

South African Chapter of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Academic Group

“10 Years Supporting South Africa’s Science Diplomacy”



Nicole du Plessis
SA IORAG Secretariat
NRF-SAEON Egagasini Node

SA IORAG University Roadshow 2026
Bloemfontein, 19 May 2026

<https://iora-sa.saeon.ac.za/>

Establishing the SA IORAG – 2016

- South Africa was confirmed as vice-chair of IORA in October 2015; taking over as Chair in October 2017
- In preparation for South Africa's chairship, DIRCO invited ministries to consider providing support by leading the various institutional groups of IORA
- In 2016 the DSTI requested NRF-SAEON to host the SA IORAG Secretariat and facilitate academic engagement in IORA in preparation for chairing the IORAG in 2017
- An initial core group of experts was selected by the SA IORAG Steering Committee
- The First Meeting of the SA IORAG was held in November 2016 (12 participants)



L-R: Prof Juliet Hermes (SAEON/SA IORAG Vice-chair), Ms Aditi Lalbahadur (SAIIA), Mr KGame Molope (DIRCO), and Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller (HSRC/SA IORAG Chair/IORAG Vice-chair). 3rd Indian Ocean Dialogue, "Addressing Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean through Enhanced Regionalism, Indonesia, April 2016.



22nd Meeting of the IORAG, Indonesia, October 2016
SA IORAG represented by: Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller (HSRC), Prof Jo-Ansie van Wyk (UNISA), Prof Ken Findlay (CPUT), Prof Henri Fouche (SU), Ms Nicole du Plessis, and Mr Selby Modiba (DSTI); DIRCO: Mr KGame Molope and Mr Graham Anderson

SA IORAG Steering Committee

- Chair: DSTI Multilateral Cooperation/Marine and Polar Research
- DIRCO Director for IORA
- NRF Business Advancement
- NRF-SAEON
- IORAG Chair
- SA IORAG Core Group Chair – NWU
- Water Research Commission
- Alternates

SA IORAG Core Group

- Chair
- Expert Group 1-8 Lead & Alternate
- SC members

Secretariat

Group
1

Group
2

Group
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Group
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Group
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Group
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Group
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Group
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Growing the SA IORAG – 2017-2019

- The Second Meeting of the SA IORAG was held in May 2017 (28 participants), in preparation for the IORA Council of Ministers (COM) and Related Meetings (including the IORAG) in October 2017
- The meeting included discussion on how to use IORA as a vehicle for regional academic cooperation, including beyond SA chairship
- Key messages:
 - South Africa needed to institutionalise the national IORAG
 - The purpose of the SA IORAG is to make inputs and advise senior officials before they advise ministers from different priority levels of IORA
 - There will be a strong African Agenda i.e. there must be a focus on building relationships with other African partners
 - **Academic meetings should be attended by academics** to ensure that there are meaningful discussions and decisions



Participants at the 2nd Meeting of the SA IORAG, Cape Town, May 2017

Growing the SA IORAG – 2017-2019

- South Africa assumed the Chairship of IORA in October 2017, including as Chair of the IORAG – Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller (HSRC)
- During the IORAG Meeting, South Africa highlighted the key areas of focus for the chairship
- **Key Message – The next IORAG Meeting must be attended by academics!**
- **Key Outcomes**
 - The IORAG meetings were decoupled from the COM to facilitate academic participation
 - Establishment of a government led sub-group to develop proposals for the reform of the IORAG with the aim to enhance academic engagement within IORA



Participants at the 23rd Meeting of the SA IORAG, Durban, October 2017



Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller chairing the 23rd Meeting of the IORAG



Prof Juliet Hermes presenting South Africa's priorities during the IORAG meeting

Growing the SA IORAG – 2017-2019

- IORAG Roadshow, July 2018
 - Visited **Tanzania, Seychelles** and **Mauritius**
 - Gain support for South Africa's IORAG priorities
 - Create interest in attending the IORAG meeting in South Africa
 - Start building academic networks within IORA



Participants at the IORAG Roadshow, Tanzania, 2 July 2018



Participants at the IORAG Roadshow, Seychelles, 4 July 2018



Meeting the IORA Secretariat, Mauritius, 6 July 2018



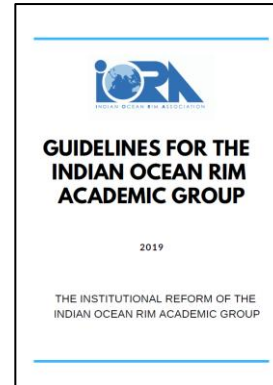
Participants at the IORAG Roadshow, Mauritius, 6 July 2018

Growing the SA IORAG – 2017-2019

- In December 2019 South Africa handed over the chairship of the IORAG to India at the 25th Meeting of the IORAG (followed by the 6th IOD)
- The handover included the submission of the recommendations from the sub-group on the Reform of the Academic Group
- **Key outcome of the series of meetings: Proposal by India to establish a Working Group for Science, Technology and Innovation (WGSTI) → supported**



South African delegates at the 25th Meeting of the IORAG, the 6th IOD and the Experts Group Meeting on the Priority Area Academic, Science and Technology, India, 2019



Mr KGame Molope and Ms Ernesta Swanepoel representing South Africa as part of the 6th IOD, India, 2019



Participants in the 1st Experts Group Meeting on the Priority Area of Academic, Science and Technology, India, 2019

Institutionalising the SA IORAG – 2020-2022

- 2020 - SA IORAG Stakeholder Meeting cancelled



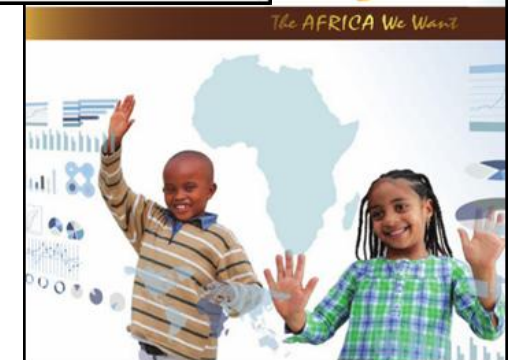
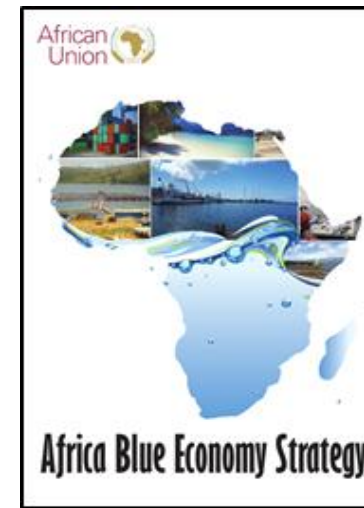
“...a systematic approach to expanding the internationalisation of STI and science diplomacy – with a strong focus on the African continent to support a pan-African agenda.”



“Through its internationalisation and strategic investments, the NRF will make a contribution to the achievement of outcomes...”

Business Advancement

The Business Advancement division provides an overarching custodianship role for national, regional and global collaborations and partnerships that cut across the NRF and the NSI; conceptualises new partnerships and programmes with nontraditional partners of the NRF; provides an overarching leadership and support mechanism for commercialisation and new business development that emanates from research conducted within the NRF; and advances those partnerships that seek to profile, enhance the visibility and position the NRF as an intellectual organisation and partner of choice. The division builds on the NRF’s strong regional and global influence and position to mutually leverage additional resources for collaborative largescale, multidisciplinary, impact-focused research of national, regional, and global relevance.



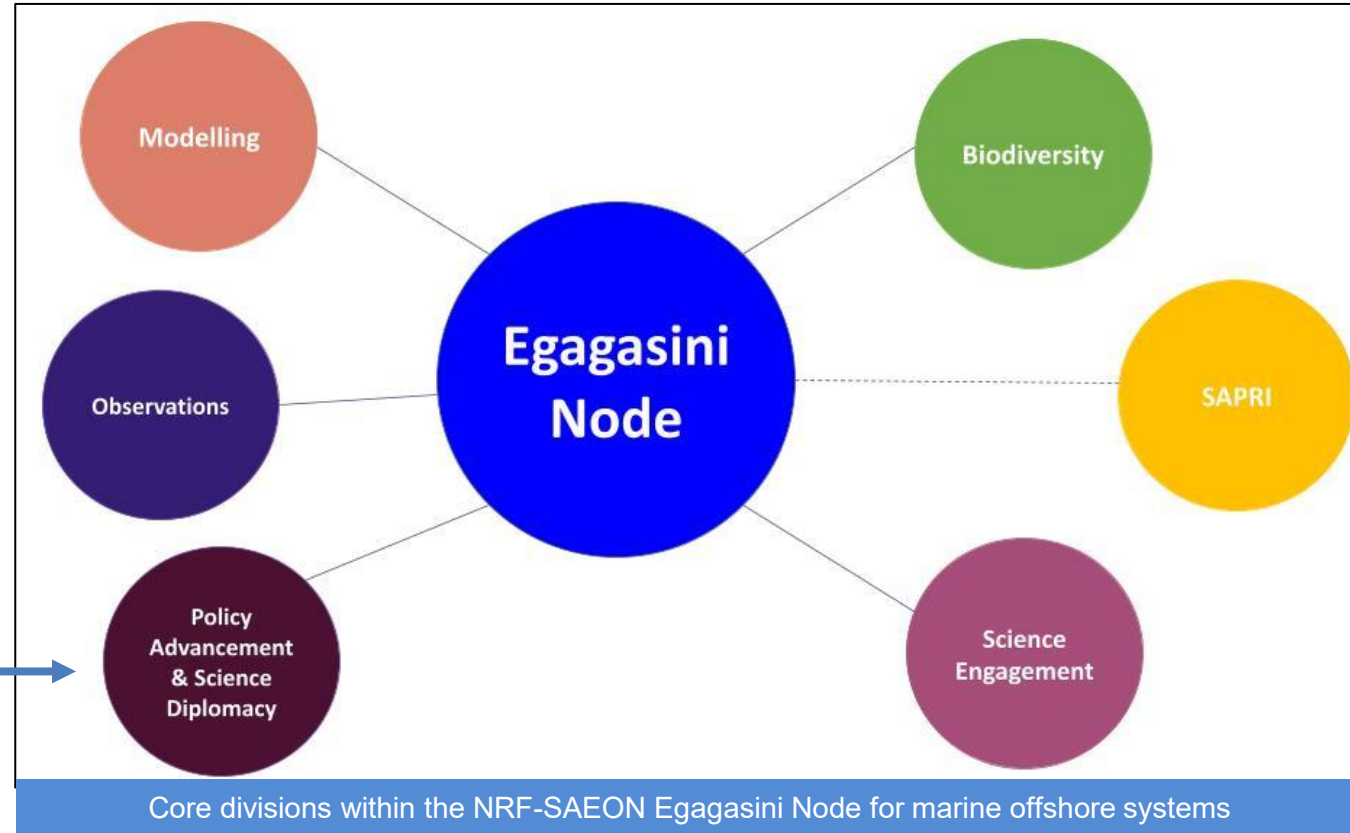
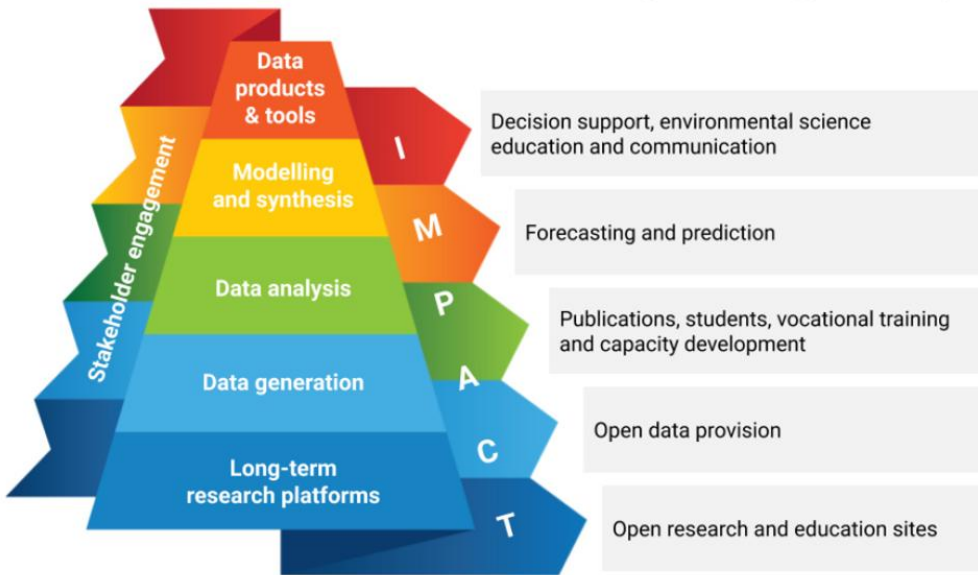
“..a major contributor to continental transformation and growth, through knowledge on marine and aquatic biotechnology, the growth of an Africa-wide shipping industry, the development of sea, river and lake transport and fishing; and exploitation and beneficiation of deep sea mineral and other resources.”

Institutionalising the SA IORAG – 2020-2022

- Online stakeholder meetings 2021 & 2022

SAEON's knowledge ecosystem

SAEON's value chain of research to sustain South African ecosystems that support humanity



Consolidate and Revitalise the SA IORAG – 2023 - ongoing

- **Chair of IORA 2022-2023**, Prof Juliet Hermes (SAEON) → **Hosted 28th Meeting of the IORAG, Cape Town, 2023**
 - NWU Chair of the SA IORAG
 - **Co-funded by IORA SF**
 - Created a link with the IORA-Business Forum (SA)
 - Agreed to prioritise the establishment of the **IORAG Early-career Professionals Network**, led by South Africa (1st Steering Committee cohort confirmed in November 2024)
 - Agreed to prioritise establishment of the **IORA University Network**, led by Australia (launched in November 2024)
 - Agreed to prioritise the establishment of an IORA portal of mobility, exchange, mentorships and scholarships, led by Reunion (in process)



SA IORAG Secretariat Activities

1. POLICY SUPPORT

- DSTI (IORAG & WGSTI) & DIRCO (IORA National Focal Point)
- Ensure that South Africa provides input to concept notes, work plans and other documents circulated by the IORA Secretariat (where relevant).

1. NATIONAL SCIENCE-POLICY PLATFORM

- Opportunity for academics to engage with national government officials
- Potential to develop this into a science-policy-business platform

3. FACILITATE REPRESENTATION OF SOUTH AFRICA AT IORA (AND RELATED) MEETINGS

- Provide exposure for academics at high-level regional events
- Dissemination of research to an international audience



13th Bi-annual Meeting of the CSO, Bangladesh, 2023

Concept Note

**Ocean Knowledge Education Programme
to strengthen the blue economy concept in the IORA region**

*A pilot study incorporating "Sustainable Ocean Management" into the
Science curriculum for 12 to 13 yr olds*

Background Information

As an oceanic state, Seychelles faces multiple threats of climate change. It has a history of local practices that reflect a culture based on using the marine landscape as a dumping site for waste and an infinite source of marine resources. A change in human activities is required to address the issues that cannot be overlooked and needs engagement of the upcoming generations to elicit the mindset change required to mitigate harmful actions to the oceans.

Seychelles had to adapt and has spearheaded a change by adopting the blue economy concept and developed its policy; "**Seychelles Blue Economy Strategic Policy Framework and Roadmap**" to develop an ocean based economy as a means of realizing the national economic, social and cultural potential through innovation, knowledge based approach, being mindful of the need to conserve the integrity of Seychelles Marine Environment and heritage for present and future generations.

Concept Paper Format

1. **Title of the Research Project:**

Seagrass blue economy concept for sustainability of small scale fisheries in Sri Lanka.

2. **Project Objectives:**

Draft as on 4 July 2022

First Meeting of the IORA Functional Bodies' Chairs and the Coordinating Countries (FBC-CC)

Wednesday, 6 July 2022
At 12:00 – 16:00 Bangladesh Standard time (GMT+6)
10:00 – 14:00 hrs Mauritius Standard Time (GMT +4)

Platform: Virtual - Zoom

Draft Agenda and Programme

BST 11:30-12:00hrs	Technical Connectivity check by host, Bangladesh (Testing phase)
BST 12:00-12:10hrs	1. OPENING SESSION
	1.1 Opening Remarks (Chair, Bangladesh)
	1.2 Remarks by the Vice-Chair (Sri Lanka)
	1.3 Remarks by the Past Chair (UAE)
	1.4 Remarks of the Secretary-General (Secretariat, IORA)
	1.5 Outline of Arrangements and Adoption of the Agenda (Chair)
BST 12:10-12:25hrs	2. MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY (MSS) – Coordinating Country: Sri Lanka
	2.1 Update: Progress Report on the Work Plan of the Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security (MCMSS) (Sri Lanka)

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- **Opportunity for academics to engage with national and international government officials**
- **Potential to develop this into a science-policy-business platform**
- **Since 2024 co-hosting with universities around the country**

3. FACILITATE REPRESENTATION OF SOUTH AFRICA AT IORA (AND RELATED) MEETINGS

- Provide exposure for academics at high-level regional events
- Dissemination of research to an international audience

Ms Nokky Ndlovu presenting on the IORA-BF during the 8th Meeting of the SA IORAG, Cape Town, 2023



Participants at the 9th Meeting of the SA IORAG, UKZN, Durban, 2024



Participants at the 10th Meeting of the SA IORAG, UNISA, Pretoria, 2025

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- Opportunities for dissemination of research to an international audience

Call for Submissions

3rd International Congress on Water Desalination

Application of Advanced Technologies in

UNCONVENTIONAL WATER TREATMENT

FOR ZONES UNDER WATER STRESS

September 14-16, 2021 **VIRTUAL**

Deadline for Submissions August 1, 2021

Deadline for Registration September 1, 2021

TARGET GROUPS

- ❖ Knowledge-based companies
- ❖ Academics and students
- ❖ R&D institutions

TOPICS

- Treatment and reclamation of water and wastewater
- Desalination of brackish water, seawater, and saline water
- Minimization, treatment, and reuse of desalination plants wastewaters
- Decentralized water/wastewater treatment processes
- Deep groundwater uptake
- Rainfall/storm water collection and treatment
- Water collection from fog and humid air
- Water loss reduction
- Water, energy, and environment nexus
- Monitoring and control of water resources using satellite technology
- Covid-19/other infections in water and wastewater
- Water technological innovation system

seminars.usb.ac.ir/uwtc

ORGANIZERS

University of Sistan and Baluchestan
www.usb.ac.ir

Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology
www.irost.org

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[linkedin.com/in/uwtc](https://www.linkedin.com/in/uwtc)

SA IORAG Secretariat Activities

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(Virtual) Workshop on

“The Urgency of Climate Change and its Consideration as a Topic in IORA”

08 November, 2021, 11:00–15:00 (Mauritius time UTC +4)

Agenda

1. **Climate Change in the Indian Ocean Region – Scientific Evidence and its Relevance for IORA (11:00 – 12:30h)**

SA IORAG Secretariat Activities

1. POLICY SUPPORT

- DSTI (IORAG & WGSTI) & DIP
- Ensure that South Africa pro work plans and other docum Secretariat (where relevant)

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Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) - Funded Virtual Brainstorming Workshop

**“Post-COVID-19 – Sustainable Innovation to set the economy back on track”
23 and 24 February 2022**

Overview Section

The University of Mauritius in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and the IORA Secretariat is organising a 2-day virtual brainstorming workshop on the theme “Post-COVID-19 – Sustainable Innovation to set the economy back on track”.

Sectoral approach: Blue Economy; Tourism; Health; Circular Economy

SA IORAG Secretariat Activities

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SA IORAG Secretariat Activities

4. RESEARCH SUPPORT

- Provide opportunity for researchers to undertake activities under IORA Working Groups
- Provide assistance through seed funding and supporting IORA Special Fund applications
- Disseminate capacity building and training opportunities provided through IORA
- Support publication in the IORA-affiliated Journal of the Indian Ocean Region
- Disseminate IORA reports



Introduction to Geospatial Information Technology (GIT) for Operational Planning and Decision Making in Disaster Risk Management - Online in 2021 and in-person Mauritius, 2022



IORA Blue Carbon Hub Early Career Professionals Programme, Australia, 2020 & 2022



Outputs from the IORA Special Fund Application "Cultural Heritage for Coastal Tourism and Climate Action in the Indian Ocean Region: A Research and Capacity Building Project in the African Diaspora", Prof Rose Boswell, NMU

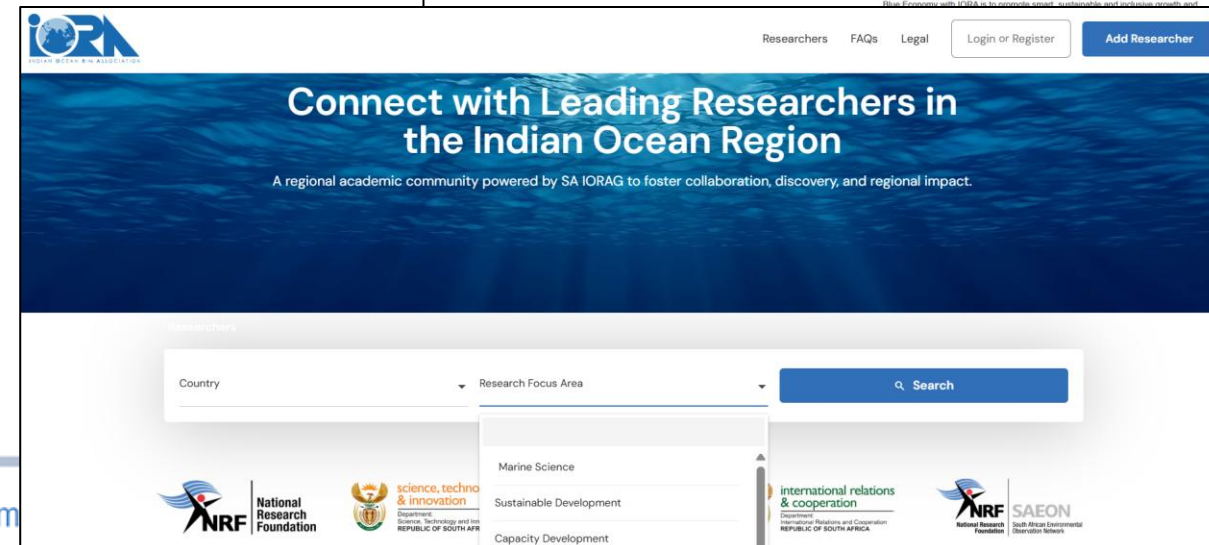
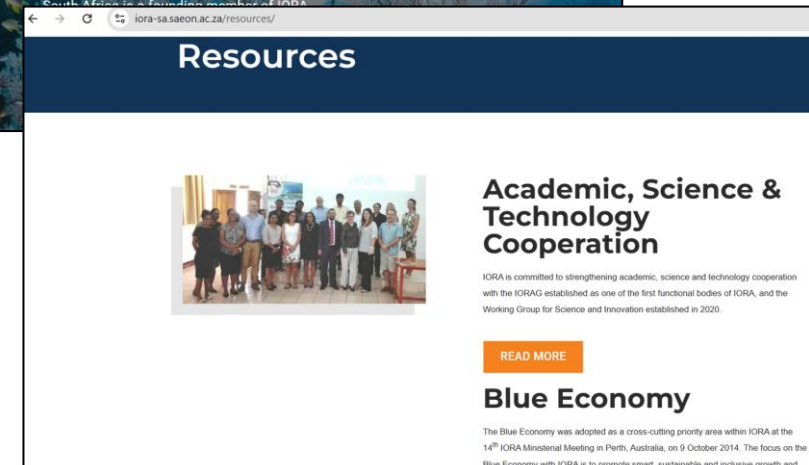
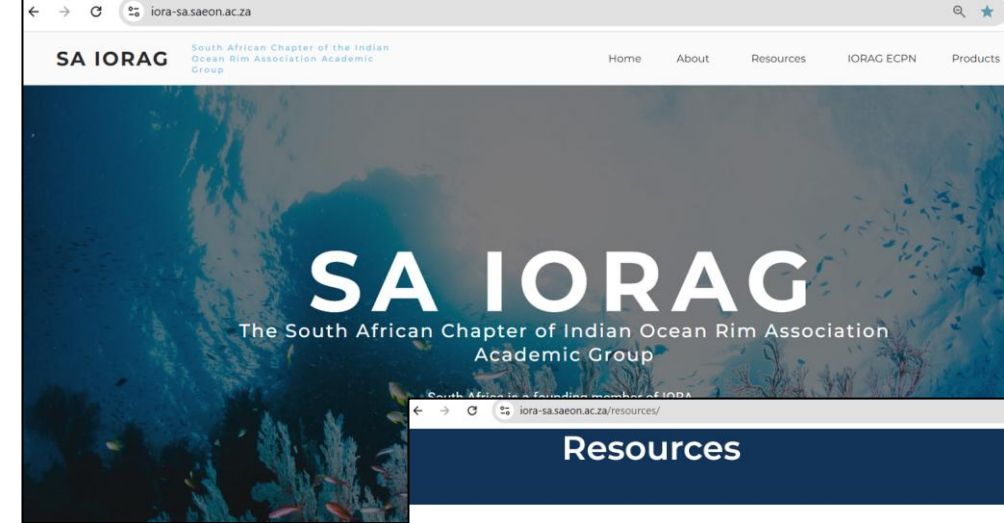
Special Issue: Diplomacy and Norm-building in the Indian Ocean Region, 2018
The Indo-Pacific as a maritime catalyst for peace, prosperity and opportunity (in press)



SA IORAG Secretariat Activities

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND NETWORKING

- National and regional engagements
- Attend relevant non-IORA meetings and conferences to create awareness of IORA
- Organise meetings and workshops to create awareness of IORA
- Build and maintain regional academic relationships
- Maintain awareness of other regional programmes through which the SA IORAG can add value
- Knowledge repository for IORA information (national and regional)
- Publish newsletters, promotional material and maintain website: <https://iora-sa.saeon.ac.za/>
- Academic Database: <https://academic.iora-sa.org/>



Outreach - Side-events at National and International Conferences



WIOMSA Symposium Special Session 2017, 2019 (co-hosted with WIO-ECSN), 2022, 2025

Fostering Regional Engagement through Transdisciplinary Research

Special Session
Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association
11th Scientific Symposium
Mauritius
University of Mauritius
05 July 2019
11:00-15:00

South African Chapter of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Academic Group in collaboration with the Western Indian Ocean Early Career Scientists Network

Looking Seaward: Leveraging African Oceans for Sustainable Development within the Ocean Decade

Global Dialogue on Sustainable Ocean Development
The 8th Global Dialogue from the Global Ocean Accounting Partnership
Hosted by the NRF-SAEON

4th July 2024 @ 14:00

This side event aims to spotlight the critical role of African coastal states in realising the objectives of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). The event will provide a platform to discuss the unique challenges, opportunities, and initiatives within the African maritime space, and how ocean accounts may be utilised as a tool for sustainable ocean planning.

Keynote Presentations

- Najim Al-Din, NRF-SAEON, SAEON Chief
- Juliet Hermes, NRF-SAEON
- Phil James, UNSW/GOAP

Panel Discussion

- Yvonne Waweru, G20 WIOCA
- Stephen Hoskings, SAEON
- Pascal Thyoya, NRF
- Rachyl Thomas, WRI

Moderator: Toluqesha UWA

6th GOAP Dialogue, Indonesia, 2024



Marine Science Programmes in South Africa

Information Session
Co-hosted by the NRF-SAEON
Egagasi Node, NRF-RISA and DSI

Date: 23 June 2022
Time: 16:30-19:00
Venue: Suites 1 & 2, Elangeni Hotel, Durban

SAMSS 2022, 2025

SAMSS 2025 Ocean20 & Women20 Side Event

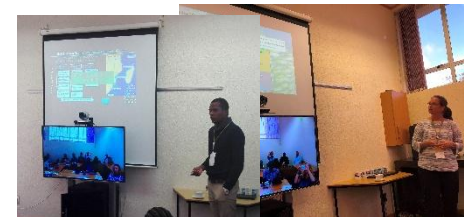
Building Bridges Through Generational Dialogue

Session 1 - "Real Talk" for ECRs
Candid career stories, lessons learnt, and interactive World Café discussions with marine science mentors

Session 2 - Women in Marine Science
Celebrating women's journeys, adding gender barriers, and sharing cross-generational wisdom

Wednesday, 10 September 2025
15:00 - 17:30
Southern Sun Hotel, Cape Town

Space is limited, so secure your seat by 1 September 2025! [Register Here](#)



Strengthening Ocean Observing in Africa – Side event at the 2019 International Indian Ocean Conference, NMU

INNOVATIVE OPPORTUNITIES IN SCIENCE

SIDE EVENT
CO-HOSTED BY NRF-SAEON & OCEAN INNOVATION AFRICA

GLOBAL CHANGE CONFERENCE 2023

REPORT: SIDE EVENT
CO-HOSTED BY NRF-SAEON & OCEAN INNOVATION AFRICA

GLOBAL CHANGE CONFERENCE 2023

ROOM 101, EBW COMPLEX,
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE,
BLOEMFONTEIN
30 JANUARY 2023
14:00-17:30

5th Global Change Conference, 2023



Upcoming Stakeholder Events

- **UNISA Conference: International Conference on Coastal, Marine, and Maritime Research (COMMRE 2026), 27-30 October 2026, Durban – Abstract deadline, 30 June 2026**



COMMRE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
COASTAL, MARINE AND MARITIME RESEARCH

Theme:

*Advancing Science, Innovation, and Equity within the UN
Oceans Decade*



Date

27-30 October 2026



Location

**Durban ICC
Durban, South Africa**

IORAG Early-career Professionals Network (SA initiative)

Vision: To promote the cooperation of Early-career Professionals within IORA through enhanced dialogue, research, and networking across all the IORA priority and cross cutting areas

Committee Chairperson (Mauritius)



Mrs. Padmini Gaya Gookool - Lecturer & Programme Manager at the Open University of Mauritius. Padmini is a PhD researcher in sustainability in education with strong academic leadership.

Secretariat (Australia)



Dr Bianca Haas - Research Fellow at the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS). She works on equity issues in tuna fisheries across the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Internal Stakeholders (Mauritius)



Dr Bhavna Mahadew - Law Lecturer at the University of Technology, Mauritius. She is an expert in international economic law, corporate law, and legal research.

External Stakeholders (South Africa)



Ms Yanga Malotana - PhD Candidate at the University of Pretoria. She works as a Program Manager at ESI, University of Pretoria. Her specialities include climate change, energy security and sustainability.

Call for Project Proposals – IORA STI 2026

*Advancing Science, Technology, and Innovation
for Sustainable Development Across Member States*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Secretariat’s Survey on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Cooperation of 1 October 2025 enabled the identification of regional STI priorities. The Secretariat seeks to advance these priorities through the promotion of initiatives (activities/programmes) and the facilitation of access to co-financing through the IORA Special Fund to implement projects in these focus areas.

STI FOCUS AREAS

The Secretariat encourages projects that advance regional cooperation, knowledge exchange, and capacity building in the following STI domains:

1. Ocean Science, Marine Technology, and Observation Systems
2. Coastal Resilience, Climate Adaptation, and Integrated Ocean Data
3. Water Security, Desalination, and Sanitation Technologies (SDG 6)
4. Applied STI, Digital Solutions, Technology Transfer and Innovation for Sustainable Development

FUNDING OVERVIEW

Funding Mechanisms	Eligible Applicants	Co-Financing	Maximum Project Cost	Notes
IORA Special Fund	All IORA Member States	50%	No set limit	Remaining 50% provided by applicant / co-funders
IORA Sustainable Development Programme	LDCs & SIDS	90%	USD 80,000	10% counter-funding in cash or in-kind; one project per Member State per year
Somalia and Yemen Development Programme	Somalia & Yemen	90%	USD 80,000	Hosted in a third country; 10% counter-funding borne by host; one project per year

Member States may receive Special Fund support for up to four projects at any given time, subject to approval. Among the four projects, LDC and SIDS Member States can apply for one (1) ISDP proposal per year.

OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT PROVIDED

- **Financial assistance:** access co-financing for collaborative STI initiatives
- **Regional visibility:** showcase projects across the Indian Ocean region
- **Networking and collaboration:** connect with Member States, research institutions, and technical experts
- **Technical guidance:** Secretariat support to align project proposals with STI focus areas and IORA objectives

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Projects may access funding through a structured application process. Applicants should start by preparing a short concept note (1–2 pages) in coordination with line ministries and/or partner institutions, outlining objectives, proposed activities, expected outcomes, and an indicative budget.
2. Submit the concept note to the Secretariat at kritika.nuckchady@iora.int and zelda.vrolick@iora.int. The Secretariat will support applicants throughout the process, including guidance on the appropriate documents, submission channels, and the most suitable funding modality (Special Fund, ISDP, or SYDP).



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Programme				per year
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SA IORAG – A Foundation for (Global Change) Science Diplomacy

- **All Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance**
 - Involved since 2020 (formerly the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance)
 - Early-career Ocean Professionals Events (Intergenerational Dialogues and Hackathon)

UK 2027



AAORIA Forum, South Africa, 2023



AAORIA Forum, Canada, 2024



Side event,
14 April 2026

SAEON, DSTI & ECOP
Forum Delegates



AAORIA Forum, Belgium, 2025



SA IORAG – A Foundation for (Global Change) Science Diplomacy

- **Ocean20**
- A social engagement group under the G20 Sherpa Track
- Formally initiated during Brazil's presidency in 2024



Minister Nzimande with former SAEON MD Dr. Mary-Jane Bopape at the community outreach side event, Ocean20 Inception Meeting, Mbombela, May 2025



Participants at the Ocean20 Summit, Cape Town, November 2025



Ocean20/SAEON team at the G20 Social Summit, Ekurhuleni, November 2025

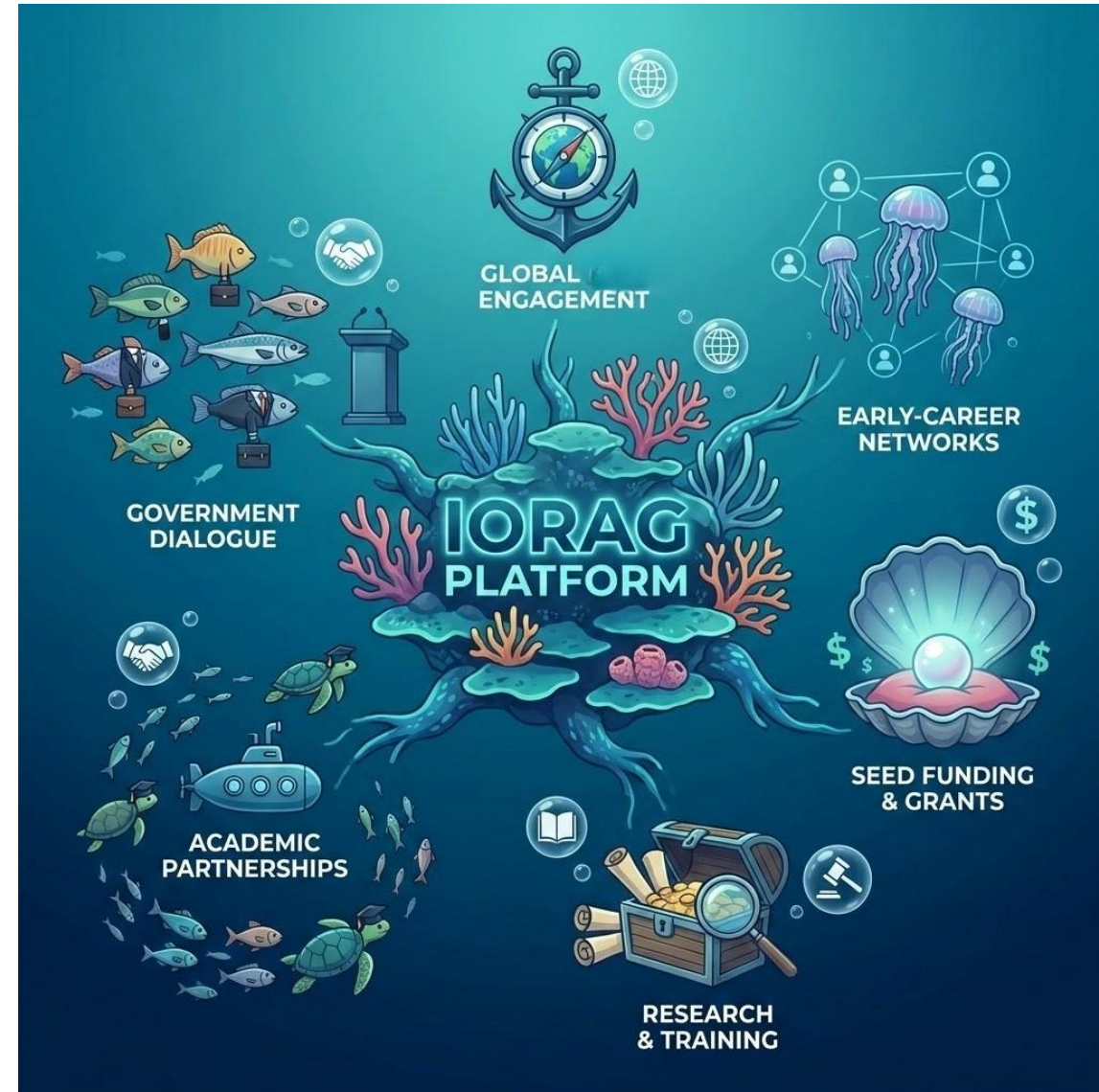


2021-2030 United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development



In Summary - What are the Opportunities?

- Provides a platform to engage with national government officials
- Provides a platform to engage with national IORA Business Forum members
- Interaction with academics across IORA (and globally)
- Participation in the SA IORAG Annual Stakeholder Meeting
- Opportunity to attend relevant IORA (and other) meetings, workshops, conferences and training events (fully or partially funded)
- Assistance with applications to the IORA Special Fund
- Opportunity to access seed funding for research and publications
- Participation in Early-career Professional Networks



Thank you!

