

Event Name: Interactive Dialogue: Addressing Marine Pollution

Date and Time: Monday, June 27th, 3-6pm

Link to Event: <https://sdgs.un.org/events/addressing-marine-pollution-45736>

Excellencies, Delegates, Esteemed Colleagues,

- Thank you for being here today.
- I want to thank my fellow panelists, and the Seychelles and New Zealand for co-chairing this session and convening us today to discuss this important topic. I am delighted to be here with you all today, and I wanted to express my gratitude and congratulations to Kenya and Portugal as the hosts of this UN Ocean Conference.
- Their decisive, collaborative, and multi-stakeholder leadership approach, and their dedication to and focus on SDG 14, allows all of us to keep the momentum going to restore and build a healthy ocean for ecosystems and coastal communities.
- As the CEO of Ocean Conservancy, it is an honor and a deep responsibility to support these efforts. We have been at the helm as co-focal point of the Community of Ocean Action for Marine Pollution alongside the leadership of the International Maritime Organization, led by Secretary-General Mr. Kitack Lim since the last UN Ocean Conference hosted by Sweden and Fiji in 2017.
- I want to echo and underscore my fellow panelists' remarks: that as we emerge from the global shadow cast by the COVID-19 pandemic, our work has never been more urgent and important. And the interconnectedness of the 17 SDGs and their relevance has never been clearer – especially the connections to SDG 14. Life Below Water is critical to protect and conserve Life Above Water. We can't have one without the other.
- The past two years underscores the importance of coordinating the actions of governments and state actors as well as philanthropy, civil society, NGOs, networks of scientists and international bodies to solve global challenges, like vaccinations during a global pandemic. Most importantly, this collaboration has saved lives. Also importantly – it has shown us that we CAN rise to the challenge when we are faced with an overwhelming, seemingly insurmountable challenge.
- The pandemic has also shown that science is key to fostering ambition and advancing solutions. We believe the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development will be critical in addressing current gaps in knowledge, to support informed and inclusive decision-making, and accelerate new, science-based Voluntary Commitments.
- There has never been a better time to commit ourselves to work collectively on our largest global challenges and recognize their and our interconnectedness. As the theme of this conference outlines, we must scale up ocean action. We must base that action on evidence, innovation and strong partnerships with local

communities, and there is not a moment to lose.

- SDG 14 touches every aspect of Ocean Conservancy's work. To carry out this mission, we must urgently address the crises of climate change and ocean plastic pollution; they are inherently linked.
- For this, we must 1) reduce the amount of plastic that is being produced - especially single-use plastic items that end up in the ocean. 2) We must better manage those plastics that are necessary in everyday life, and 3) finally, we must clean up the plastic pollution that is already on beaches, in waterways and in our ocean. _
- Ocean Conservancy has built our plastics work around these exact intervention points: our International Coastal Cleanup is one of the world's largest single day volunteer efforts on behalf of the ocean and is a critical instrument in supporting individual and community action on ocean plastics.
- Through this effort over the last 35 years, more than 156 million kilograms of plastics and trash have been removed from beaches, rivers, and lakes worldwide. On the upstream side, we also work tirelessly through our advocacy efforts to pass comprehensive plastics policies in the US that would eliminate single-use plastics most problematic for our ocean, invest in alternative materials and delivery models, and hold producers of single-use plastics accountable for the waste their products create.
- Pending policies such as California's *Plastic Pollution Prevention and Packaging Producer Responsibility Act* and California's *Plastic Pollution Reduction and Recycling Act*. These landmark pieces of legislation call for a 25% reduction in plastic packaging and foodware by weight and item count over the next decade. This provision alone would directly eliminate nearly 23 million tons of single-use plastic packaging and foodware over the next ten years. To put that in context, that amounts to nearly 26 times the weight of San Francisco's famous Golden Gate Bridge.
- In Vietnam, we are working with partners on several trash capture projects along the Red River in Nam Dinh. Through this collaboration, we are tracking plastics captured in the devices, conducting community outreach and public opinion surveys, and preventing plastic pollution from flowing downstream to the ocean.
- Ocean Conservancy is also working to eradicate the deadliest form of marine plastic pollution. Our Global Ghost Gear Initiative is a vast network of 20 governments, 135 civil society, and private sector partners working together to prevent and remove lost, abandoned, and discarded fishing gear. Ocean Conservancy research has shown that ghost gear affects 40% of animals on the IUCN Red List for Endangered Species and impacts 5-30% of harvestable fish stocks in some fisheries.
- Internationally, we have the once-in-a-generation opportunity to reduce the influx of plastics into the environment. We applaud the decision of UNEA to pass the resolution mandating the creation of an intergovernmental negotiation committee tasked with drafting an internationally legally binding instrument to tackle plastic

pollution.

- To have the most comprehensive and effective agreement possible, Member States and the INC should consider the importance and role of the informal sector and waste pickers, who are often voiceless and marginalized communities, as an integral part to prevent the flow of plastic and waste. And it is critical to consider the role of innovative financial mechanisms and their role in the binding instrument, to effectively mobilize the funds needed to address the marine pollution problem. Finally, we urge Member States and the INC to include specific language on ghost gear in the negotiations.
- And yet – despite all this work, despite all these positive signs, we MUST do more. Current commitments by the private sector and world governments to reduce the amount of plastic entering our ocean and waterways are not nearly enough. According to a study from 2020 that looked at global commitments to reduce plastic pollution, we reduce the flow of plastics into the environment by just 7%. While more progress has been made since this study, the gap today between commitments and the SDG 14 target is still unacceptable.
- And as we all know, we can't talk about plastics without talking about climate change. By tackling plastic pollution, and particularly plastic production, we help the climate AND the ocean.
- Plastics in the ocean is a slow motion and persistent oil spill. We all know that plastics are largely made from and powered by fossil fuels and may never truly break down, but rather continue breaking up into micro- and nano-plastics. The physical pollution of plastic in the ocean and the carbon emissions from producing plastics are two different forms of marine pollution; both require our urgent attention. What's crazy to me is that we already use as much oil for plastic as we do for aviation. And that could be 20% of all oil demand by 2050 at current growth trends.
- The plastic you see on the beach and in the ocean is a part of a massive petrochemical industry built upon the fossil fuel industry, the very industry that is driving climate change. And as the oil and gas industry sees its future as fuel shrinking, its looking to plastic and petrochemicals for its future. There is a surge of investment into plastic production capacity into petrochemical facilities – and that investment is impeding the clean energy transition that needs to continue to happen and accelerate.
- So we have a climate problem, and a plastics problem, and yet the reality is that they are both a carbon problem. To address both we need global ambition, action and coordination. Scaling up effective models and further engaging actors at all levels is critical. For example, there is an opportunity with the plastics treaty negotiations to include binding measures for upstream source reduction. And finally, justice, equity, diversity and an inclusive approach should be a priority – ensuring that historically marginalized communities are not continuously disproportionately affected by plastic pollution impacts – as they are now.
- In the shipping sector, as well as in other ocean-based industries, progress is being made on issues such as marine plastic litter, climate change and

decarbonization, both through the regulatory bodies and the industry itself. Ocean Conservancy is thrilled to note this progress and urges even more action to get to zero emissions from the shipping industry by 2050, at the absolute latest with intermediary targets in 2030 and 2040 to stay on track. We also applaud the International Maritime Organization's Marine Environmental Protection Committee's decision to set the process in motion for gear marking to be considered a mandatory measure – a considerable step towards addressing ghost gear more effectively.

- As we know, and especially as we have seen these last two years – the SDGs are intrinsically interlinked - plastics pollution and climate change, you can't solve one without addressing the other. We need dialogue and most importantly, action among ocean-dependent sectors, across multilevel governance borders and boundaries, and between different levels of governments, civil society, philanthropy, and the private sector to ensure a healthy, thriving, and resilient ocean for us all.
- Thank you all for this opportunity and thank you again to New Zealand and the Seychelles, Kenya and Portugal for your work and effort. Ocean Conservancy is grateful for your leadership and looks forward to working with you to protect Life Below Water, to preserve Life Above Water, and supporting a successful and transformative UN Ocean Conference.