**Summary of Webinar ‘Community of Ocean Action**

**on Sustainable Blue Economy’**

**14 July 2021**

UNDESA hosted the webinar ‘’Community of Ocean Action on Sustainable Blue Economy” on the 14th of July 2021. The webinar discussed how the Sustainable Blue Economy can provide a viable global response to build back better from the pandemic through blue-green recovery, and showcased some of the ambitious and successful best-practices and innovative solutions. It demonstrated how Voluntary Commitments contributed to the advancement of Sustainable Blue Economy and the implementation of SDG 14 at global, national and local levels under the Communities of Sustainable Blue Economy. The publication on “Promotion and Strengthening of Sustainable Ocean-Based Economies” was launched at the webinar.

The webinar began with a brief welcome from Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-charge of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals. This was followed by Opening Remarks from Mr. Liu Zhenmin Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs via a pre-recorded video followed by a keynote address by Dr. Marjo Vierros, Director of Coastal Policy and Humanities Research on the key findings of the report entitled “Promotion and Strengthening of Sustainable Ocean-Based Economies”. The webinar concluded with a Q&A moderated by Mr. Alexander Trepelkov and closing remarks delivered by H.E. Ambassador Charlotta Schylter, the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations and the United Nations Secretary General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, H.E. Ambassador Peter Thomson via a pre-recorded video.

**Opening Remarks**

**Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-charge, Division for Sustainable Development Goals** welcomed all participants and guest speakers, highlighted that the Voluntary Commitment was one of the key outcomes of the 2017 Ocean Conference - rallying all stakeholders to act for the ocean. Since then, over 1,600 Voluntary Commitments have been registered by governments, private sectors, NGOs and academia globally – 420 of which are registered under Community of Ocean Action on Sustainable Blue Economy. Mr. Trepelkov highlighted the importance of a better recovery, one which is robust, sustainable, resilient and inclusive.

**Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs** underscored the integral role the ocean plays in the survival of our planet through sequestrating greenhouse gases and providing food and livelihoods to the global community, as well as the importance of how a Sustainable Blue Economy goes beyond traditional business-as-usual models through relying on emerging ocean sectors such as low carbon shipping, offshore renewable energy, marine biotechnology and ecotourism. He further highlighted that the ocean holds the key to both prosperity and sustainability through providing jobs whilst safeguarding the marine ecosystem. Lastly Mr. Liu underscored the importance of the Voluntary Commitments in generating innovative solutions that provide concrete ocean action and encouraged sharing best practices, experiences, and identifying areas for collaboration within the COA to ensure that we are on track to meeting SDG 14 deliverables.

**Keynote**

**Dr. Marjo Vierros, Director of Coastal Policy and Humanities Research** delivered her keynote address on key findings of the report entitled “Promotion and Strengthening of Sustainable Ocean-Based Economies”. She stressed the importance of steering away from business-as-usual models to protect the oceans health. Sustainable blue economies can be proven to provide equitable, inclusive and positive economic outcomes without foregoing our marine environment through progressive, robust and sound long-term policymaking; affordable long-term financing at scale; and common guidance and principles for what a blue economy means. Dr Vierros highlighted the importance that the goals of the 2030 Agenda and of blue economies must be inclusive and that coastal communities are able to equitably share the benefits and multisectoral ocean governance was underlined i

**Panel Discussion**

The panel discussion provided the opportunity for panellists to showcase some of the best practices as well as share lessons learnt within their Voluntary Commitments under the Communities for Sustainable Blue Economy.

**Dr Marie Bourrel-McKinnon** of the International Seabed Authority presented the voluntary commitment implemented in partnership with UN-DESA, ‘The Abyssal Initiative for Growth’. The commitment ensures that Pacific-SIDS Sponsoring States (Tonga, Nauru, Kiribati and the Cook Islands) which rely heavily on the sustainable use of the ocean and its resources can engage in the development of the concept of blue economy. Each state’s new deep-sea bed mining and activities have been supported by the Abyssal Initiative through cross-cutting capacity building workshops enhancing scientific knowledge and help national expertise to strengthen their institutional capacity to comply with international legal requirements and inform and support decision-making processes.

**Mr. Francis Munyeki** introduced CAD’s Voluntary Commitment – ‘Information Technology in Marine Life in Kenya’, which harnesses innovative ICT to assist local fisherperson by providing them with a small waterproof bio-metric “Mvuvicard”. This innovative solution addresses challenges faced by stakeholders such as researchers, traders, fishers, law enforcement and administrations by providing them with an identification card which also provides dynamic and immediately verifiable data to mutually solve each of their bespoke problems. This innovative solution has particularly addressed the job security problems faced by small-scale fisheries and has shown great potential for replication at the local, country and regional level with requests from Kisumu, Turkana Liberia and Uganda.

**Dr. Kirsty Nash** of the University of Tasmania showcased the inspirational ‘Voluntary Commitment for Future Seas’ which explores potential futures through leveraging the power of individuals and communities’ experiences in relation to 12 major challenges facing the ocean. For each challenge, the Voluntary Commitment has addressed two questions of what the future could look like: ‘a business-as-usual future’ and a ‘More Sustainable Future’. The evidenced based answers are supported by comprehensive outcome-orientated roadmaps – both short-term and long-term - to support ‘the ocean we need for the future we want’ through scientific publications, interdisciplinary learning, training the next generation of ocean leaders and practical toolkits to support ocean sustainability.

**Dr. Alasdair Harris** delivered a presentation on the Voluntary Commitment implemented by Blue Ventures, Rebuilding Tropical Fisheries with Coastal Communities. The commitment supports tropical coastal communities and small-scale fisheries in East Africa and the West Indies to design, scale-up and strengthen locally led fisheries management and marine conservation at the community level through diversified livelihood, integration of community- and local governance. The two-pronged commitments Blue Ventures undertakes both under the theme of empowering communities to manage their tropical marine resources concern: scaling up the use of fisheries management and the development of mangroves for blue carbon conservation. He stressed that mangroves provide an affordable way to address climate change, yet they have been lost faster than any other forests on land. Their blue carbon project in Madagascar has huge opportunities to be replicated at local level, despite some policy barriers and constraints.

**Dr. James Kairo** delivered the presentation on the ‘Follow-up to the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference (SBEC)’ in Nairobi, Kenya in 2018 which explored the investment potential in unlocking the sustainable ocean blue economy for Kenya. He highlighted that participants at SBEC made numerous voluntary non-monetary and monetary commitments amounting to approximately USD 172.2 billion in the various sectors of the blue economy. He introduced Kenya’s commitments on marine and water resources protection, establishment of a Blue Economy Bank and plastics and waste management. These commitments have been supported through policies, a National Blue Economy Committee as well as new and ongoing Blue Economy Projects. Kenya as a member of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, is committed to investing in Nature-Based Climate Solutions; Securing Sustainable Food for the Future; and Expanding Ocean Observation Research.

The panellists then further deliberated on the theme of a Blue Economy and blue-green recovery in the following Q&A session, with key discussion points on: harmonising recovery strategies with marine tourism; simultaneously protecting human rights and the marine environment; and untangling the international definition – and lack thereof – of a Sustainable Blue Economy.

**Closing Remarks**

The webinar ended with closing remarks from H.E. Ambassador Charlotta Schlyter, and a pre-recorded message from H.E. Ambassador Peter Thomson. Mr Trepelkov announced the launch of the publication on ‘Promotion and Strengthening of Sustainable Ocean Based Economies’ and thanked the Government of Sweden for their generous grant which made this production possible.

**H.E. Ambassador Charlotta Schlyter** began by stating the exhibition of Voluntary Commitments from the panellists provides excellent examples of ways in which SDG 14 and sustainable blue economies can be realised, hoping for future commitments which contain a similar level of inspiration and ambition. Ambassador Schlyter mentioned how the report highlights good practices and progress made and points towards the need for a robust framework to support the development of a sustainable blue economy and help secure a socially and environmentally sustainable future. The Ambassador concluded by stating that as we prepare for the second UN Oceans Conference hosted by Portugal and Kenya in 2022, we should step up our efforts to agree on science-based definitions, principles and guidelines that can steer finance and systems to monitor and evaluate the growth of the blue economy in the wake of the pandemic.

**H.E. Ambassador Peter Thomson** closed the webinar by recounting how the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the Ocean-based Economy hard. However, he stressed that this must be taken as an opportunity to build back better, with a blue-green based economy. He stated that SDG 14 provides a blueprint for such a recovery, and although not explicitly stated, Sustainable Blue Economy is at the heart of SDG-14. Blue economy offers massive potential for increasing economic benefits and job opportunities for coastal states, providing a key to achieving food security, poverty eradication and gender inclusion. Investment and financing must be increased for the world to deliver on Sustainable Blue Economy. He called upon all stakeholders to register VCs for ocean actions, and compelled all to take this time as an opportunity to adjust our riggings, take stock and freshen up our thinking and actions in advance of the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in 2022.