Today we are proud to celebrate the 30 years’ Anniversary of the UNESCO/IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC). The history of WESTPAC recorded the spirit of cooperation that scientists in the region have been upholding over several generations despite various challenges, even before the establishment of WESTAPC in 1989. May I remind you of the first regional programme conducted under the auspices of IOC in the region, i.e., “The Cooperative Study of the Kuroshio and adjacent regions (CSK, 1965-1979)” and inform you that recent generation is conducting the Feasibility Study on the Second Cooperative Study of the Kuroshio and Adjacent Regions.

The Sub-Commission established the “WESTPAC Outstanding Scientist Award” in recognition and appreciation of those marine scientists for their long-term dedication to regional marine science development and cooperation. The Award was delivered first in 2014 and second time in 2017 during the 9th and 10th WESTPAC International Conference held in Nha Trang, Vietnam and Qingdao, China respectively. We congratulate 9 outstanding scientists on receiving this honorable award and expect more scientists will dedicate themselves to regional cooperation.

In order to enable young generations to carry forward the spirit of scientific cooperation, the Sub-Commission also established a “WESTPAC Best Young Scientist Award” and a “WESTPAC Young Scientist Travel Grant” to nurture young science leaders and facilitate international exposure of young scientists. A dozen of young scientists received the Award and around 100 researchers were provided with partial or full financial support in two above-mentioned Conferences. By these activities with financial support of the Governments of a number of Member States, WESTPAC encouraged young marine scientists from the region to devote themselves to marine science, sustained observations and services.

Following 30 years’ development, WESTPAC, currently consisting of 22 member states, is committed to fostering cooperation among scientists, institutes and countries in the Western Pacific and adjacent regions in the study of the ocean, in order to assist countries in sustainably managing their ocean and coastal biodiversity and resources, protecting coastal populations, and maintaining
ecosystem services in line with their own priorities and needs. In recent years, with the ever-growing commitment of its Member States a number of newly established regional programmes and activities which were conducted under four priority themes, including: ocean processes and climate in the Indo-Pacific; ecosystem health; marine biodiversity and seafood security and safety, and enhanced knowledge on emerging issues.

5 The Sub-Commission adopted adaptive and self-driven approaches to capacity development in the region with guiding principles to prioritize the inclusion of capacity development as one of key components in WESTPAC programmes in order to attain their research goals, focus on regional and national needs, and foster North-South and South-South cooperation.

6 The recent period recorded the vitality of the Regional Training and Research Centres (RTRCs) which were established and operated in national marine research institutes and/or universities for provision of regular trainings on the specialization focus of these Centres to young scientists mainly from developing nations within and outside the region. This WESTPAC initiative of “IOC Regional Network of Training and Research Centers (RTRCs) on Marine Science” has been received strong support from Member States. We express our great appreciation to the Governments of China and Indonesia for their strong willingness and supports in establishing the RTRCs respectively on Ocean Dynamics and Climate (ODC), and Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health (MarBEST). There are still other Member States wishing to establish new RTRCs which will be announced during this meeting.

7 The achievements of our WESTPAC community in the last decade is closely linked with the unwavering efforts of the WESTPAC office led by Wenxi Zhu. We highly appreciate him and his staff for their high-quality performance and efficient operation, and sincerely expect IOC could take motivational measures to keep these staff for a long term as they are “the greatest assets of WESTPAC and IOC”.

8 As you are aware that IOC was tasked to coordinate the preparations and implementation of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021 – 2030). The planning process for the Decade implementation is to start with the 1st Global Planning Workshop in Copenhagen (13-15 May) and Regional Planning Workshop in Tokyo (31st July – 2nd August). The question as to how scientists can work closely with policy makers and other stakeholders to bring prosperity to all in our region in a changing world requires WESTPAC to overcome a wide range of challenges to achieve the Decade’s objectives. Given the limitation in resources, strengthening the sense of ownership from Member States will be critical to keep WESTPAC’s present momentum. On this occasion, we would express our great appreciation to the Government of Indonesia for hosting the 11th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference in 2020 and hope to have active and numerous participations of scientists within and outside the region in the Conference.

9 Toward the UN Decade, it is suggested that WESTPAC and its Member State agree to conduct a series actions, including inter alia:

i. Advocating the UN Decade at various occasions;
ii. Nominating suitable expert(s) to the Executive Planning Group;
iii. Organizing and hosting the regional and global workshop(s) for the UN Decade;
iv. Contributing capacity building opportunities and transferring marine technology;
v. Developing and strengthening Centers of Excellences in marine to serve the Decade’s objectives;
vi. Developing, coordinating and aligning international programmes/activities to meet the UN Decade’s objectives, with a focus on an integrated approach;
vii. Forging triennial WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference as an essential regional platform to ensure a timely response to, and examine the outputs of the UN decade.
Finally, in my capacity as the Chairman for the period 2017 – 2019, I expressed my confidence that WESTPAC will continuously prosper with the continued support of Member States, and extend my sincere thanks for all support received for my chairmanship over the past two years.