



Ocean Deoxygenation: Causes, Consequences, and Conservation Strategies

Kesavan K

Associate Professor and Head, Department of Aquaculture, MES Asmabi College, Vemballur, Kerala, India

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Abstract

Ocean deoxygenation represents a critical consequence of anthropogenic climate change and nutrient pollution, yet remains under-recognized compared to ocean warming and acidification. This paper synthesizes current understanding of the mechanisms driving oxygen loss in marine environments, evaluates cascading ecological and biogeochemical consequences, and assesses conservation strategies. Global ocean dissolved oxygen has declined approximately 2% since 1960, with oxygen minimum zones expanding and coastal hypoxic areas increasing tenfold. Primary drivers include warming-induced stratification reducing oxygen solubility and ventilation, alongside eutrophication-driven microbial respiration in coastal waters. Consequences span cellular stress responses and metabolic constraints to habitat compression, biodiversity loss, and altered biogeochemical cycles including enhanced greenhouse gas emissions. Effective conservation requires integrated approaches: climate mitigation to address thermal deoxygenation through emissions reductions aligned with Paris Agreement targets, and comprehensive nutrient management combining agricultural best practices, wastewater treatment upgrades, and watershed restoration. We propose an integrated framework spanning global climate policy to local watershed management, emphasizing adaptive management, enhanced monitoring through autonomous platforms, and recognition of multi-decadal response timescales. Success demands unprecedented coordination across disciplines, sectors, and jurisdictions, guided by robust science while accommodating inherent uncertainties in this complex Earth system challenge.

Keywords: Ocean Deoxygenation, Hypoxia, Eutrophication, Climate Change, Marine Conservation, Biogeochemical Cycles

I. INTRODUCTION

The world's oceans contain approximately 200 times less dissolved oxygen (DO) than the atmosphere, making marine organisms highly vulnerable to oxygen availability changes¹. Since the mid-20th century, global ocean oxygen content has declined by more than 2%, with oxygen-depleted waters expanding substantially². This phenomenon operates through two primary pathways: thermal deoxygenation in open oceans driven by warming-induced stratification, and eutrophication-driven hypoxia in coastal systems influenced by nutrient over-enrichment³. The expansion of oxygen minimum zones (OMZs) in tropical oceans and proliferation of seasonal hypoxic "dead zones" in coastal waters represent distinct expressions of this global challenge.

Despite growing recognition, significant knowledge gaps persist regarding the relative contributions of various drivers, non-linear interactions between thermal and nutrient-driven processes, and effectiveness of proposed mitigation strategies across different oceanographic contexts. This paper addresses these gaps through four objectives:

- Elucidate physical, chemical, and biological mechanisms driving oxygen loss
- Synthesize evidence regarding ecological, biogeochemical, and socioeconomic consequences
- Critically assess conservation and mitigation strategies
- Propose an integrated management framework recognizing regional heterogeneity while providing actionable guidance.

We employ a synthetic analytical approach, integrating empirical data from global ocean observation systems including the World Ocean Database and Global Ocean Oxygen Database, results from mechanistic biogeochemical models, and theoretical frameworks from marine ecology. The analysis examines temporal trends, spatial patterns, and correlations with physical and biogeochemical drivers, while evaluating conservation strategies through comparative analysis across regional contexts.

II. MECHANISMS OF OCEAN DEOXYGENATION

1.1. Fundamental Oxygen Dynamics

Dissolved oxygen concentrations result from the balance between supply and consumption processes. Oxygen enters through air-sea gas exchange and photosynthetic production, with solubility depending inversely on temperature and salinity⁴. Supply to subsurface waters occurs through advection, mixing, and ventilation. Consumption occurs throughout the water column via aerobic respiration, with microbial decomposition of organic matter representing the dominant sink⁵. The biological pump—organic matter sinking from surface waters—delivers oxygen demand to depth.

Figure 1: ocean oxygen balance

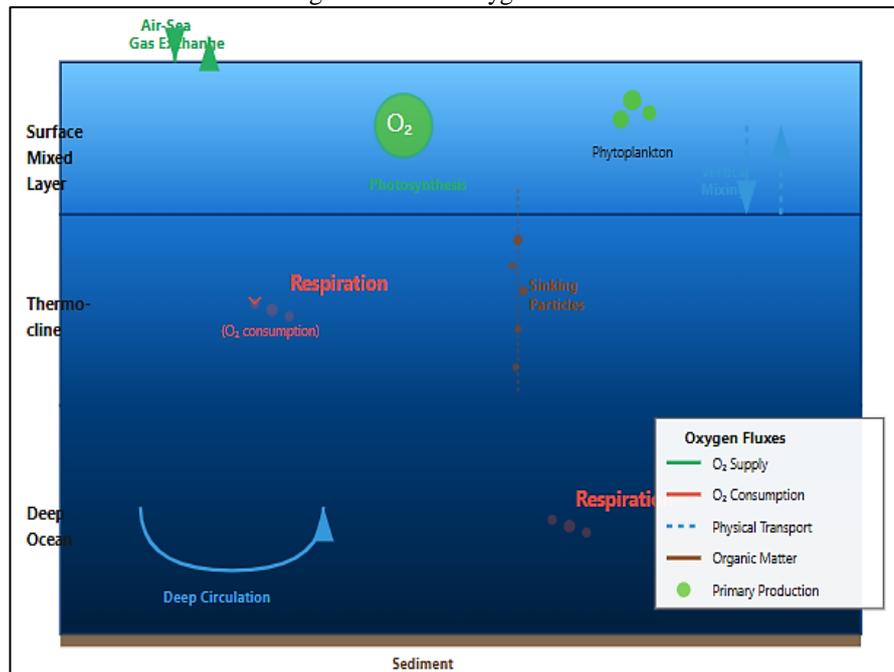


Figure 1 Shows a Conceptual diagram showing oxygen balance in the ocean, including air-sea exchange, photosynthetic production, physical transport mechanisms, and respiratory consumption at different depths. The figure should illustrate the vertical structure of the ocean with surface mixed layer, thermocline, and deep ocean, with arrows indicating oxygen fluxes.

1.2. Thermal Deoxygenation

Thermal deoxygenation refers to oxygen loss driven by ocean warming and associated circulation changes, operating globally but particularly evident in subtropical and tropical OMZs⁶. Multiple interconnected processes contribute:

- **Reduced Solubility:** Oxygen solubility decreases approximately 1.4% per degree Celsius⁷. Given surface warming of $\sim 0.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ since 1950, solubility effects alone account for $\sim 0.8\%$ oxygen decline.
- **Enhanced Stratification:** Preferential surface warming increases temperature gradients, reducing vertical mixing and ventilation of subsurface layers⁸. Shoaling mixed layers may increase surface productivity in some regions while reducing nutrient supply to euphotic zones in others.

- **Circulation Changes:** Large-scale circulation patterns respond to surface warming and altered atmospheric forcing. Modeling suggests weakening Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation and shifts in thermocline ventilation depth and intensity⁹, affecting oxygen supply to intermediate-depth waters forming OMZ cores.
- **Metabolic Amplification:** Temperature-dependence of metabolic rates exceeds that of oxygen solubility, creating a "metabolic squeeze" wherein warming reduces supply while increasing demand¹⁰. This effect intensifies at low oxygen concentrations where organisms operate near physiological thresholds.

Observational evidence confirms significant OMZ expansion in tropical Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans¹¹. Analysis reveals the volume of water with oxygen below 80 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ increased approximately 4.5 million km^3 between 1960 and 2010, with pronounced changes in tropical thermocline waters at 200-700m depths.

1.3. Eutrophication-Driven Coastal Hypoxia

Coastal hypoxia develops through anthropogenic nutrient loading, algal blooms, and enhanced respiration during organic matter decomposition, typically in semi-enclosed systems with restricted circulation¹².

- **Nutrient Loading:** Human activities dramatically increased nutrient delivery through agricultural runoff, urban wastewater, atmospheric deposition, and aquaculture effluents. Global riverine nitrogen export increased 2-3 fold since pre-industrial times¹³.
- **Primary Production and Export:** Elevated nutrients stimulate phytoplankton growth, increasing primary production. While initially increasing oxygen production, subsequent sinking and decomposition creates intense oxygen demand in bottom waters, with efficiency depending on stratification preventing re-aeration.
- **Stratification Dynamics:** Seasonal patterns interact with nutrient loading: spring/summer warming establishes thermal stratification, river discharge creates salinity stratification, and the combination isolates bottom waters from atmospheric oxygen supply.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Hypoxia development triggers positive feedbacks including phosphorus release from sediments, altered microbial communities shifting toward anaerobic metabolism, reduced bioturbation, and decreased grazing pressure.

Documented coastal hypoxic zones increased from approximately 10 in 1960 to over 500 currently, with total affected area exceeding 245,000 km^2 ¹⁴. Major systems include the northern Gulf of Mexico, Baltic Sea, northwestern Black Sea continental shelf, and numerous smaller systems worldwide

Figure 2: Mechanisms of Ocean Deoxygenation

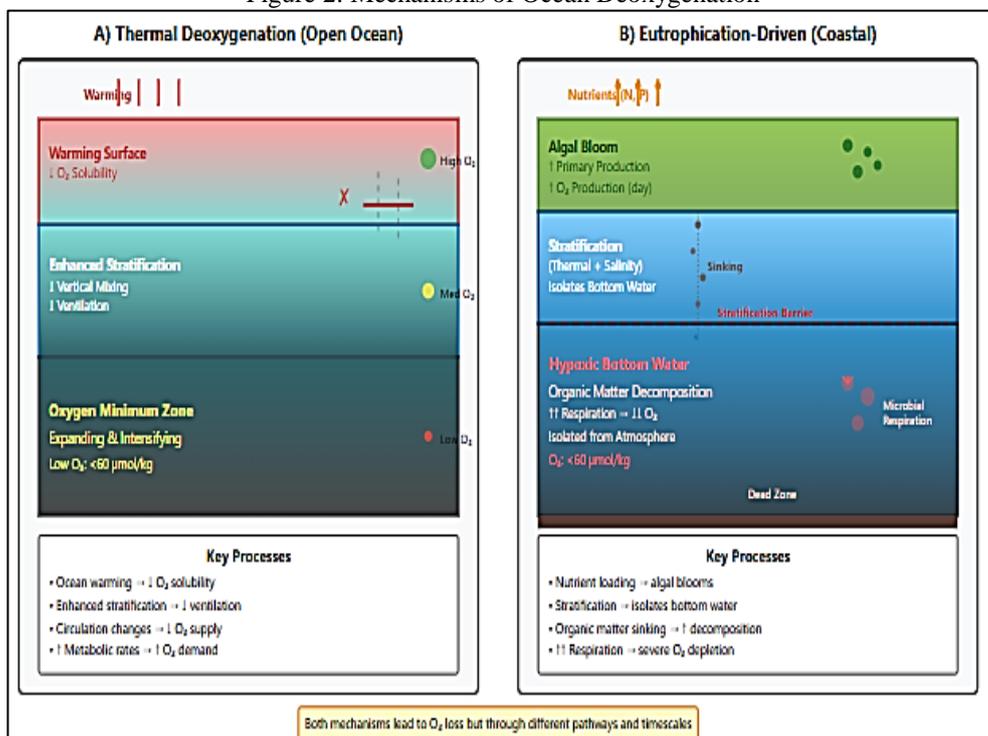


Figure 2 Shows Dual-panel conceptual diagram comparing thermal deoxygenation mechanism (left panel) and eutrophication-driven hypoxia mechanism (right panel). Each panel should show the key processes: for thermal - warming, stratification, reduced ventilation; for eutrophication - nutrient loading, algal bloom, organic matter decomposition, stratification. Use color gradients to indicate oxygen concentrations.

1.4. Synergistic Interactions

Thermal and eutrophication-driven deoxygenation interact synergistically, amplifying oxygen loss beyond additive effects¹⁵. Climate warming exacerbates eutrophication-driven hypoxia through earlier and stronger stratification extending hypoxic seasons, temperature-driven increases in metabolic rates enhancing consumption, altered precipitation affecting nutrient loading timing, and changes in phytoplankton community composition affecting organic matter quality. Regional manifestations vary: open ocean OMZs exhibit predominantly thermal mechanisms, coastal upwelling systems show natural low oxygen amplified by thermal trends, river-influenced systems demonstrate eutrophication dominance with warming modulation, and semi-enclosed seas experience strong synergistic effects.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF OCEAN DEOXYGENATION

3.1. Physiological and Organism-Level Impacts

Marine organisms experience progressive metabolic limitation as oxygen declines¹⁶. Critical oxygen thresholds vary widely, from $<10 \mu\text{mol/kg}$ for tolerant invertebrates to $>60 \mu\text{mol/kg}$ for active fishes and cephalopods. Sublethal hypoxia reduces aerobic scope, shifts metabolism toward less efficient anaerobic pathways, and alters energy allocation from growth and reproduction toward maintenance. Both hypoxia and reoxygenation induce oxidative stress through reactive oxygen species generation, potentially overwhelming antioxidant defenses¹⁷. The hypoxia-inducible factor pathway represents the primary molecular response, triggering transcriptional changes affecting metabolism, angiogenesis, and survival¹⁸.

Meta-analyses demonstrate sublethal hypoxia significantly reduces growth rates and reproductive output across taxa¹⁹: reduced growth efficiency, delayed maturation, decreased fecundity and offspring quality, and disrupted reproductive timing. Mobile organisms exhibit behavioral modifications including migration to avoid low-oxygen waters, altered feeding, modified predator-prey interactions, and changed vertical migration patterns. Severe hypoxia ($<20\text{-}30 \mu\text{mol/kg}$) causes direct mortality through respiratory failure, with documented mass mortality events affecting fish, crustaceans, and benthic invertebrates.

3.2. Ecosystem Restructuring

Individual organism responses drive large-scale community and ecosystem changes. "Habitat compression" occurs as oxygen concentrations decline²⁰: shoaling of upper OMZ boundaries restricts vertical habitat, compression increases vulnerability to surface fisheries, reduced thermal refuge eliminates escape from warm surface waters, and altered species co-occurrence patterns change community assembly. Analysis of fisheries data reveals billfishes, tunas, and large pelagic species increasingly avoid expanding low-oxygen waters, concentrating in surface layers experiencing thermal stress and increased fishing pressure.

Figure 3: Habitat Compression from Ocean Deoxygenation

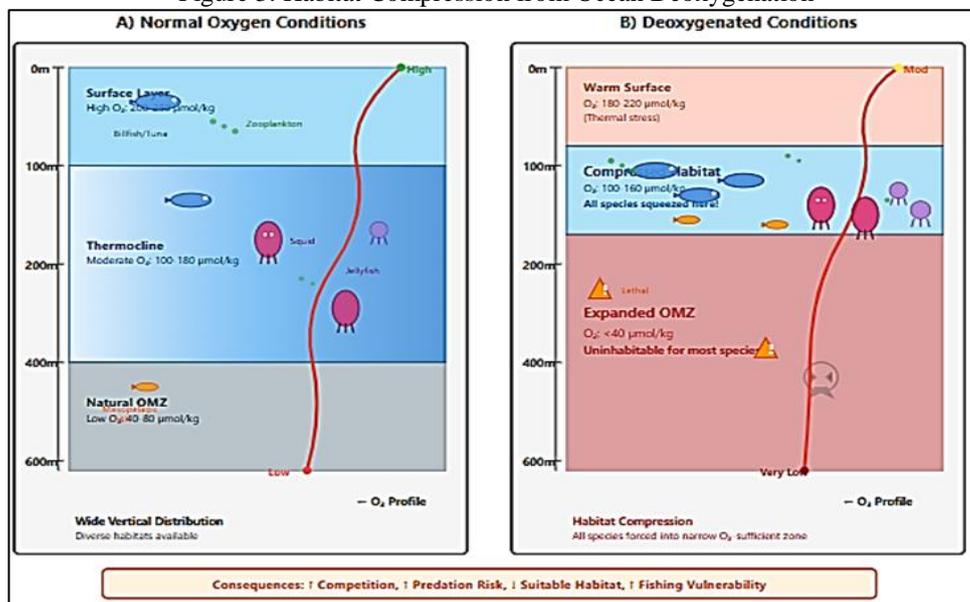


Figure 3 Shows Multi-panel diagram showing habitat compression in the water column. Panel A shows normal oxygen profile with vertical distribution of different taxa (fish, zooplankton, etc.). Panel B shows deoxygenated conditions with compressed habitats and species squeezed into narrower oxygen-sufficient zones. Use color coding for oxygen concentrations and silhouettes for different organisms.

Chronic hypoxia selects for tolerant species while eliminating sensitive taxa: reduced species richness and altered community structure, dominance by opportunistic hypoxia-tolerant species, loss of functional diversity, and modified size structure favoring smaller individuals with lower oxygen demands. In benthic communities, severe hypoxia eliminates macrofauna entirely, while moderate hypoxia shifts communities toward polychaete-dominated assemblages with reduced diversity. Trophic cascade effects propagate through food webs via altered predator-prey dynamics as spatial overlap changes, modified energy transfer efficiency between trophic levels, potential pelagic-benthic coupling decoupling, and shifts in dominant energy pathways.

3.3. Biogeochemical Consequences

Ocean deoxygenation fundamentally alters marine biogeochemical cycles with implications extending beyond direct ecological effects. The nitrogen cycle exhibits particular sensitivity to redox conditions²¹: enhanced denitrification in suboxic conditions removes bioavailable nitrogen, increased nitrous oxide (N₂O) production occurs in oxygen-depleted zones, altered nitrification-denitrification coupling affects nitrogen retention, and anammox zone expansion modifies nitrogen removal pathways. Expanding OMZs potentially increase oceanic N₂O emissions, creating positive feedback to climate warming.

Oxygen availability influences carbon cycling through multiple pathways: altered organic matter remineralization rates, modified biological pump efficiency, changed organic carbon export to deep ocean, and potential methane release from sediments under severe hypoxia. Redox-sensitive elements including iron, manganese, and phosphorus exhibit altered cycling²²: enhanced phosphorus release from sediments fuels surface productivity, modified iron speciation affects phytoplankton nutrition, altered trace metal availability influences primary production patterns, and potential harmful algal bloom promotion through modified nutrient ratios. Bottom-water hypoxia dramatically alters sediment biogeochemistry through shifts from aerobic to anaerobic metabolic pathways, decreased bioturbation reducing oxygen penetration, modified organic matter preservation efficiency, and hydrogen sulfide release under severe conditions.

3.4. Socioeconomic Impacts

Deoxygenation translates into significant socioeconomic costs across multiple sectors. Fisheries experience impacts through reduced suitable habitat decreasing carrying capacity, habitat compression increasing catchability potentially leading to overharvest, sublethal effects reducing growth and reproductive output, shifts in species composition altering catch value, and increased uncertainty complicating stock assessment²³. Economic analyses estimate potential losses of billions of dollars annually from hypoxia-related fisheries impacts in major systems.

Coastal hypoxia degrades multiple ecosystem services: biodiversity loss reduces ecosystem resilience and option value, degraded water quality impacts recreation and tourism, reduced nutrient cycling capacity affects system productivity, and loss of cultural values associated with healthy marine ecosystems. Severe hypoxia events damage infrastructure including desalination plant intake fouling, fish farm mortality, beach closures, and property value reductions. Total economic costs remain incompletely quantified but likely amount to tens of billions of dollars annually globally, with costs increasing as deoxygenation expands and intensifies.

IV. CONSERVATION AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

4.1. Climate Change Mitigation

Addressing thermal deoxygenation fundamentally requires reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit ocean warming and circulation changes, aligning with Paris Agreement objectives²⁴. Modeling indicates achieving 1.5-2.0°C warming limits would substantially reduce but not eliminate thermal deoxygenation. Under high-emission scenarios (RCP8.5), global ocean oxygen could decline an additional 3-4% by 2100; under moderate mitigation (RCP4.5), approximately half this magnitude; even under aggressive mitigation (RCP2.6), some continued deoxygenation would occur due to thermal inertia. These projections emphasize critical importance of rapid, substantial emissions reductions.

Ocean-based climate solutions targeting ocean systems include ocean alkalinity enhancement, macroalgae cultivation for carbon sequestration, protection and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, seagrasses, salt marshes), and ocean iron fertilization (controversial due to uncertain effectiveness and side effects). Effectiveness, scalability, and potential unintended consequences require careful evaluation.

Blue carbon ecosystem restoration offers co-benefits for deoxygenation mitigation through localized nutrient uptake and enhanced oxygen production.

Given multi-decadal persistence of thermal deoxygenation due to ocean thermal inertia, adaptation strategies are necessary: spatial management adjusting marine protected area boundaries, fisheries management incorporating deoxygenation effects into assessments and harvest strategies, aquaculture siting accounting for projected oxygen trends, and early warning systems for severe events.

4.2. Nutrient Management for Coastal Hypoxia

Eutrophication-driven coastal hypoxia is theoretically amenable to relatively rapid mitigation through anthropogenic nutrient loading reduction, though implementation faces substantial technical, economic, and political challenges.

4.2.1. Agricultural Best Management Practices:

Agriculture represents the dominant nutrient source to many coastal systems²⁵. Effective practices include precision agriculture using variable-rate fertilizer application, cover cropping and conservation tillage reducing runoff, riparian buffer strips intercepting nutrients, constructed wetlands treating agricultural drainage, and nitrogen management planning with timing and splitting applications. Strategic implementation achieves substantial nutrient reductions at reasonable cost, though full mitigation requires widespread adoption.

4.2.2. Wastewater Treatment Upgrades:

Urban wastewater represents geographically concentrated but significant nutrient sources: advanced nutrient removal technology in treatment plants, green infrastructure for stormwater management, septic system upgrades in sensitive watersheds, and combined sewer overflow control. Wastewater nutrient removal is generally more cost-effective than agricultural controls per-unit-nutrient, with regulations increasingly mandating upgrades.

4.2.3. Watershed-Scale Planning:

Effective nutrient management requires integrated approaches²⁶: identification of critical source areas contributing disproportionate loads, targeting management efforts for maximum reduction per dollar, coordination across jurisdictional boundaries, and adaptive management incorporating monitoring to assess effectiveness.

4.2.4. Nature-Based Solutions:

Restoration of natural nutrient retention capacity offers multiple co-benefits: wetland restoration providing nutrient uptake and denitrification, riparian forest buffers for interception, oyster reef restoration enhancing filtration and removal, and seagrass restoration increasing oxygen production and nutrient sequestration.

Figure 4: Watershed Management for Nutrient Reduction

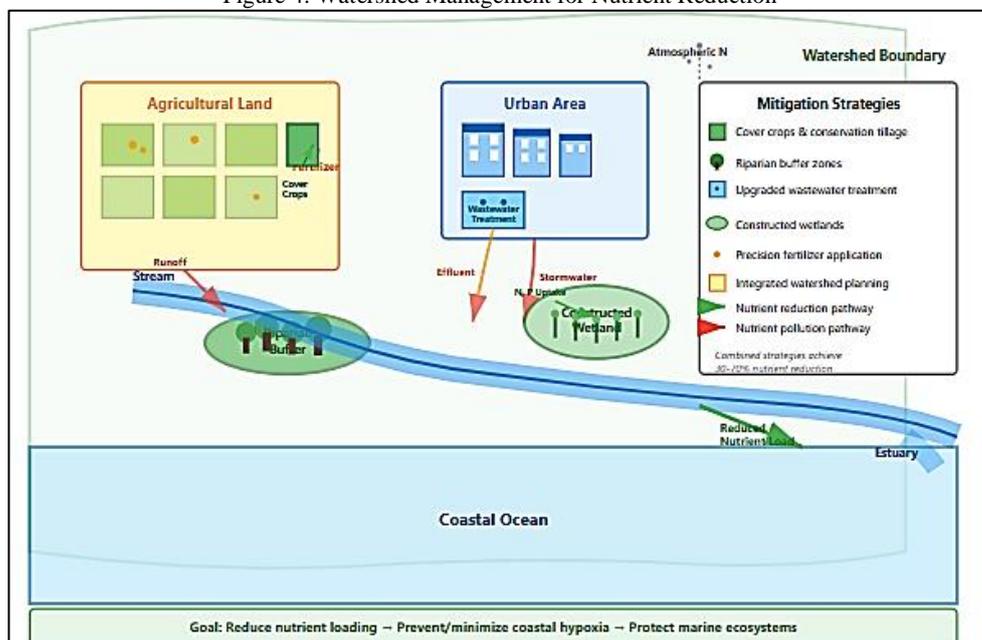


Figure 4 shows a Watershed management schematic showing different nutrient sources (agriculture, urban, atmospheric) and mitigation strategies (best management practices, wetlands, buffer zones, wastewater treatment). Include arrows showing nutrient pathways and reduction points. Use icons to represent different interventions.

4.3. Marine Spatial Planning and Monitoring

Strategic spatial management maintains refugia for oxygen-sensitive species and promotes ecosystem resilience. Dynamic management approaches include real-time management adjusting fishing closures based on observed oxygen, mobile protected areas tracking suitable habitat, seasonal closures timed to hypoxic periods, and adaptive boundaries responding to multi-year oxygen trends. Marine protected area networks should include naturally high-oxygen areas serving as climate refugia, connectivity planning accounting for oxygen-driven dispersal barriers, representation of diverse oxygen environments maintaining evolutionary potential, and buffer zones around protected areas accounting for oxygen variability.

Effective management requires robust monitoring to detect trends, trigger responses, and assess effectiveness²⁷. Multiple platforms contribute to oxygen monitoring: fixed moorings providing high-temporal-resolution time series, profiling floats (Argo-Oxygen) enabling global subsurface monitoring, autonomous underwater vehicles conducting spatial surveys, Volunteer Observing Ships contributing opportunistic observations, and satellite remote sensing of surface conditions. Integration through data assimilation systems provides comprehensive monitoring capacity. Mechanistic models enable forecasting: seasonal hypoxia forecasts for coastal systems, climate model projections of long-term trends, short-term forecasts using real-time data assimilation, and machine learning approaches identifying predictive patterns.

4.4. Case Study Insights

Specific system implementations provide valuable lessons. Chesapeake Bay's 40+ year nutrient reduction effort achieved substantial loading decreases, yet hypoxia persists at significant levels²⁸: legacy nutrients in sediments continue fueling hypoxia decades after reductions, climate warming offsets some benefits, agricultural sources prove particularly challenging to control, and sustained political and financial commitment is essential. The Baltic Sea's coordinated international action through the Helsinki Commission reduced nutrient loading, with recent improvement signs: long time lags between loading reductions and ecosystem response, importance of addressing all sources including atmospheric deposition, need for coordinated action across national jurisdictions, and value of integrated monitoring programs. Tampa Bay represents a success story where aggressive nutrient management substantially improved oxygen conditions: strict wastewater treatment requirements, seagrass restoration serving as indicator and driver, public-private partnerships in implementation, and adaptive management adjusting strategies based on monitoring.

These case studies highlight that while nutrient reduction can effectively mitigate coastal hypoxia, success requires sustained commitment, comprehensive approaches addressing all major sources, and realistic expectations regarding ecosystem recovery time frames.

V. INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

5.1. Multi-Scale Action Framework

Effective response to ocean deoxygenation requires integration across spatial scales, temporal horizons, and governance levels. We propose a hierarchical framework recognizing distinct characteristics of thermal versus eutrophication-driven deoxygenation while addressing synergistic interactions.

5.1.1. Global Scale - Climate Mitigation:

At the largest scale, reducing greenhouse gas emissions remains the only effective approach to limiting thermal deoxygenation, requiring national commitments aligned with Paris Agreement targets, transition to renewable energy systems, carbon pricing mechanisms, and international cooperation. Timeline: Multi-decadal commitment required, with emissions reductions this decade critical for limiting mid- and late-century oxygen loss.

5.1.2. Regional Scale - Marine Spatial Planning:

Within large marine ecosystems and coastal seas: coordinated monitoring networks providing regional oxygen assessments, marine spatial plans incorporating deoxygenation projections, fisheries management adapting to changing oxygen conditions, and regional cooperation on nutrient management for shared water bodies. Timeline: Decades for full implementation, with adaptive management adjusting strategies based on observed trends.

5.1.3. Local Scale - Watershed and Coastal Management:

At individual estuary and coastal system scales: nutrient Total Maximum Daily Loads or equivalent frameworks, implementation of best management practices in watersheds, local habitat restoration enhancing resilience, and community engagement and stakeholder participation. Timeline: Years to decades for implementation, with monitoring tracking progress toward targets.

Figure 5 : Integrated Management Framework for Ocean Deoxygenation

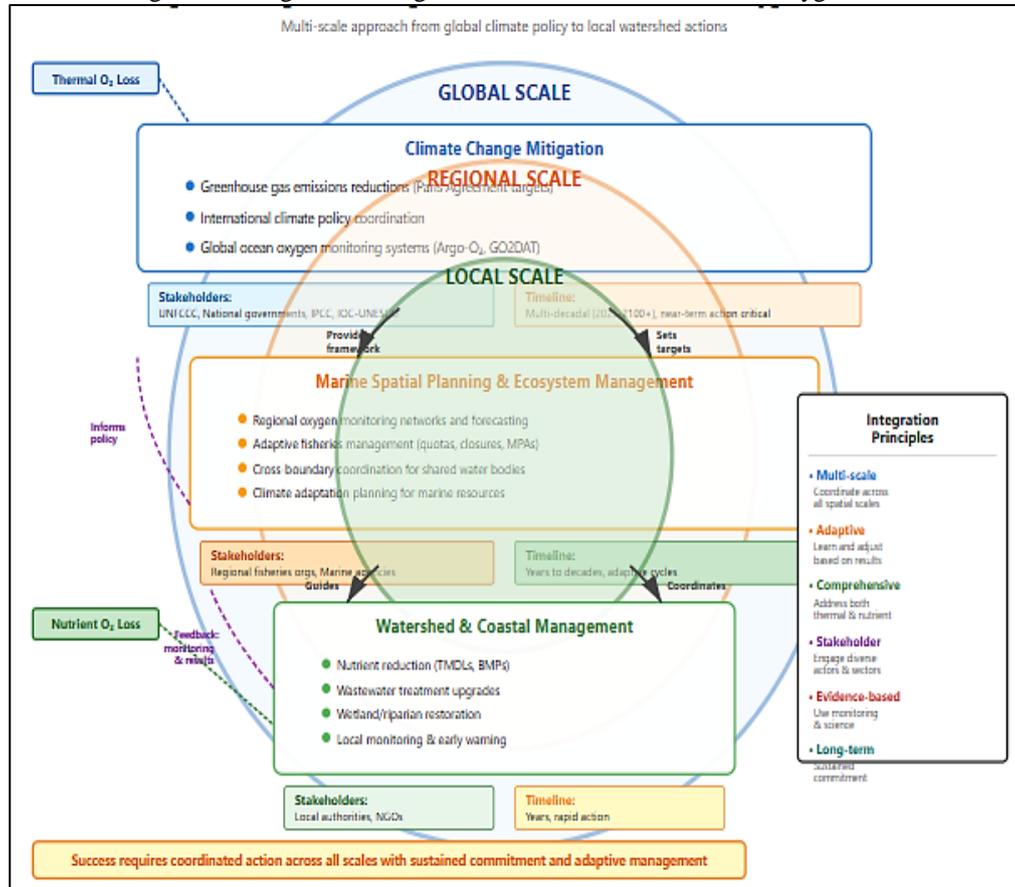


Figure 5 shows a Hierarchical framework diagram showing three nested scales (global, regional, local) with key actions, stakeholders, and timelines for each scale. Use concentric circles or nested boxes to show the relationship between scales, with specific strategies listed for each.

5.2. Priority Actions and Implementation

Based on analysis of deoxygenation mechanisms, consequences, and mitigation options, priority actions span multiple domains:

- **Science and Monitoring:** Expansion of global oxygen observing system particularly in under-sampled regions, enhanced process studies elucidating mechanistic drivers and threshold behaviors, improved modeling capabilities for prediction across scales, and synthesis activities integrating diverse data streams.
- **Policy and Governance:** Incorporation of ocean deoxygenation into climate policy frameworks, strengthening of nutrient management regulations and enforcement, development of adaptive management frameworks for marine resources, and international cooperation mechanisms for shared ocean regions.
- **On-Ground Implementation:** Deployment of best management practices in agricultural watersheds, wastewater treatment infrastructure upgrades, coastal habitat restoration projects, and fisher and aquaculture operator adaptation strategies.
- **Capacity Building:** Training programs for resource managers on deoxygenation assessment and response, public education on ocean health and individual actions, stakeholder engagement in collaborative management, and knowledge exchange between regions facing similar challenges.

5.3. Adaptive Management and Barriers

Given substantial uncertainties regarding deoxygenation trajectories, ecosystem responses, and management effectiveness, adaptive management approaches are essential²⁹. Key elements include clear management objectives specifying measurable targets, systematic monitoring and assessment tracking oxygen trends and ecosystem status, predictive models forecasting consequences of management alternatives, regular learning and adjustment reviewing data to assess progress, and institutional structures enabling adaptive decision-making while maintaining long-term commitment.

Implementation faces multiple barriers. Economic and political barriers include costs concentrated on specific sectors while benefits diffuse, misalignment between political and ecological time scales, competing priorities for limited resources, and stakeholder resistance to regulations. Overcoming these requires economic instruments (payments for ecosystem services, nutrient trading), demonstration of co-benefits beyond deoxygenation mitigation, building political constituencies, and equitable distribution of costs and benefits.

Technical and knowledge barriers include uncertainties in projections and thresholds, gaps in understanding ecosystem responses, limited predictive capacity for management effectiveness, and data scarcity in many regions. Addressing these requires continued investment in research and monitoring, improved translation of science to management guidance, capacity building in data collection and analysis, and collaborative learning across regions.

Institutional and governance barriers include fragmentation of authority across jurisdictions and sectors, mismatch between ecological and governance boundaries, limited integration across air quality, water quality, and marine management, and insufficient coordination between local, regional, and global actions. Solutions include integrated governance frameworks spanning sectors and jurisdictions, formal coordination mechanisms, clear allocation of responsibilities and accountability, and flexibility to adjust governance as understanding improves.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ocean deoxygenation represents a critical dimension of global change with profound implications for marine ecosystems, biogeochemical cycles, and human societies. The phenomenon results from both climate warming at global scales and nutrient pollution in coastal systems, with synergistic interactions amplifying oxygen loss. Consequences cascade from molecular responses through ecosystem restructuring to socioeconomic impacts worth billions of dollars annually.

Key findings include:

- Multiple interacting drivers operate through thermal effects globally and nutrient pollution in coastal systems, with synergistic amplification;
- Multi-scale consequences span cellular to ecosystem levels with significant socioeconomic costs; (3) Differentiated solutions require climate mitigation for thermal deoxygenation and nutrient management for eutrophication-driven hypoxia;
- Multi-decadal time scales for both deoxygenation evolution and response to mitigation require sustained commitment;
- Implementation challenges often exceed purely technical obstacles.

Critical research priorities include: quantification of thermal versus eutrophication contributions in regions experiencing both, mechanisms and thresholds for non-linear responses, improved Earth System Model representation of oxygen dynamics, rigorous evaluation of nutrient management strategy effectiveness, and cost-benefit analyses of alternative intervention strategies.

Policy recommendations include: explicit incorporation of ocean deoxygenation into National Determined Contributions and climate assessments, mandatory oxygen monitoring in areas at risk, integration of deoxygenation projections into marine spatial planning, enforceable nutrient reduction targets based on Total Maximum Daily Load approaches, improved integration across climate, water quality, and marine resource management institutions, and support for long-term monitoring programs essential for adaptive management.

The integrated framework presented here provides actionable guidance while identifying critical research priorities. Success requires unprecedented coordination across disciplines, sectors, and jurisdictions, guided by robust science while accommodating inherent uncertainties. Ocean deoxygenation exemplifies complex, multi-scale Anthropocene challenges. Effective response demands comprehensive, sustained action recognizing multi-decadal persistence of oxygen debt in subsurface waters. The stakes are high: ocean ecosystems providing essential services to billions and harboring much of Earth's biodiversity. The time for action is now.

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