1000 Ocean Startups

Our Journey from 2019 to 2025

1000 OCEAN STARTUPS

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1000 Ocean Startups

1000 Ocean Startups (1000OS) is a global coalition dedicated to scaling startups that invent and deploy critical innovations for ocean health. Founded by *OceanHub Africa*, *SWEN Blue Ocean*, *Katapult Ocean*, *GEOS*, *Builders Vision and Conservation International Ventures* to spur action despite the postponement of The United Nations Ocean Conference 2 (UNOC2) due to COVID-19, the coalition brings together various ocean-impact networks and members committed to supporting startups focused on ocean sustainability.

Today, 1000OS has grown to be the largest global ocean innovation network.

Executive Summary

This article chronicles the formation and first years of the 1000 Ocean Startups coalition, highlighting key milestones along its journey from inception to becoming the world's largest global ocean innovation network. Each section is aligned with a year and major development:

- **2019: Genesis of 1000 Ocean Startups**
  Early discussions, initiated by OceanHub Africa with the Ocean Panel, motivated by the desire to act for ocean innovation despite the postponement of UNOC2.
- **2020: Building the foundations of the coalition**
  Establishment by the six founding members of the coalition's mission, ethos, governance, brand and multi-stakeholder engagement.
- **2021: Official Launch of 1000 Ocean Startups**
  Coalition formally launched with 17 members at ChangeNOW Summit with growing membership and global visibility.
- **2022: Ocean Impact Navigator Tool and partnership with the World Economic Forum**
  Launch of a practical impact measurement tool, developed collaboratively to track startup contributions. The World Economic Forum becomes the secretariat of the coalition.

Introduction

1000 Ocean Startups was founded in 2019 to unite the global ecosystem supporting ocean startups towards the common goal of fostering innovation for ocean health. Members include incubators, accelerators, competitions, networks and venture capital firms. The coalition's vision is to mainstream the ocean impact innovation ecosystem, garnering investment at scale from institutional investors, at levels at least similar to those directed towards addressing climate change. Its goal is to support over 1000 transformative ocean-impact startups by the end of the United Nations' Ocean Decade in 2030.

2019: Genesis of 1000 Ocean Startups

In December 2019, Alexis Grosskopf, CEO of OceanHub Africa formed part of the Advisory Network of the High Level Panel for A Sustainable Ocean Economy.

It was then announced that the next major ocean gathering, The United Nations Ocean Conference 2 (UNOC2) would be postponed due to the uncertainties of COVID-19.

The ocean startup ecosystem was slowly emerging and in need for more collaboration, coordination and cohesion. However, amidst this landscape, pioneering organisations like Aquaspark and Katapult were laying the groundwork for innovation in the field.

Recognizing the need for a more unified approach, discussions began amongst various stakeholders. Alexis Grosskopf thus engaged in separate conversations with The High Level Panel, Adrien Vincent - *Ocean Lead at* SYSTEMIQ and Erika Harms - *High Level Panel representative*, and Christian Lim and Olivier Raybaud - *Managing Directors at* SWEN *Blue Ocean* (called Blue Oceans Partners at the time, until 2021). The group agreed on the idea of not waiting until the next UNOC to come together and start using the Blue Papers published by the Ocean Panel for the Ocean Conference in Lisbon to inform the development of impact innovations.

2020: Building the foundations of the coalition

After discussions, it was decided that a coalition needed to be formed to utilize the existing Blue Paper to inform priority areas for the development, support of ocean-impact innovations and turn the Ocean Panel's Blue Paper recommendations into action, thus enrolling the private sector ahead of high-level conferences.

In this effort initiated by two organisations, *OceanHub Africa* would represent the innovation technical assistance and SWEN *Blue Ocean* the investment side. In addition, SWEN Blue Ocean believed a coalition would enable the building of relationships and synergies between members of the blue economy ecosystem more efficiently than through only bilateral connections or events.

The coalition was initially dubbed the *Ocean Impact Innovation Network*. By April 2020, the coalition's high-level concept was approved and recognised as the implementation coalition for the innovation agenda of the Transformation Papers -the first of several Action Groups of the Ocean Panel.

Swen Blue Ocean joined OceanHub Africa as part of the Advisory Network of the Ocean Panel and they actively searched for a core group of stakeholders to build a credible first-of-its-kind coalition. The six founding members were identified, immediately accepted to take part in the project and joined the first Steering Committee: OceanHub Africa (an ocean-impact startup incubator based in Africa, represented by Alexis Grosskopf), SWEN Blue Ocean (an early-stage ocean-impact investor, represented by Christian Lim), Katapult Ocean (an ocean-impact accelerator, represented by Jonas Skattum Svegaarden), Builders Vision (ocean-impact family office and philanthropy, represented by

Peter Bryant), Conservation International Ventures (the venture philanthropic arm of Conservation International Ventures, represented by Janice Yoshioka) and GEOS (Global Ecosystem for Ocean Solutions, a multi-stakeholder initiative led by Ocean Visions, represented by Emanuele Di Lorenzo), with Alexis Grosskopf and Christian Lim as founding co-chairs.

Between October 2020 and March 2021, the inaugural Steering Committee laid down its foundational vision, goals, governance, and values. It established the vision to make the ocean impact innovation ecosystem mainstream and create a space of synergies to accelerate the development and adoption of new impactful ocean solutions globally. It set a goal to back at least 1000 transformative ocean startups by the end of the ocean decade. This sparked the change in the coalition's name from Ocean Impact Innovation Network to the 1000 Ocean Startups coalition (1000OS).

It established the values and governance of the coalition, which are still in force through the Charter of the coalition today. These are grounded in five core principles: TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, INCLUSIVENESS, MEMBER LEADERSHIP and SERVICE.

- **TRANSPARENCY** means that rules, budget, and minutes of all meetings of the SteerCo and working groups are shared online with all members, so that any member can review and challenge them at any time.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** means the SteerCo can be dissolved at any time by 50% of the members and each working group defines clear KPIs when created.
- **INCLUSIVENESS**, as indicated above, means every member has a chance to join the SteerCo.
- **MEMBER LEADERSHIP** means working groups are created for and led by members.
- Above all, the coalition is guided by the principle of "giving more than we take". These words, from Jonas Skattum, capture the spirit of **SERVICE** of 1000 Ocean Startups, to the group and to our cause, the Ocean.

2021: Official Launch of 1000 Ocean Startups

On the basis of the foundations above, the initial group started recruiting additional members, with an objective to officially launch the coalition when critical mass would be achieved.

By March 2021,1000OS had already grown to include 17 pioneering members and was admitted as an official program of the UN Ocean Decade - it was now time to become more public and official.

The launch of 1000OS was held in May 2021 -18 months after the idea emerged in South Africa in December 2019 - at The ChangeNOW Summit. The launch included a video introducing the pledge by the 17 members at the time: ""The coalition pledges to back at least 1000 transformative ocean startups by 2030, thereby dedicating talent, energy, and resources to scaling startups that contribute to ocean health." The launch included participation and support from prominent figures including Sir Richard Branson (successful entrepreneur and ocean advocate), H.E. Erna Solberg (Norwegian Prime Minister at the time) and William Trubridge (freediving world record holder in constant weight no fins discipline and ocean advocate). The full video of the launch is here.

2022: Ocean Impact Navigator Tool and World Economic Forum partnership

In 2022, 1000OS continued to gain momentum and with support from SYSTEMIQ developed an open-source impact KPI framework for the Ocean impact innovation ecosystem. This framework would simplify, harmonize and strengthen impact measurement and reporting for the ecosystem. It was named the Ocean Impact Navigator.

Its first version was made possible thanks to the direct in-kind and sponsorship support from many members including Builders Vision, SWEN Blue Ocean, GEOS (Ocean Visions), along with SeaAhead, CI Ventures, Katapult Ocean and OceanHub Africa, and was launched at the United Nations Ocean Conference in Lisbon in 2022.

The Ocean Impact Navigator consists of 30 prioritized KPIs, grouped into six main impact areas to capture the impacts that innovators are driving across ocean health, climate change, and human wellbeing and equity.

Under the leadership of Kristian Teleki and Ron Tardiff, the World Economic Forum initiated discussions with 1000 Ocean Startups for collaboration. In a major milestone, in December 2022, the coalition struck a partnership with the Forum, which became the secretariat of 1000 Ocean Startups, augmenting the capacity of the coalition with operational and strategic support, as well as its unparalleled reach and convening power.

Other important milestones in 2023 and 2025

- **2023 - First Annual Gathering:** 1000OS hosts its first Annual Gathering at The Explorers Club in NYC during NYC Climate Week. The coalition grows to 37 members and 33 of them attend the AG, many meeting face-to-face for the first time.
- **2025 - The Startup Reef at UNOC3:** At the UN Ocean Conference Green Zone, 1000OS curated The Startup Reef — the only dedicated ocean innovation pavilion — showcasing 40 startups, drawing over 100,000 visitors, and creating powerful connections between innovators, investors, and policymakers.