



29TH JUNE 2022

UN OCEAN CONFERENCE

LISBON, PORTUGAL

PLENARY: GENERAL DEBATE

STATEMENT

**THE HONOURABLE MELVIN "MITCH" TURNBULL
MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND LABOUR
GOVERNMENT OF THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentleman,

The British Virgin Islands is fully committed to implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. We are following through on our obligations through a combination of marine conservation measures and the development of a sustainable blue economy. In this regard, good progress is being made on regrowing our mangrove forests and expanding our coral nurseries. We also continue to protect sharks and rays and to monitor the level of fishing in our territorial waters to prevent overfishing. At the same time, our marine based tourism is rebounding with yachts returning to our shores. To support a sustainable blue economy we have stepped up monitoring of compliance with all regulations by vessels operating in our jurisdiction. Our goal is to become the most sustainable sailing destination in the world in line with our position as the sailing capital of the world. We believe that our ongoing implementation of SDG 14 strikes the right balance for the sustainable management and use of our marine resources that will protect the marine environment and support the growth of our economy.

Excellencies, under international law, the British Virgin Islands has rights and responsibilities over approximately 200 nautical miles or 84,000 square kilometers of maritime space, a maritime area that is significantly larger than our land area. The Territory has articulated its aspirations for the sustainable use of the 200 nautical mile, Exclusive Economic Zone guided by the UNDP-led technical assistance for the development of the Blue Economy Road Map in 2019. The Road map is well grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals' 2030 Agenda. We express our appreciation to our partners UNDP and the Economic Commission on Latin

America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for the continued support, especially after the 2017 hurricanes.

In developing this national blue economy framework, the government of the Virgin Islands has several priorities, which are to support the sustainable development of the maritime tourism sub-sector; develop the existing fisheries sector; improve the existing knowledge base around the marine environment and the capacity to undertake future research; and explore new and emerging opportunities that could be developed in the British Virgin Islands. We believe that in developing a *strategic outlook for our Blue Economy Roadmap*, we will promote sustainable economic growth, ensure food security, improve environmental governance and stewardship, transition to a more climate resilient Territory and sustain the ecological integrity of the marine environment.

In doing so, the British Virgin Islands joins the community of **Small Island Developing States** that advance the very strong notion of a reclassification of our economies and to be viewed as **Large Ocean States** given the combined vastness of our Exclusive Economic Zones. This paradigm shift is an important one since:

- It recognizes that the definition of our small land masses, when viewed as SIDS does not account for the contribution to the conservation of marine biodiversity and the relative contribution towards climate adaptation, as our oceans are as important in terms of carbon sequestration as larger states. Therefore, greater emphasis must be placed on ensuring that the services our oceans provide are accounted.
- It recognizes that there are vast, untapped resources which must be better understood, and which form the key to the economic growth of our communities. Large Ocean States/Small Island Developing States' economies are heavily reliant on our marine and coastal resources.
- Attention must be paid in terms of the resources allocated to better understand and sustainably use the Exclusive Economic Zones of SIDS/LOS. Resources must match the scale of the challenges and opportunities for the sustainable use of marine resources within these areas.

The British Virgin Islands stands ready to add its voice to the continuing dialogue as to the true contribution that Large Ocean States make to meeting the 2030 agenda. Growth and sustainable use of marine resources for this and for future generations must realize the full potential of our

Exclusive Economic Zone, which in turn will provide greater opportunities for the engagement of national stakeholders in the blue economy.

Excellencies, importantly the British Virgin Islands as a Large Ocean State also faces the challenge of other SIDS in monitoring and policing the vastness of our marine space. Illegal fishing is a problem which we must tackle. Cooperation with our neighbours and international partners on satellite surveillance and coastguard patrols will be critical to addressing this challenge.

The British Virgin Islands calls for the Associate Members of the UN's regional commissions like the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to also be included in the support measures to Governments that will emerge out of this meeting. We too need this critical support if we are to meet our obligations to implement SDG 14.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentleman, I thank you for your attention.