDC-BE have mobilised resources, facilitated and implemented contributions (see detailed list of 2025 Ocean DA in annex I).
- The NDC-BE secretariat has continued its engagement with other NDCs:
 - NDC Netherlands (Maarten Heijnen, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management),
 - NDC Portugal (Luís Menezes Pinheiro, Chair of the Portuguese Committee for the IOC)
 - NDC Germany (Ulrike Heine, GEOMAR),
 - NDC Chile (Juan Fierro Contreras, Comisión Nacional del Oceano and SHOA Chile),
 - NDC Colombia (Francisco Arias Isaza, Colombian Ocean Comision (Comisión Colombiana del Océano)
 - NDC UK (Matt Frost, Plymouth Marine Laboratory)
 - NDC Madagascar (Aina Le Don Mone Nomenisoa, National Oceanographic Data Center of Madagascar)
- The core-members and secretariat of the NDC-BE have developed and participated in communication, outreach, and awareness campaigns (see detailed list of 2025 Ocean Decade Actions in annex I).

Co-design of decade actions and setting up collaboration has been addressed through at least 15 bilateral and follow-up meetings with the NDC-BE core group members complementary to the core group meetings, at least seven other meetings with Ocean Decade actors and stakeholders, and nine global meeting with the current 40 National Decade Committees and Decade Coordination Unit. These meetings have allowed the secretariat to provide first-hand information to our NDC-BE core members and partners, allowing the secretariat to support the NDC-BE members efficiently. The secretariat has also actively engaged and provided substantial input to relevant documents and processes for the OD implementation at national level (e.g. see NDC monitoring and evaluation, NDC subgroups discussions...).

The continue bilateral interactions with particularly seven NDCs (see above) have served mutual learning and exchanges about best practices and discuss common priority areas. It has result on the participation of UK and Colombian institutions at the Scientific Committee for the World Conference on Marine Biodiversity 2026, an international ocean decade activity organised by VLIZ, besides continue co-designed ocean decade projects like Co-Management 2030+ (NDC Chile and local partners) and creating momentum for raising topics like Ocean and Human Health. The NDC-BE anticipates more joint actions in 2025 with global, regional and local implementation to keep the engagement, promote the role, contribution and support of NDCs with national constituencies and strengthen international cooperation, including the DIPs, where relevant and impactful/actionable.

Actions focused on the 4 core roles of an NDCs and strengthening Ocean Decade priority areas such as ocean observation and prediction, ocean data management and data sharing, ocean literacy and citizen engagement, capacity development and knowledge transfer/exchange, outreach, and raising awareness on the Ocean Decade Mission and Vision.

New Ocean Decade projects by NDC-BE members and their partnerships were endorsed in Belgium in 2025:

- Co-management 2030+ (approved on 07/03/2025)
- EDITO for DITTO (approved on 07/03/2025)
- Digital Twin of the Ocean: Animal Tracking via Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) and in cooperation with European Tracking Network-VLIZ (Jan Reubens) (approved on 07/03/2025)
- Boosting seaweed farming with genetic resources via SBEP and in cooperation with ILVO (Tom Ruttink) (approved on 07/03/2025)
- Rare Earth Element Reduction in Ocean Green Energy via SBEP and in cooperation with VUB (Jan Helsen) (approved on 07/03/2025)
- FOODIMAR via SBEP and in cooperation with Ghent University (Jo Dewulf) (approved on 07/03/2025)

Project proposals were developed in 2025 for call #9 and #10:

1. Ostend Group on Ocean and Human Health (in preparation for 9th call)

These add to the existing and previously endorsed actions (see annexes).

Engagement and actionable support were provided to recent groups and coordination offices in 2024 – 205 (June):

- Capacity Development Facility, coordinated by the Decade Coordination Unit and in cooperation with IODE Project Office – Capacity Development team, VLIZ participates in the Steering committee. The CDF is a platform supporting the Ocean Decade by assessing opportunities for matchmaking (offer-demand; gaps) with the capacity development needs from the decade actions (Funded by government of Flanders through Flanders UNESCO Trust Fund FUST)
- Decade Coordination Office (DCO) for Ocean Data Sharing under IODE Project Office, coordinated by mr. Jan-Bart Calewaert.
- Ocean Decade Data Coordination group: with active membership of the VLIZ Marine Data Center, dr. Lennert Tyberghein, director of the VLIZ Marine Data Centre and member for the core group NDC-BE.
- VLIZ coordinates the Belgium node of the Early Career Ocean Professionals Programme under the Ocean Decade.

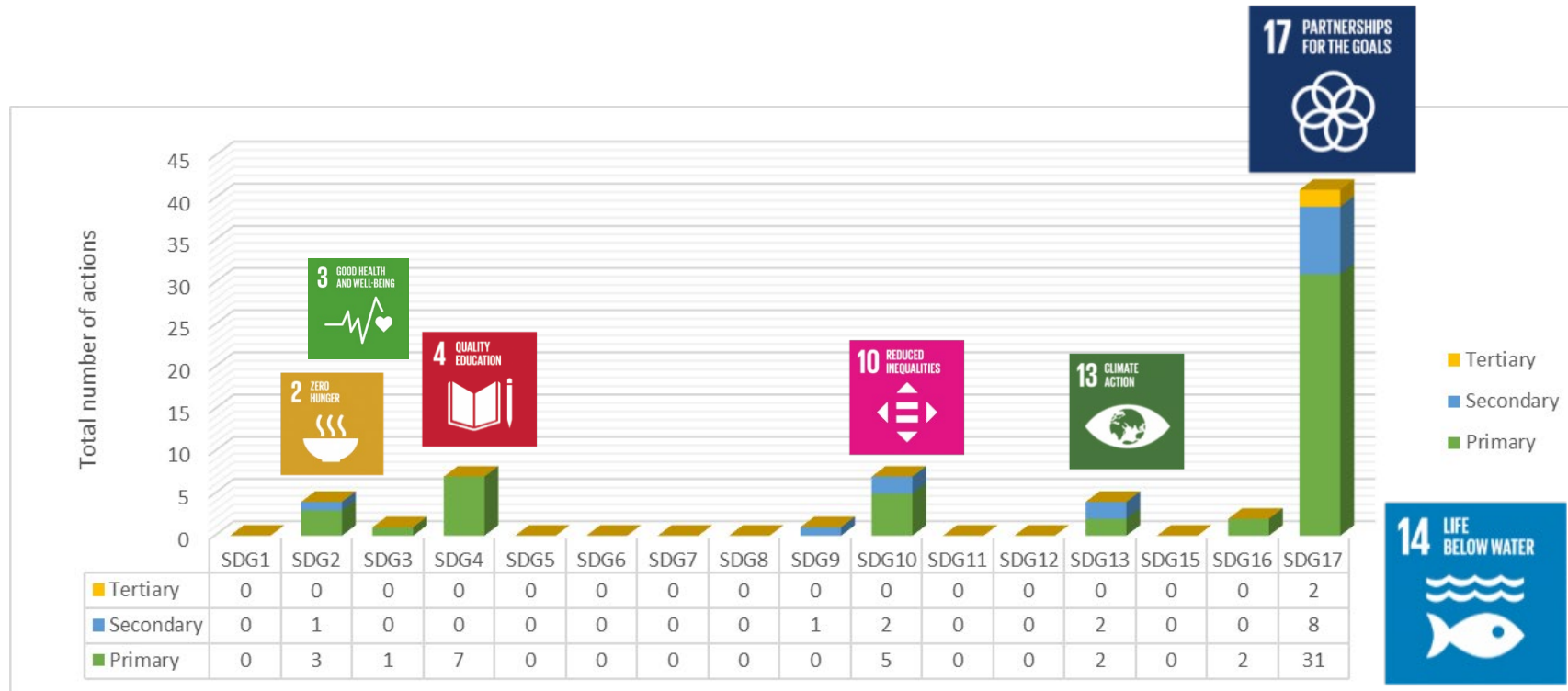


Figure 3 Data represents the distribution of SDGs across 60 Ocean Decade Actions in 2025. Priorities are categorized by the degree of focus: Primary (main objective), Secondary (direct contribution), and Tertiary (indirect alignment). All actions contribute to SDG14 therefore it is not considered in the graph.

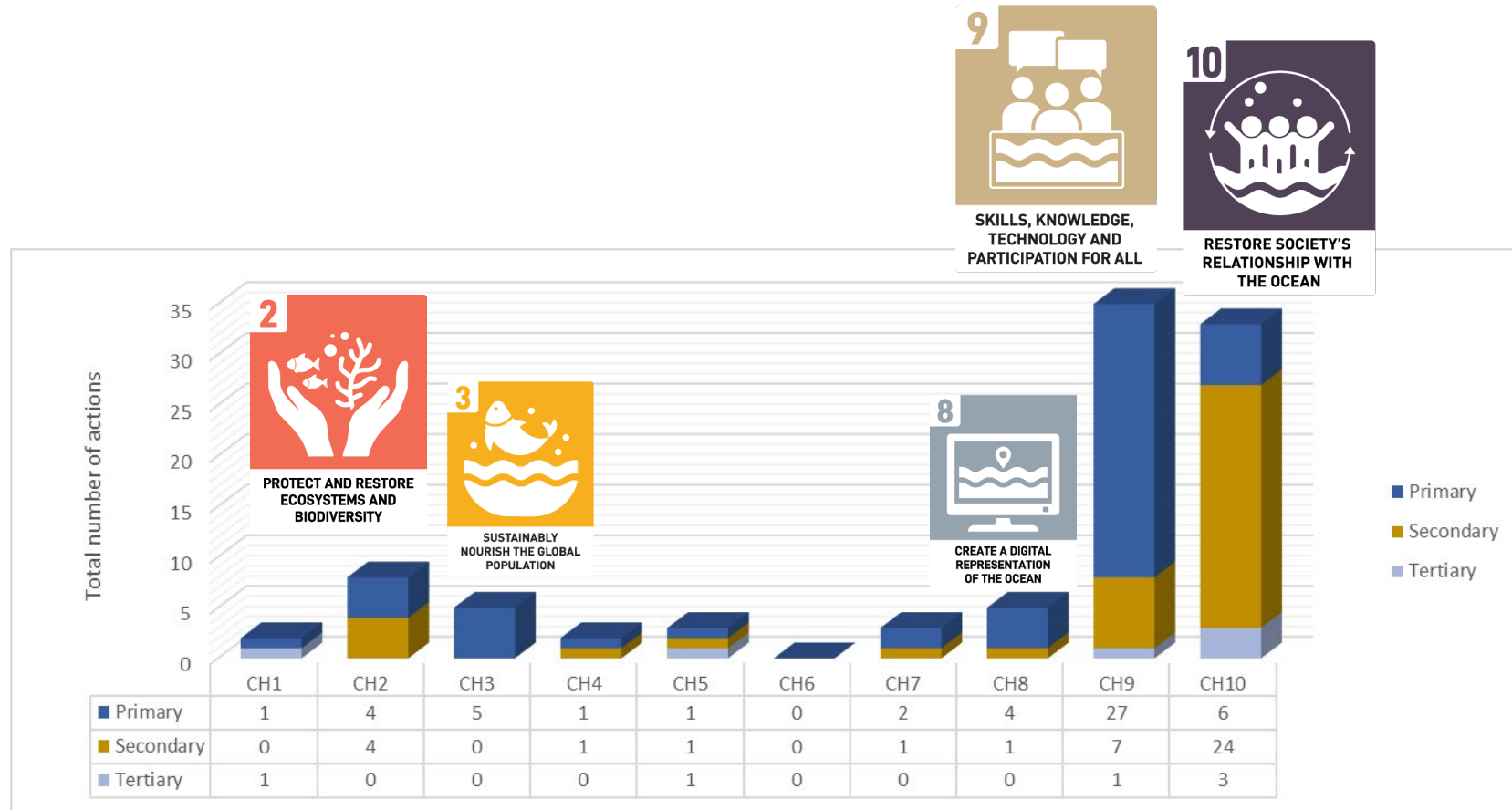


Figure 4 Data represents the distribution of Ocean Decade challenges across 60 Ocean Decade Actions in 2025. Priorities are categorized by the degree of focus: Primary (main objective), Secondary (direct contribution), and Tertiary (indirect alignment)

Concluding remarks

Over the past three years, the National Decade Committee for Belgium has demonstrated that Belgium is not only an active participant in the UN Ocean Decade, but also a trusted partner, mobiliser, and enabler of ocean science solutions. Just in 2025 with 63 coordinated actions, 54 Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) supported and actively engaged, and collaborations across three continents, Belgium-Flanders has successfully translated the Decade vision into tangible and inclusive outcomes.

Looking ahead, the NDC-BE will further strengthen its role by:

- Expanding bilateral cooperation with National Decade Committees to deliver co-designed projects with global, regional and local impact
- Deepening capacity development pathways, ensuring ECOPs are empowered to lead and shape future ocean science and innovation
- Scaling partnerships with the Global South, advancing shared commitments to equity, resilience and the Leave No One Behind principle
- Enhancing visibility and accessibility of ocean knowledge, data, and innovation for the benefit of all communities
- Mobilising new funding, including philanthropy and mission-driven investments, to accelerate implementation of endorsed Decade Actions

Belgium-Flanders will continue to lead by example — ensuring that Decade Actions are implementation-driven, aligned with global priorities emerging from Barcelona and the Vision 2030 process, and contributing to the outcomes of the 2025 UN Ocean Conference.

Next steps for 2026

Towards the end of the current reporting period January-December 2025, **13 Ocean Decade actions** have initiated and/or scheduled or in preparation in view of their implementation in 2026. These OD actions follow the core principles of co-design, multidisciplinary approach, innovation and abide by the ‘leave no-one behind’ principle. The preliminary list of activities of the NDC-BE for 2026 includes (subject to input and co-design of the NDC-BE partners):

1. VLIZ Marine Science Day 2026
2. World Conference on Marine Biodiversity 2026 – participation grants for ECOPs
3. Dag van de Wetenschap 2026
4. Nanopore workshop for the LACOBON network 2026 March – INVEMAR
5. EUREMAP UGent Summer School
6. Co-design action on blue education framework PART2
7. Co-design action on legal aspects Ocean and Human rights PART2
8. Co-design action on discourses for Ocean and Human rights PART2
9. Co-design action on ocean essential variables (GO2DAT)
10. Co-design action on science communication: Learning lab for ECOPs PART2
11. Alumni networks event: Master Oceans & Lakes in cooperation with OceanTeacher Global Academy
12. 2nd Mangrove training (Seeding sustainability project)- May 2026
13. Rapa Nui pilot under Co-Management 2030+ ocean decade project

PARTICIPATION IN THE UN OCEAN CONFERENCE 2025 & ONE OCEAN SCIENCE CONGRESS

Strategic Engagement: Global Data Sharing and NDC Collaboration

The NDC Belgium Secretariat facilitated a series of high-level technical exchanges focused on the operationalization of Ocean Decade goals through international data governance:

- **Global Strategic Alignment:** NDC Belgium participated in the global working meeting of NDCs aboard the RV METEOR, setting the five-year strategic outlook for political engagement and stakeholder diversity.
- **International Data Cooperation:** In cooperation with NDC Brazil and the Decade Coordination Office on data sharing, NDC Belgium presented at a panel session on the societal benefits of ocean data sharing.

- ECOP Advocacy and Panel Participation:
 - OOSC Panelist: The NDC Secretariat and ECOP representative served as a panelist at the Digital Twin Ocean Pavilion session by the UN Ocean Decade ECOP programme on the transformative role of young scientists in partnerships.
 - OOSC Town Hall Co-organizer: Led a dedicated session on the international participation of ECOPs, identifying and addressing barriers to engagement at UN-related conferences.
 - Youth Action Side Events: Presented capacity development activities for ECOPs and Flanders cooperation model at two events by the SOI Foundation (Canada, Quebec) as a contribution to SDG14

BBNJ Infrastructure: Technical Pillars of the Clearing House Mechanism

In the Belgian side event “The Importance of a Well-Working Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) for BBNJ,”. VLIZ presented as potential infrastructure the Ocean Decade projects WoRMS (World Register of Marine Species) and Marine Regions as foundational contributions to the BBNJ Clearing House Mechanism to make it a dynamic interoperable system:

- WoRMS serves as the global taxonomic reference, ensuring that biodiversity data across jurisdictions is standardized.
- Marine Regions provides the necessary geographic scaffolding for maritime boundaries and legal zones.

Together, these systems provide the technical "engine" required for transparency, justice, and scientific collaboration in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).

Capacity Development Facility

The Capacity Development Facility (CDF), funded by the Flanders UNESCO Science Trust Fund (FUST), was presented as a functional marketplace for the Ocean Decade.

- Operational Matchmaking: The facility’s Ocean Matcher tool was officially launched, providing a technical platform to align capacity-building supply with the specific demands of global partners.
- User Engagement: The launch confirmed strong international interest, positioning the CDF as a vital infrastructure for accelerating technology transfer and scientific literacy across the Decade network.

Knowledge Dissemination & Philanthropic Mobilization

- Scientific Knowledge: The brochure “Flanders – Gearing up our Blue Knowledge 2025” was launched at UNOC3, providing a technical overview of regional expertise in marine robotics, blue energy, and biotechnology as contributions to SDG 14.
- Strategic Philanthropy: VLIZ Philanthropy participated in the launch of the Ocean Matcher and was formally invited by the Decade Coordination Unit to take a leading role in relation to the travel grants for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference

UNOC3 High-Level Outcomes

- BBNJ Ratification: 19 additional ratifications (reaching 50 MS + EU) set a definitive path for the treaty to enter into force in 2026.
- Conservation Frameworks: 96 signatories committed to the Nice Action Plan, while 37 Member States signed a letter for a moratorium on deep-sea mining.
- Institutional Progress: The official launch of the International Panel for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS) and the EU Ocean Pact established new frameworks for public-private scientific collaboration.



PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OCEAN AND HUMAN HEALTH

The recent conference successfully positioned Ocean & Human Health (OHH) as a cornerstone of international knowledge exchange. By convening experts across diverse fields—including psychology, pharmacology, and pollution research—the event underscored a critical need for transdisciplinary collaboration. A significant paradigm shift was observed: moving beyond a traditional focus on environmental risks toward a proactive exploration of the ocean's benefits, ranging from mental health restoration to breakthroughs in marine-based medicine.

Supported by NDC Belgium, an Early Career Ocean Professional (ECOP) and expert representative from the Ostend Working Group on Ocean & Human Health—a philanthropy-driven network coordinated by the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ)—represented the Belgian scientific community. Their participation effectively amplified the research of 21 Belgian scientists spanning 15 distinct disciplines.



Key Scientific Highlights

- **Systemic Frameworks:** Gert Everaert introduced a newly published transdisciplinary framework designed to streamline and accelerate global OHH research.
- **Psychological Wellbeing:** Elias De Craene presented qualitative research detailing "coastal emotions" and their measurable impact on human wellbeing.
- **Controlled Environment Studies:** A joint presentation by Gert Everaert and Elias De Craene showcased Flanders' state-of-the-art simulation facilities, which replicate ocean conditions to study psychophysiological responses compared to urban and green spaces.
- **Biomedical Innovations:** Maarten De Rijcke highlighted emerging evidence regarding the influence of sea spray aerosols on the human immune system.

Global NDCs working meeting and co-organisation

Alongside of the conference, representatives from the different National Decade Committees and the Decade Coordination Unit start the development of a Joint statement on Ocean and Human Health, where key steps are highlighted to bring ocean and human health closer together, recognizing the health sector importance – though still underrepresented- ally in ocean protection. The declaration calls for greater integration of these dimensions both internationally particularly within the framework of the UN Ocean Decade, and nationally, advocating collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches capable of effectively responding to global challenges that simultaneously affect the health of the ocean and human populations. Final version can be found here: [Conferência "Ocean and Human Health" reúne especialistas internacionais e culmina com declaração conjunta](#)

The international conference was lead by the National Decade Committee of Portugal in partnership with the National Ocean Decade Committees of Belgium (Ann-Katrien Lescauwaet, Karen Rappé, Juana Jimenez) France, Deutsches Komitee der UN-Ozeandekade (ODK), UN Decade Ocean Committee Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Ocean

Decade UK and the USA, the Portuguese Committee for the IOC, Agricultura e Mar, Ministério da Educação, Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação, Estudo Autónomo -, Conselho Português para a Saúde e Ambiente, Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, the Maritime Academy, Instituto Português do Mar e da Atmosfera (IPMA), EMEPC, Centre Scientifique de Monaco, CIESM - Mediterranean Science Commission, CIMA Ualg., Universidade de Aveiro and CESAM - Centre for Environmental and Marine Studies, LNEC, the Global Action Network Sustainable Food from the Ocean and Inland Waters, and MYOCEAN.Net.



Figure 5 Presentation of the Ostend Working group on Ocean and Human Health at the International Conference on Ocean and Human Health (Lisbon, 2025)



Figure 6 NDC Belgium representation at the International Conference on Ocean and Human Health (Lisbon, 2025). From left to right: Ann-Katrien Lescauwae, Gert Everaert, Elias De Craene and Juana Jimenez

Walking the talk: Our support to ECOPs and Leave no one behind principle

Support to Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)

We invest directly in the next generation of ocean leadership by expanding skills, visibility, and participation pathways for ECOPs.

Element of Support	NDC-BE Ocean Decade actions
Capacity Development (training, skills, leadership)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning lab on science communication for and by ECOPs (Belgium node: Creators for Climate, VLIZ) • Data management for sustainable development on FAIR, CARE and TRUST principles (EuroGOOS, VLIZ, EU4Ocean) • Ocean Decade presentation at APECS Belgium (September 2025) – polar conference for ECOPs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ocean Decade session at the WIOMSA conference 2025 (October 2025) – where NDC Belgium shared best practices to engage national and regional actors and apply the co-design principle.
Representation and Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call for ECOPs to join the scientific committee of the World Conference on Marine Biodiversity (global) • ECOPs World Conference on Marine Biodiversity at scientific committee roles secured (global) • Coordination of ECOP Belgium node (Belgium) • ECOP Belgium node at UNOC3 and One Ocean Science Congress
Funding & Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 participation grants for ECOPs to attend the UNOC3 and One Ocean Science Congress • 5 grants under Brilliant Marine Research Idea • 3 participation grants for EMSEA conference 2025 • 1 participation grant for international conference on Ocean & Human Health • 2 participation grants for ECOP trainers at Erasmus Maris training • 1 Joint PhD in collaboration with UQAR-VLIZ
Networking & Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student job under Ocean Decade secretariat • Networking and peer-to-peer mentoring under ECOP Belgium node • Internship for IKUMA8 conference • VLIZ DIP (mentoring role) at ERASMUS IMBRSea symposium
Communication & Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributions to ECOP newsletter (global) • Launch of ECOP Belgium newsletter + social media

Support to the Global South

We apply the *Leave No One Behind* principle by directing scientific cooperation, knowledge exchange, and funding toward under-resourced regions in the Global South.

Region / Principle	NDC-BE Ocean Decade actions
Bi-regional research exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 scientific exchange VLIZ – IFOP (Chile) on marine litter, biodiversity, carbon, and data (Chile) • 2 scientific exchange for OD projects: INSPIRE and IMARPE (Peru) as representatives of REMARCO (Red de Investigación de Estresores Marinos – Costeros en Latinoamérica y el Caribe) • 2 scientific exchange VLIZ – INVEMAR (Colombia) to develop the Colombian Register of Marine Species (CoRMS) in collaboration with WoRMS
Local knowledge co-production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-management 2030+ (Chile)
Strengthening national data systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAIR oceanographic data collection project in Magallanes (Chile) • Fully operational Peruvian Register of Marine Species (Peru, IMARPE) • Development Colombian Register of Marine Species (Colombia, INVEMAR)
South–South / cross-regional participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 participation grants: Presence and support provided at UNOC3 and One Ocean Science Congress participation for WIOMSA ECOP representative (Tanzania) and NGO Mundus Maris representatives (Argentina, Senegal, Nigeria) • 4 participation grants to CPPS (Comision Permanente del Pacifico Sur) members for the GOOS Regional Alliance South Pacific (GRASP meeting)
Global inclusion mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to the Capacity Development Facility (global) with explicit Global South focus • Co-management 2030+ and EDITO cooperation proposal (global) for the Ocean Decade

Resources

The NDC-BE is supported by the engagement of its members and members' institutions and partnerships. Additionally, the Flanders government (EWI) has reserved earmarked funding to support the Ocean Decade in response to Flanders government ambition to adhere to the Ocean Decade. This funding and mobilisation of resources is reflected in the

outputs/outcomes of the VLIZ DIP and the NDC-BE and includes a 1 FTE in support of the Implementation of the Ocean Decade, and 1 PTE in support of the implementation of the Ocean Decade and related programmes and initiatives at EU, sea basin, regional, national, and local level. Additional funding secured through Flanders government provides 'seed money' for actions and initiatives under the Ocean Decade.

References

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- www.oceandecade.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/09/337572-Decade%20Collaborative%20Centres%20and%20Decade%20Implementing%20Partners:%20Operational%20Guidelines
- UNESCO-IOC. 2021. National Decade Committees Operational Guidelines. Paris, UNESCO (IOC/2021/ODS/24) (The Ocean Decade Series, 24)
- www.oceandecade.org/wp-content/uploads//2021/09/337557-National%20Decade%20Committees%20Operational%20Guidelines
- The VLIZ [Ethical Code of Scientific Research in Belgium](#) (Dutch only) (2009)
- The [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) (2011). Diversity and inclusion, gender and equality plan
- NDC for Belgium (2023). Terms of Reference. Core group members National Decade Committee for Belgium (2023). https://vliz.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/division_international_relations-NationalDecadeCommittee/Gedeelde%20documenten/National%20Decade%20Committee/Documents%20by%20NDC-BE%20core%20group/ToR_NDC-BE_approved.docx?d=wa3e30f7d1aa7431daaebf79e7d73c6b9&csf=1&web=1&e=bYUfoH

Relevant Ocean Decade documents

- [The Science We Need for The Ocean We Want](#)
- [Join the movement for the Ocean We Want](#)
- [Co-designing the Science We Need: Guidance and recommendations for DA](#)
- [State-of-the-Art of Ocean Literacy](#)
- OD Implementation plan [full report](#) and [summary](#)
- [Decade Collaborative Centers and Decade Implementing Partners: Operational guidelines 2021](#)
- [Ocean Literacy framework for the UN Ocean Decade](#)
- [Advancing science for sustainable ocean business: an opportunity for the Private Sector](#)
- [Ocean Knowledge for a Sustainable Ocean Economy](#)
- [The transformative role of Foundations in the Ocean Decade](#)
- [Foundations Dialogue – The Bouknadel Statement](#)
- [Brand Guidelines for the Ocean Decade](#)
- [National Decade Committee for Belgium HANDBOOK](#)

ANNEX I

Overview of actions developed by the NDC-BE in support of the Ocean Decade in 2025

PM = Person months. Question marks '?' will need a follow up with partners to determine the exact amount of co-funding or co in-kind

ID Code	Title	Lead partner	Contact person	Lead Country	NDC Secretariat		Co-support	
					Total NDC funding (euro)	Total NDC in-kind (PM)	Total Co-funding (euro)	Total Co-in-kind
					124982.87	20.40	46600.00	36.00
ID Code	Title	Lead partner	Contact person	Lead Country	NDC-financial	NDC-in-kind (PM)	Co-financial	Co-in-kind (PM)
OD_BE_00099	VLIZ Marine Science Day 2025	VLIZ	Jan Seys	Belgium	100.00	0.10	3600.00	7.00
OD_BE_00100	ECOPs scientific committee of World Conference on Marine Biodiversity 2026	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_00101	Communication toolkit about VISTOOLS - part 2	ILVO	Hans Polet / Tom Janssen	Belgium	3750.00	0.60	0.00	0.30
OD_BE_00102	Awareness campaign underwater sound - FPS Transport - part 2	FPS Transport	Marie-Lucie Susini	Belgium	2720.00	0.00	0.00	0.30
OD_BE_00103	FAIR oceanographic data collection and protocols for ocean observation in the Ocean Decade - Magallanes region - part 2	UGent	Mann and	Belgium	3625.00	0.60	?	2.00
OD_BE_00104	IKUWA 8 + Philantrophy support	VLIZ Philantrophy	Karen Rappé	Belgium	0.00	0.10	12000.00	?
OD_BE_00105	Dag van de Wetenschap / Science Day 2025	VLIZ	Bart De Smet	Belgium	0.00	0.00	1000.00	2.00

OD_BE_001 06	Gearing Up brochure: contribution from Flanders to OD / UNOC	Blue Cluster	Kinnie	Belgium	363.34	0.60	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 07	The Sea As a Good Cause in support to the OD - 2025	VLIZ Philantrophy	Karen Rappé	Belgium	0.00	0.10	30000.00	0.50
OD_BE_001 08	VISTool podcasts	ILVO	Hans Polet / Tom Janssen	Belgium	0.00	0.00	?	?
OD_BE_001 09	IKUWA 8 ECOP internship part 2	VLIZ	Heidi Coussens/Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 10	EDITO II - international cooperation	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 11	EDITO for DITTO project endorsed	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.00
OD_BE_001 12	Co-management 2030+	NGO Conectar para Conservar	Layla Osman	Chile	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.00
OD_BE_001 13	Support to management portal Peruvian Register of Marine Species portal (PeRMS)	VLIZ	Leen Vandepitte	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	?
OD_BE_001 14	Communication NDC Belgium 2025	VLIZ OD secretariat	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	1.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 15	Ocean Decade proposals preparation 2025	VLIZ OD secretariat	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	0.80	0.00	0.20
OD_BE_001 16	Global NDC meetings 2025	VLIZ OD secretariat	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	600.00	1.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 17	Book 'The unknown sea'	VLIZ Philantrophy	Karen Rappé , Ann- Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	15000.00	0.00	?	1.00
OD_BE_001 18	EMSEA Conference 2025 - ECOP grants	EMSEA	Evy Copejans	Belgium	3500.00	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 19	INSPIRE: River Cleanup activity GenOcean	VLIZ	Gert Everret , Ana Catarino	Belgium	0.00	0.00	?	?

OD_BE_001 20	ECOP webinar series with EuroGOOS	EuroGOOS	Dina Eparkhina	Belgium	0.00	0.60	0.00	1.50
OD_BE_001 21	BE-POLAR conference ECOP support and presentation	APECS	Coraline Leseurre	Belgium	500.00	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 22	Student job at NDC-BE secretariat 2025	VLIZ	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	1000.00	0.50	0.00	0.00
OD_BE_001 23	NDC Belgium secretariat and ECOP Belgium node participation at OOSC and UNOC3	VLIZ	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	4023.99	0.50	0.00	6.00
OD_BE_001 24	UNOC3 side event on data sharing	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.50
OD_BE_001 25	UNOC3 BBNJ clearing house mechanism	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet	Belgium	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.50
OD_BE_001 26	UNOC3 - Mundus Maris side event	Mundus Maris	Patricia Morales	Belgium	2425.50	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 27	GO2DAT summer school - TBC	Uliege	Marilaure Grégoire	NA	NA	0.00	NA	NA
OD_BE_001 28	Installation of new sea level station and capacity development	VLIZ	Francisco Hernandez	NA	NA	0.00	NA	NA
OD_BE_001 29	Artificial Intelligence supporting citizen science and citizen engagement, digital field guide application and identification of fish species	Mundus Maris	Cornelia Nauen	NA	5000.00	0.00	0.00	0.50
OD_BE_001 30	Involvement with other NDCs 2025	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	700.00	0.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 31	NDC core meetings 2025	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	1500.00	1.20	0.00	3.00
OD_BE_001 32	NDC Belgium open and annual meeting 2025	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	100.00	1.20	0.00	0.20
OD_BE_001 33	NDC Belgium [one-one] meetings 2025	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet, Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	1.20	0.00	1.50

OD_BE_001 34	Co-management - RapaNui pilot project PART1	NGO Conectar para Conservar	Layla Osman	Chile	10000.00	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 35	Coordination of ECOP Belgium node 2025	VLIZ	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	0.00	2.40	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 36	Support Capacity Development Facility - Steering Committee 2025	VLIZ	Ann-Katrien Lescrauwaet	Belgium	0.00	0.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 37	FAO data standards - Marine Regions/WoRMS	VLIZ	Lawrence Whatley	Belgium	5200.00	0.20	0.00	1.00
OD_BE_001 38	Development of CoRMS (INVEMAR-WoRMS)	INVEMAR	Cristina and Erica	Colombia	6867.44	0.90	?	?
OD_BE_001 39	Scientific exchange on plastic research (IMARPE-INSPIRE)	IMARPE	Sara Purca	Peru	2401.55	0.90	?	?
OD_BE_001 40	Joint PhD project on biogeochemical modelling (UQAR-VLIZ) - Ocean observation (data)	UQAR	Mathilde Jutras	Canada	22000.00	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 41	ECOP grant for UNOC and OOSC (WIOMSA, DCO data sharing)	VLIZ OD secretariat	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	2621.18	0.60	?	?
OD_BE_001 42	IMBRSea Symposium 2025 - participation ECOP programme	VLIZ OD secretariat	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	548.60	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 43	Networking opportunities for ECOP (IMBRSea, Oceans & Lakes)	VLIZ OD secretariat	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	800.00	0.20	?	?
OD_BE_001 44	ECOP grant for Erasmus Maris training 2025	VLIZ OD secretariat	Juana Jimenez	Belgium	2816.26	0.10	?	?
OD_BE_001 45	International Conference on OHH 2025 and ECOP grant	NDC Portugal	Luis Pinheiro	Portugal	3176.68	0.60	?	?
OD_BE_001 46	Ocean Decade session at WIOMSA conference 2025	IOC Africa	Edwin Mwashinga	Kenya	2529.33	0.40	?	?
OD_BE_001 47	Co-design action on legal aspects Ocean and Human rights PART1	VUB	Erik Franckx	Belgium	5000.00	0.10	?	?
OD_BE_001 48	Co-design action on discourses for Ocean and Human rights PART1	Mundus Maris	Patricia Morales	Belgium	3500.00	0.10	?	?
OD_BE_001 49	Co-design action on blue education framework PART1	EMSEA	Evy Copejans	Belgium	5000.00	0.10	?	?

OD_BE_001 50	Learning lab on science communication PART1	Creators for Climate	Tom Janssen	Belgium	5000.00	0.10	?	?
OD_BE_001 51	GOOS Regional Alliance South Pacific GRASP meeting contribution	Comision Permanente del Pacifico Sur (CPPS)	Edwin Pinto	Peru	2614.00	0.20	?	?

ANNEX II

Formally endorsed Ocean DA involving partners based in Belgium (including NDC-BE members projects and activities).

Last update March 2025

Disclaimer: It was possible to keep track of the decade activities by partners in Belgium which were shared via email by the Decade Coordination Unit. If you are a partner based in Belgium and your activity/project/programme that you are involved in is not in the list, you can share it with us to oceandecade@vliz.be.

ID code	Title	Category	Progress	Institution based in Belgium	Contact person
-	9th EMB Forum	Activity	endorsed	EMB	Paula
SBEP05	Boosting seaweed farming with genetic resources	Project	endorsed	ILVO	Tom Ruttink
SBEP06	Rare Earth Element Reduction in Ocean Green Energy	Project	endorsed	VUB	Jan Helsen
SBEP12	FOODIMAR	Project	endorsed	Ugent	Jo Dewulf
SBEP13	Digital Twin of the Ocean: Animal Tracking	Project	endorsed	VLIZ	Jan Reubens
-	EMSEA 2025	Activity	endorsed	EMSEA	Evy Copejans
-	EMODnet conference 2025	Activity	endorsed	EMODnet	Kate Larkin
-	VISTool Podcast serie	Activity	endorsed	Creators for Climate	Tom Janssen
9.7	EDITO contributing to the DITTO	Project	endorsed	EU Commission	Nicolas Segebarth, Zoi Konstantinou

ANNEX III

List of membership to the core group of the National Ocean Decade Committee for Belgium NDC-BE

Participants (in alphabetical order):

Affiliation	Name	Last name
Belspo (Federal Public Planning Service Science Policy)	Koen	LEFEVER
Blue Cluster	Kinnie	DE BEULE
Department of Chancellery and Foreign Affairs (DKBUZA)	Simon	CALCOEN
EMSEA (European Marine Science Educators Association)	Evy	COPEJANS
Economy, Science and Innovation department (EWI) Flanders Government	Gert	VERREET
Federal Public Service (FPS) Mobility and Transport, DG Shipping	Marie-Lucie	SUSINI
Federal Public Service Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment of Belgium (FPS Health, Chair)	Sophie	MIRGAUX
HAEDES Consultancy & Engineering	Piet	HAERENS
ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)	Johan	ROBBENS
NGO Mundus Maris	Patricia	MORALES
The Sea As a Good Cause (VLIZ philanthropy)	Karen	RAPPE
Province of West-Flanders /Coastal office (Streekhuis Kust)	Hannelore	MAELFAIT
University of Ghent /Ostend Science Park	Colin *Eveline	JANSSEN DIOPERE
University of Liege	Marilaure	GRÉGOIRE
VLIZ (Focal point, co-chair)	Ann-Katrien	LESCRAUWAET
VLIZ (NDC Secretariat)	Juana	JIMENEZ
VLIZ Marine Data Center	Lennert	TYBERGHEIN
Oceans and Lakes	Karolien	VAN PUYVELDE
Vrije Universiteit Brussel	Diana	DI NITTO