

United Nations Ocean Conference – Plenary – Statement by New Zealand, delivered by Hon David Parker

Thank you Chair.

I would like to begin by thanking the Governments of Portugal and Kenya for their enormous effort as co-hosts of this Conference.

I acknowledge the Heads of State, Heads of Government, Ministers and other distinguished representatives attending the Conference this week.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only been a barrier to our taking stock of our collective action towards realising Sustainable Development Goal 14; we can see that it has exacerbated the complex, transboundary threats to the health of the ocean, and hindered progress towards SDG 14 targets.

It is vital that we use this opportunity to renew our commitment to all parts of SDG 14, and our commitment to act together.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, as a maritime state with one of the largest and most biodiverse marine areas in the world, the ocean defines our ways of life. It underpins our deep connection to the Pacific and Antarctic regions. Our economies, livelihoods, culture and well-being depend on the ocean.

The New Zealand Government has established a dedicated Oceans and Fisheries ministerial portfolio to signal our commitment to a more holistic, integrated approach to managing our marine environment. This includes by explicitly incorporating an ecosystem-based approach.

New Zealand has a world-leading fisheries management system. We also have a range of protection measures across our waters. Work is underway in both areas to optimise the conservation and sustainable use of our marine environment, and ensure our approaches are fit for future generations.

The protection of threatened species is an important pillar of our oceans and fisheries work. Seabirds, sharks, sea lions, penguins, and Hector's and Maui dolphins are at particular risk and we are working hard to protect them. We value our range of productive partnerships to implement this work, especially on seabird conservation.

Our work does not stop at 200 nautical miles.

New Zealand works closely with our Pacific partners to advance shared priorities that contribute to SDG 14. The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Ocean Statement 2021 recognises the enormous potential of the ocean to meet sustainable development needs, but only if the ocean is restored and maintained to be healthy and productive.

Since 2018, New Zealand has spent over NZ\$68.5 million on ocean priorities, and more on core funding to regional agencies that are integral in supporting Pacific Island countries to protect the ocean.

New Zealand is focused on growing scientific knowledge and research capacity to inform decision-making, and incorporating traditional knowledge as a core part of this. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development is a key opportunity to deepen understanding of ocean science priorities such as the ocean-climate nexus and deep sea ecosystems.

New Zealand works consistently across the multilateral agenda to promote outcomes that ensure protection of the marine environment. We welcomed the decision by the international community to embark on negotiations for a new treaty to end plastic pollution. We share the view that the new Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity must deliver ambition on marine issues. New Zealand also took an active role in the process towards a new agreement on fisheries subsidies at the World Trade Organization and welcomes its conclusion.

This year, as we mark the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, we can reflect on its contribution to achieving SDG 14. It has been the starting point for rules and agreements aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. New Zealand looks forward to seeing the conclusion of an ambitious treaty to protect marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. We are also actively engaged in negotiations at the International Seabed Authority on a regulatory regime for deep sea mining, which must ensure that deep sea mining cannot proceed unless the marine environment is effectively protected.

Last year, New Zealand, alongside other Pacific Islands Forum members issued the *Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise*. New Zealand is committed to working with the international community to ensure that the maritime rights and entitlements on which many states rely are preserved in the face of sea-level rise, consistent with the Convention and its principles.

Chair, these are just some of the areas in which New Zealand is contributing to the realisation of SDG 14. We look forward to the remainder of the conference and to making the most of the opportunity it presents to take meaningful collective action to ensure a healthy and productive ocean.