

Report from ICES 2020

The [International Council for the Exploration of the Sea \(ICES\)](#) is an inter-governmental marine science organization, meeting societal needs for impartial evidence on the state and use of our seas and oceans. With headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark, ICES is a network of 6000 experts from 700 institutes and organizations in 20 member countries and beyond. Every year more than 2800 experts participate in ICES activities and contribute to fulfilling the organization's mandate to give advice on human activities affecting, and affected by, marine ecosystems.

Science is the foundation on which integrated and successful environmental marine policies are built to achieve agreed objectives. ICES contributes within its remit to promote marine research, particularly in relation to living resources and marine ecosystems. ICES works at the science-policy interface, providing the best available science to sustainable management. The science is carried out in a way that is transparent, auditable, and peer-reviewed covering areas from the regional to the global level.

ICES has established formal cooperation agreements with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC/UNESCO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). As an observer to the UN General Assembly, ICES contributes and engages actively in relevant work, such as working towards the Sustainable Development Goals; contributing to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (UNESCO/IOC); the Informal Consultations of States Parties to the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement; and the UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process in Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

Below are examples of ICES work, within the remit of our [seven priorities](#). ICES work relates to the key areas in the United Nations General Assembly resolution 75/239 in capacity building, marine environment and marine resources, including the ecosystem based approach, marine biodiversity, including Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction and EBSAs, and marine science. The full ICES 2020 Annual Report is available [here](#).

Highlighted Activities in 2020

2020 was characterized by the diversity and breadth of ICES work – ranging from [scientific advice](#) for fisheries and management plans, maritime and fishing issues, biodiversity, and ICES Ecosystem and Fisheries Overviews that cover new ecoregions, including areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). ICES considers ecosystem-based management as the primary way of managing human activities affecting marine ecosystems. To reflect this, a newly published [Guide to ICES advisory framework and principles](#) outlines how ICES remains relevant, credible, and resilient in our provision of independent advice for decision-makers to meet conservation, management, and sustainability goals. Ecosystem and Fisheries Overviews provide outputs to support ecosystem-based management. In 2020, [nine updated ecosystem overviews](#) were published, as well as growing the [fisheries overviews](#) portfolio to include ten ecoregions. The [Data and Science Technology Steering Group](#) was also established to address the increasing volumes and complexities of data. The group will advance data science, systems management, quality assurance and data governance to ensure a solid foundation for the science and advice being developed by the ICES network as a whole.

ICES participated in regional planning workshops for the UN [Ocean Decade](#) that took place throughout 2020. In January, ICES joined ocean leaders and key stakeholders at the [North Atlantic Ocean Regional Workshop](#) in Halifax, Canada to discuss and prioritize the issues identified at the First Global Planning Meeting. ICES breadth of expertise and potential to support the societal outcomes of the Decade was highlighted. ICES also joined the [Arctic Region Workshop](#) in October.

Together with the [North Pacific Marine Science Organization \(PICES\)](#), ICES recognizes that the strategic plans and objectives of both organizations are well aligned with the objectives of the UN Ocean Decade. Through the [joint ICES-PICES programme](#), ICES will focus on areas of mutual interest including climate change, fisheries and ecosystem-based management, social, ecological and environmental dynamics of marine systems, coastal communities and human

dimensions, and communication and capacity development.

ICES, along with 11 international partners, including the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO and IOC, co-sponsored the online [International Symposium on Plastics in the Arctic and the Sub-Arctic Region](#) in March 2021 to address plastic marine litter and pollution in the Arctic marine environment.

[Mission Atlantic](#), a project under the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme, was launched in 2020 and will be the first initiative to develop and systematically apply integrated ecosystem assessments (IEAs) at Atlantic basin scale. ICES has joined with ocean experts from Europe, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, and the USA to map, model, and assess Atlantic Ocean ecosystems and to improve professional skills and competences across the Atlantic in support of IEA approaches to ocean resource management.

On the basis of the [ICES Strategic Plan](#), ICES has also increased the focus on gender and diversity in the organization, and will follow up in 2021 on specific guidance and recommendations to ensure that ICES offers opportunities for a gender balanced, diverse, inclusive, and respectful working environment.

COVID-19

The pandemic response has resulted in a regime shift, which has changed the understanding of how work can be done with less travel and reduced CO2 emissions. ICES agreed to take actions necessary and where possible to move towards net-zero status for ICES meetings, as well as to support activities that develop and integrate science necessary for reducing CO2 emissions related to the remit of our work.

Moving online required learning by doing, facing the new challenges of working across time zones, limited meeting time, and therefore, prioritization of issues to be addressed. Thanks to ICES long-standing experience in conducting remote work, and the readiness and flexibility of member countries and community. The Annual Science Conference was postponed in 2020. Instead, ICES arranged the first webinar, "[ICES reflections: Understanding the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on fisheries, markets, communities, and management](#)" with more than 500 participants.

ICES will be hosting the first virtual [Annual Science Conference](#) 6-10 September 2021 including interactive sessions and pre-recorded presentations.