

Plenary Statement
Hon. John M. Silk, Minister of Natural Resources and Commerce
2022 United Nations Ocean Conference
Plenary Hall

Time Limit: 3 minutes

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you the warm greetings of Yokwe on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. We join with the Pacific Island nations, and small island developing states around the world, to work with others in emphasizing the vital importance of sustainable oceans, fisheries and SDG 14.

We remain gravely concerned that the good words we all speak at the United Nations are still too often contradicted by actions driven by immediate commercial self-interest. As a world, we are at continued risk where the common interest of all becomes the responsibility of none. We are failing our oceans and failing our future generations. As island nations, these threats are real, and have far more devastating consequences now than ever. But we know that achieving strong action on sustainable oceans is also a far wider global challenge.

The world cannot reverse course on the health of global oceans and fisheries by symbolic partnership, but by political will through comprehensive actions at scale. And yes, we can point to examples - leadership by island nations and others who know that if we fail to act wisely today, tomorrow our future generations will be robbed blind of the oceans resources which we closely depend on. In the Pacific Islands region, our island nations are leading at the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission to ensure effective tropical tuna harvest measures for some of the world's last remaining sustainable commercial fisheries.

In the Marshall Islands, we are leading coastal conservation efforts through our Reimaannlok commitments which place local communities and traditional practices at the forefront of resource management and protected areas. We are using this to meet our national target of conserving half of all our coastal areas by 2030, and to support regional action through the Pacific Islands Forum 2050 strategy for a Blue Pacific. This strategy will also reaffirm our Pacific Leaders' Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change related sea-level rise, securing our rights and entitlement to resources within our jurisdiction even in the face of rising sea levels.

At the International Maritime Organization, we continue our push for strong action that ensures an equitable transition to zero emission shipping by 2050 at the latest, driven a carbon levy starting at \$100/ton in 2025. Globally, we expect to conclude this year on a strong new UN treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction to cut across fragmented policy silos to ensure effective and coordinated action for conservation in the high seas. We have every belief that the international community is well capable of higher ambition and action at the step-change needed to address the global oceans crisis.

Our livelihood, our future generations and indeed our security as island nations demands stronger action. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in our region is systematic and linked to organized crime. Up to a third of our own Pacific fish are taken, in fact robbed, from our waters, and we welcome new technology partnerships to boost our monitoring capacity. Far more must be done by foreign partners to better advance human rights protections in our fishery, and throughout the world. We need their commitment to strengthen labor protection standards we have already put in motion in our region. Yet our closest partners also must realize as islands we want to build and renew fisheries access treaties on our terms, and to benefit our own security. And we cannot act without their presence and partnership.

Climate-driven impacts not only threaten our rich biodiversity, but the very resources upon which our remote atoll communities depend for livelihoods and food security. Foreign plastic waste, some from halfway around the world, chokes our shores and threatens these resources

SIDS and many other nations advanced the SDG goal 14 on sustainable oceans to ensure that the vital health of global oceans remains front and center of international action. We hope - but cannot blindly trust - that future Oceans summits will be opportunities to highlight sweeping actions that make a dramatic change in the trajectory of our shared oceans resources. To do so, all nations, large and small, must search deep, and garner far stronger political will.

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