

**UN Ocean Conference**  
**Draft National Statement Ireland**  
**given by Minister for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm**  
**Noonan.**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ireland welcomes the opportunity to speak today at this important global ocean event. We join others in thanking the Governments of Portugal and Kenya for co-hosting this Conference, and for their leadership in bringing us together in the beautiful Atlantic city of Lisbon.

This conference is critical for our future. By working together to develop and share knowledge we can, through science and innovation, reduce pollution, conserve biodiversity and stem the effects of climate change.

Ireland is a small island state but, with a seafloor seven times the size of our beautiful island, we are also a large ocean state. Warm ocean currents of the North Atlantic Drift regulate our climate. These have shaped our environment, our history and the development of our culture.

Ireland's seas are rich in biodiversity, hosting deep-water coral gardens and carbonate mounds, and diverse coastal habitats, from exposed rocky shores to sheltered sandy bays and undersea meadows. Our Maritime Area is home to over 20 species of whales and dolphins, some of which, like the Blue whale, remain highly endangered today, decades after their exploitation was finally curbed.

Thus, we are alert to the growing strain on our ocean from climate change; biodiversity loss; and pollution – visible and invisible. These triple ocean challenges jeopardise the capacity of the ocean to support our society, and yours. We must protect our seas and oceans for future generations.

Ireland champions collaboration to protect the ocean via the OSPAR Convention. Through its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030, OSPAR has set ambitious objectives to deliver clean, resilient, sustainably used and biologically diverse seas.

We also collaborate with other nations through the EU's marine environmental policies and through global actions to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Convention on Biological

Diversity. We are proud to have co-chaired along with Kenya, the process to finalise the Sustainable Development Goals. We are an ocean-facing partner to all. Ireland is keen to continue international ocean action, and is bolstering its efforts to realise a global treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, bringing valuable experience in effective multilateralism to that process.

Ireland is addressing marine litter pollution including plastic, both from land and sea based sources. These are tackled through a wide range of practical measures focusing on:

- circular economy;
- waste and litter control;
- waste water management.
- beach cleaning programmes;
- a Clean Oceans initiative encouraging fishers to bring litter collected ashore ;and legislative measure such as Ireland’s Microbeads (Prohibition) Act; implementation of the Single Use Plastics Directive the Port Reception Facilities Directive; the MARPOL Convention among others;

Ireland is further committed to protecting and conserving our rich biodiversity by expanding our network of Marine Protected Areas to cover at least 30% of our marine region by 2030.

We recognize of course that the oceans are a source of renewable energy and are committed to securing up to 5 Gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030, through environmentally responsible and sustainable development.

Meaningful public participation and the mobilisation of all citizens and sectors is key to delivering these objectives and catalysing necessary change. Through participation, citizen science and education, we will empower our citizens to become stewards of the ocean.

Ireland is expanding its fleet of ocean-going research vessels to build on our leadership in marine science, supporting conservation and sustainable use of our ocean resources and of those worldwide

This is because as an island nation, we have a strong connection with Small Island Developing States and other coastal states and recognise the disproportionate impact they face from climate change and pollution. Thus, this week Ireland announced around €10 million in funding to support **international ocean action**. This includes the launch of Our Shared Ocean Programme which will directly support the ambition of this conference and the UN Decade of Ocean Science

by supporting research partnerships and travel between Irish and SIDS-based research institutions.

It includes becoming a member of the Blue Action Fund to support marine protection and sustainable livelihoods in the world's poorest coastal communities.

Ireland is keenly aware of the benefits of working with our partners to achieve our common goals. Our seas and oceans do not follow our concepts of borders and collaboration with partners is vital for success.

We are here not just to speak about these things, but to take action, to move towards a cleaner, healthy and biodiverse marine environment – for our citizens, for the citizens of the world and for the health of the ocean and our blue planet.

**ENDS**