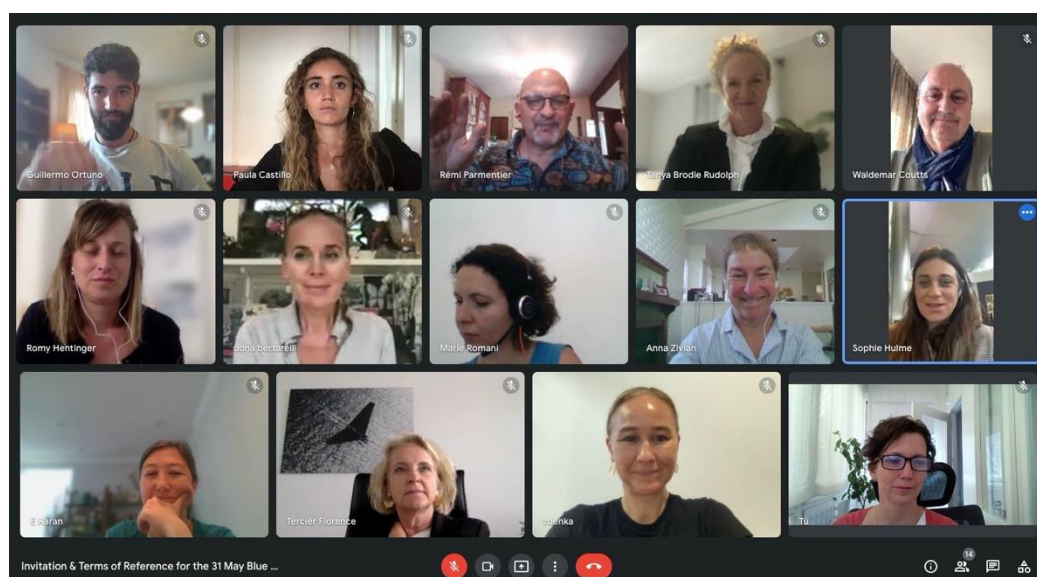


## FROM BLUE FOOD FOR THOUGHT TO BLUE FOOD FOR ACTION

### Thematic webinar #5: *Opportunities & Options for Regional Ocean Management Organizations* 31 May 2022



#### Participants

- Rémi Parmentier, The Varda Group, lead author of the report and facilitator
- Dona Bertarelli, Ledunfly Philanthropy (partner)
- Romy Hentinger, Fondation Tara Océan (partner)
- Marie Romani, MedPAN (partner)
- Sophie Hulme, Director
- Ambassador Waldemar Coutts, Former Director for Climate and Ocean, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chile
- Tanya Brodie Rudolph, Enviromer, South Africa
- Guillermo Ortuño, Stockholm Resilience Center
- Elizabeth Karan, Project Director, Protecting Ocean Life on the High Sea Campaign, The Pew Charitable Trusts
- Anna Zivian, The Ocean Conservancy
- Zdenka Piskulich, Managing Director, Enduring Earth
- Isabel Leal, The Varda Group
- Paula Castillo, The Varda Group trainee

#### With support from:



## Introduction

This was the fifth and last thematic webinar following the publication of the paper [From Blue Food for Thought to Blue Food for Action](#), which contains share some new ideas for protecting the ocean, focussed this time on Opportunities & Options Regional Ocean Management Organizations. The paper was presented at the Monaco Ocean Week in March and notes from the round table which took place there, and from all thematic webinars are available on the blue Food for Action [Google Drive](#).

Now that the cycle is completed, the **Lisbon Addendum** to the original paper will be prepared, for presentation at the UN Ocean Conference at the end of June 2022. A room has been booked for a **presentation in Lisbon, on 28 June from 16h00 to 17h30** at the [PT Meeting Center](#), Auditorium 3, just across the street from the main “blue zone” UN Conference venue.

The poster features a dark teal background on the left and a light grey background on the right. On the left, the United Nations logo is at the top, followed by 'OCEAN CONFERENCE' and 'LISBON 27 JUNE - 1 JULY 2022'. The main title 'Welcome out of the box!' is in large white letters, with the subtitle 'From Blue Food For Thought To Blue Food For Action' and 'Making ocean protection the norm rather than the exception' below it. The event details include 'Side event at the UN Ocean Conference, Lisbon', 'Save the date!', 'Tuesday, 28 June 2022', '16h00-17h30', and 'Auditorium III - PT Meeting Centre, R. do Bojador, 1990-048 Lisbon'. The website 'www.vardagroup.org' is at the bottom left. On the right, there is a QR code with an envelope icon, the word 'register' below it, a small photo of a coastal landscape, and logos for 'the VARDAGROUP', 'DONA BERTARELLI LUDWIG PHILANTHROPY', 'Foundation tara ocean', and 'MedPAN'.

These webinars are conducted under the Chatham House Rule whereby individual statements are not attributed unless someone wishes to be on record.

After an introduction by Rémi Parmentier (The Varda Group, lead author of the paper) and opening remarks by Dona Bertarelli, Romy Hentinger (Tara Ocean Foundation) and Marie Romani (MedPAN), each participant was asked to address some of the following questions during a *tour de table* and ensuing dialogue:

1. Do you think that ROMOs can be a valid option to address the fragmentation of ocean governance?
2. Do you think ROMOs should be an option to substitute [certain] RFMOs, or to supervise them?
3. Given the time that it would take to establish a new architecture of ocean governance under the supervision of ROMOs, would it be preferable to envisage

- ROMOs as some form of watchdog independent from governments which would report periodically in the margins of RFMOs, Regional Seas Conventions meetings and other relevant instruments or fora? If so, which independent organisations could be candidates to lead such an effort, and how should they be approached?
4. Could the proposed international panel on ocean sustainability, which will be discussed at the UN Ocean Conference, pursuant to initial conversations held at the One Ocean Summit and the Monaco Ocean Week this year, be fit for this purpose?
  5. Could one approach be a [pilot] project within on specific region? For example: the Mediterranean, the Southern Ocean, the Arctic, BBNJ, the North Sea or the wider Northeast Atlantic?
  6. Any other bold out-of-the-box relevant ideas to secure a strong and effective implementation of ocean protection through the ecosystem approach?

In his introduction, Rémi Parmentier explained that unlike the other proposals contained in the paper, Regional Ocean Management Organizations (ROMOs) were **not exactly a new idea**: it has been discussed a number of times in the context of the ecosystem approach since the world summit on sustainable development of 2002, the reform of Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMOs), the Global Ocean Commission (2013-2016), and also among NGOs (principally, WWF and Pew). He said that as explained in the paper, Regional Ocean Management Organizations could complement the work of RFMOs by taking into account cumulative impacts affecting the ocean, for example those due to climate change or pollution (including noise pollution). And maybe also emerging issues such as deep-sea mining. Rémi pointed out to **several options**, including whether ROMOs could be **independent watchdogs** overseeing RFMOs and regional seas programmes, or whether a **governments-led pilot project** in one or two different regions should be envisaged. Encouraging participants to think out-of-the-box he mentioned also a possible linkage with the **international panel on ocean sustainability** which will be discussed in Lisbon at the end of June.

He reminded that this process was made possible thanks to the support of Dona Bertarelli Philanthropy, the Tara Ocean Foundation and MEDPAN – the network of Mediterranean MPAs.

### Partners' Opening Remarks

#### Dona Bertarelli (DB Ledunfly Philanthropy):

Referring to the entire series of webinars, including the round table in Monaco, Dona said that it was with this last issue of ROMOs that she struggled the most to think with something inspiring, because she was unsure whether out of the box can take us where we have to go, or whether instead in this instance we have to stay within the box to change it. Reminding that she was a member of Friends of Ocean Action and also an IUCN Patron of Nature and UNCTAD Special Adviser for the Blue Economy, she said that even in these organizations where you have great brains and people that do things to try to move mountains, one can easily get stuck trying to advance ambition and tracking commitments from governments. On the question of whether ROMOs should be independent organizations or an arbiter that tracks commitments

and targets or countries-driven organizations, she said that she was interested to hear what others had to say.

**Romy Hentinger (Tara Ocean Foundation):**

Romy underscored that it was important to discuss innovative approaches to fisheries. Tara has been working since 2015 with African countries, and they are now running a programme with Senegalese researchers in their country. She said that it was very important that fisheries are regarded not only from a species focus, but from an ecosystem perspective. For example, researchers working with Tara are trying to better understand the role of plankton in fisheries management and conservation and to develop integrated visions and interdisciplinary management when it comes to fisheries management. With regard to new governance entities like ROMOs, Romy said we must think of the best approach for ocean, fishers and coastal communities.

**Marie Romani (MedPAN):**

Marie agreed with Dona about the need to connect the in and out of the box evolve and achieve change. Based on MedPAN's experience as an observer at the meetings of the Barcelona Convention, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the Union for the Mediterranean, she noted a wide gap to achieve integrated ocean management at the regional level, and a difficulty to resolve or reduce the gap through a Forum of key governmental and non-governmental actors at local, national, and regional level, to progress formal agreements on a roadmap that can identify key actions to implement ocean protection commitments and attempt to connect stakeholders at different levels. However the Forum meets only once every four years, which is not enough. She said that in that context a ROMO in the Mediterranean would help as a complement but she thought that the watchdog option may not trigger the desirable evolution.

**Tour de Table**

**One participant said that from a communications perspective**, there was “a real need for a watchdog approach as RFMOs have often scored quite low in terms of effectiveness”.

She outlined the need for improved transparency in RFMOs meeting behind closed doors: “we should tackle RFMOs out of their remit and their non-transparent structure”. She also alluded the need to put the climate change connection at the heart of protecting the ocean, especially the Southern Ocean. Referring to the various “ocean summits” that take place frequently, she said that despite lots of activities before they take place and “a big fanfare during the events with a lot of good announcements”, there was “not enough follow-up, which limits their potential.” She said that: “we need to take the momentum of these events and then follow up, including helping the media to connect the dots, show progress and demonstrate how the needle to achieve ocean health is moving.” She welcomed the opportunity of the Blue food for Action webinars to reflect and brainstorm, exchange ideas and looking how we can take things forward.

**Another participant speaking from his perspective coming public affairs** shared his experience in promoting the linkages between climate change and ocean change through a

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holistic approach which includes connecting efforts at the UNFCCC, the CBD, BBNJ negotiations, the WTO and of course the ambition of protecting 30% of land and ocean by 2030. With regard to the Global Ocean Commission proposal on ROMOs dating back from 2014, he said that “maybe it’s time to revive this idea, especially because certain RFMOs are more conservative than others”. Referring to the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization, he said it had adopted an ecosystem approach and the precautionary principle and there was a proposal to create the [Salas y Gómez and Nasca ridges](#) High Seas MPAs in the South-Eastern Pacific Ocean. He said that “with time we might be able to create a ROMO or similar because of the need to tackle these issues with a holistic approach: RFMOs tackle fisheries only, but there are many other issues that are involved in what it seems to be a big turnover in terms of ambition on how we wish to manage the ocean.” He expressed hope that this could be part of the conversation at the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon.

**The next participant to take the floor** said that she what inspired her about ROMOs was “the recognition that we need to do some things differently”. She said that “we are all aware that we cannot continue to govern the ocean the way we’ve had for the past hundred years, and that we are not going to get a sustainable future ocean if we continue as we have in the past.” She said “we need to shift, we need coordinated governance at different levels, from local to regional to global.” “What I like about the ROMO idea is bringing existing institutions together, to manage their common resources collectively. However because of the narrow and sectoral focus of RFMOs it is unlikely that on their own they will adopt an ecosystem approach.” She suggested that it might be interesting to explore links with the regional management bodies which deal with water governance issues in transboundary river basins, and that a regional management organization that includes regional fisheries management and other entities in the same ocean space, could be very effective. She added also that: “for good governance we need good science”, and informed on on-going discussions about a possible future Panel on Ocean Sustainability which in her view could serve to connect knowledge gaps in the ocean, increase cohesive access to science and break the knowledge silos which exist in different institutions. “ROMOs can have a coordination function in bringing existing ocean organisations and existing knowledge systems together; and be a bridge between science and policies.”

**A participant with a scientific background** said that for the last ten years, he had been thinking about the relationship of RFMOs with the BBNJ draft agreement. He said that BBNJ is very focus on biodiversity, and RFMOs not so much; he thought that part of the problem was that RFMOs were managed individually. “We are managing 16,000 transboundary species in the ocean with ‘boxes’ (RFMOs) who don’t talk to one another, which is deeply problematic.” “I prefer to empathize with them, but how many decades it is going to change them?” He said that “we do not only need simple evolution, but revolutionary evolution; we need to take RFMOs from within, to work on the box, and expand the mandate to fill the gaps.” He also emphasized that still today large areas of the high seas are without RFMOs and said that implementation of the UN fish Stocks Agreement of 1995 is still missing. He said that he believed in the idea of ROMOs, but being pragmatic he thought that BBNJ was the best hope for biodiversity in the high seas. “The best use of our time and energy would be to find the best space to work RFMOs from within, adding ROMOs to the existing framework.”

**One member of a large NGO** said that around today’s conversation, there are two issues: one being on effective implementation and the other on the role of watchdogs, which she said are both two very important but separate functions. She said that there are many organizations

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tasked with implementation, and also many existing conventions like CCAMLR, OSPAR, the Barcelona Convention, etc. “We need to get these organizations work better and smarter, and be accountable for the mandates they have received, because they are not doing enough.” She also made reference to conflicting mandates of different overlapping organizations: “This is a challenge that we are seeing, and there is a need for some sort of accountability mechanism.”

She recognized that the BBNJ agreement was not going to solve all the gaps and governance deficiencies “But I do think that it has the potential to set up the ideal conditions for many issues, as to establishing high seas MPAs, as it can facilitate the dialogue and integrate the recommendations from environmental impact assessments and highlight the critical needs as long as we know where are the gaps and needs.”

**The member of another NGO** said she saw two different threads: one was improving existing bodies including RFMOs which are sector-specific; one other issue was the watchdog approach in the implementation. She suggested to think of ROMOs in the context of the Barcelona Convention and maybe other regional seas programmes. She also thought that indigenous peoples, and “not just ministers”, should be brought in the conversation. She said she liked the idea of ROMOs “because I don’t think RFMOs alone can provide the ideal governance we need, but ROMOs must not be just another international body where the same voices are heard, and the same voices are excluded again.” She added that she could see an important role for ROMOs in terms of coordination: “They can have a strong role in making people talk to each other. e.g., governments and communities working on the science side; and the scientists working on the governance side.”

**Another ocean advocate** said that the fragmented approach in conservation required a convening capacity to create a common vision and sustainable finance for that vision. She said that she saw fragmentation of institutions not only at the international level, but that it was also happening at the national level. “Many marine efforts are stuck in complex insititutionalities at regional level leading to that fragmentation.” Talking of control and surveillance, she used the example of Costa Rica where she identified 17 institutions that had a say in terms of protected areas. “Everywhere we see a myriad of organizations and the need for simplicity. We need first to make sure that whatever is created can be applied in a practical way at a national scale. She said it was important that whatever is designed can be designated can be replicated or followed up by governments and stakeholders at the national level: “Thinking about structure, for many of the practitioners in the field a lot of what’s being discussed refers to and is negotiated at the international level.” She also alluded to the lack of access to information as a major problem: “In RFMOs, the information is not easily accessible for those who are not working directly in these topics, and many times, it is almost impossible to access data; you need to request it from governments and it can take months and years to get the information.” She saw three levels that need to be included: governments, organized civil society, and local stakeholders: “It is key to ensure an adequate participation of all three, so the three dimensional approach is effective, and that whatever is created is not another government-led body that manages information.” She said that “a lot of what happens at these conferences never gets translated into practicalities.” She support previous remarks on ocean science, noting that it is easier to work across borders at territorial level than in the ocean: “in ocean campaigns, we often don’t know what the correct institutions are to work with.” Based on this background, she manifested interest in thinking of ROMOs in regional

case studies, for example in the Mediterranean or the South Pacific, as opposed to the local level where initiatives are already underway.

## Discussion

**One participant** expressed support for the point made on social justice and indigenous peoples. She said that “we need to reach a level of confidence and mutual trust to ensure that all different voices are heard and taken into account.” She believed in the power of networks in particular to establish the connection between the local and the decision-making levels, but also the sub-regional level (for example, the Adriatic and the Ionian Seas in the Mediterranean.)

**Another participant** reiterated that science can be cohesive and can translate the impacts of the different users. She said that she agreed to keep the “ROMOs spirit” (ecosystem approach taking account of multiple and cumulative impacts) and giving more space for scientific dialogues and data sharing, but without necessarily creating new organisations.

**One participant** said that she liked the concept of revolutionary evolution concept which was raised during this webinar. Regarding the agenda of the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, noting that such large conferences and processes with world leaders were top down, and she said that this time around it would be good to have the opportunity to not only just listen and record commitments, but also to build the accountability that we all seem to agree is needed.” Expressing the shared sense of frustration which is often present at these conferences, she suggested to try to have some mandatory bottom up segment to produce and track the changes we want.

In response, **someone stated his very clear belief** that there is a need for an action-oriented holistic approach, and to lead by example.