

2022 UN Ocean Conference Session

Israel's Statement

Excellencies, Colleagues,

The UN Ocean Conference comes at a critical time. Our oceans, seas and marine resources are vital to every aspect of our lives. They provide us with food security and oxygen, support job creation and biodiversity, they are central for trade and sustainable economic growth, and the list goes on and on. Sadly, they are facing an alarming emergency. The need to scale up efforts for the implementation of SDG14 and to reaffirm our strong commitment to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, cannot be overemphasized.

Israel's Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlines, stretching a total of 205 kilometers, are among the country's most valuable natural assets. Nearly 70% of the population and much of the country's economic and commercial activity, as well as a rich diversity of natural, environmental, and culture are concentrated along these coastal strips. Amazingly enough, this marine environment had suffered limitless amounts of terrestrial, seaborne and airborne pollution, for years. This environment simply cannot absorb any more. It is our collective duty to restore its life-supporting role. Since the mid 1990's Israel has been taking action in exactly this route. Allow me to describe some of the steps we are taking.

Marine Protected Areas

Israel is committed to the conservation of ocean biodiversity and ecosystems, improving long-term food security, and preventing over-fishing. We reaffirm the call for the protection of 30% of the oceans by 2030, towards the CBD COP, this December.

Three weeks ago, the Minister of Environmental Protection started the process to declare the "Palmachim Disturbance" sea area within the Israeli EEZ, as an MPA. This unique area of a rectangular 450sqkm, will double the protected area under Israel's jurisdiction. It consists of endangered deep-sea shark species, vast nursery grounds of susceptible cnidarian assemblages, sea pens, cold-water corals, and black corals. Researchers documented the presence of cold seep chemosynthetic communities and Bluefin Tuna aggregations during their reproductive season, in this area.

Marine Industrial Pollution

Marine Industrial Pollution from land-based sources has always been a serious problem. During the last 25 years, having set ambitious reduction goals, we managed to dramatically reduce pollution loads up to 95-99%. Out of seven identified pollution hotspots, Israel is left with one. It is located in the beautiful coastal area near the city of Acco. This previously PVC industrial plant left a legacy of untreated mercury waste which had seeped into the soil, the underground waters

and to the Mediterranean Sea. Lately, this area was purchased by a private company. A clean up survey and rehabilitation plan was devised together with the relevant government agencies and a plan is set to prevent further mercury pollution.

Marine Litter Pollution

Marine Litter pollution continues to be a huge challenge. "Clean Coast Program" is Israel's national action plan to decrease marine litter, especially plastics, and was developed in accordance with the regional reduction plan of marine litter of the Barcelona Convention. This multi-layer program mitigates the impact of marine litter on the coastline of Israel, by operating in six intertwined axes: publicity campaigns; enforcement activities; educational activities; marine monitoring of plastics; prevention at the source and regular coastal cleanup.

Routine, result-oriented, cleanup activities, financed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection are measured regularly and rated by the Clean Coast Index (CCI). The target measured by the index was set to be 70% of clean coasts at least 70% of time. Last year's results showed an unprecedented mark of 74% clean coasts. Therefore we reset the target to be 75%. Prevention at the source, with legal measures like the Plastic bags Law and the Packaging Law, reduced consumption of polluting plastic bags by 65%.

Seawater Desalination

Seawater Desalination was Israel's solution to overcome its serious shortage in drinking water, by the construction of 5 facilities (and 2 more under construction) that produce over 65% of its potable water. However, desalination brine has an effect on the marine environment. Luckily monitoring shows that the impact is local. Also, there is a knowledge gap as to the impact of the intake seawater, where the facility "cleans" the seawater from its natural micro-organisms (that makes the primary production of the food web). The government initiated a 2-year research project to determine the joint impact of all of Israel's desalination plants along the Mediterranean shore. Therefore, careful conduct must be maintained at all times.

Cooperation and partnerships

Israel is an active member of the Barcelona Convention to protect the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean countries joined forces to turn the region in to a Sulphur emissions control area which obliges ships to use low Sulphur fuel (which produces less sulfuric acids), saving human lives and benefiting the marine environment. Last week, the Israeli parliament approved the Regulations of Air Pollution Prevention from Ships, which will enable Israel to fully apply the Annex 6 of the MARPOL convention. Also, we actively participate in INTERPOL's marine enforcement programs to fight offshore crime leading to marine pollution. Our inspection and enforcement program checks at least 20% of the ships calling at Israeli ports, for compliance with the international maritime conventions.

Excellencies,

The global emergency of oceans, seas and marine resources is indeed alarming and requires urgent action. The examples above are only a few, but serve to show that actions, regulatory measures, targeted policies and cooperation can go a long way. The window of opportunity is narrowing, but if we act now and we act together, we can still restore, conserve and protect our oceans and seas.

We need to reiterate: Think and plan globally and act with determination, locally

Thank you.