

UN OCEAN CONFERENCE

Interactive Dialogue n°4: ‘Minimising and addressing ocean acidification, deoxygenation and ocean warming’

Wednesday 29, June 2022 / 10:00-13:00

[Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen]

My dear friends and colleagues,

One of the privileges of being the last speaker to take the floor is that I can get directly into the thick of the matter! My fellow panellists have already put forth the conclusions of the IPCC Special Report on the ocean and the cryosphere (SROCC) and, more recently, of the 6th Assessment Report.

The time to act is now and we have a tough road ahead of us if we are to successfully tackle the climate crisis. However, we need to remain optimistic and continue working together to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. In that regard, let me reinforce that the very best thing that we can do for the ocean, to limit ocean acidification, warming and loss of oxygen, is to drastically reduce GHG emissions. Parties to the UNFCCC need to urgently scale-up action to keep the 1.5°C target within reach.

Before looking at the road ahead, I wanted to take a minute to acknowledge the tremendous work that has been accomplished in less than a decade by the ocean-climate community. If we go back a few years ago, the ocean was largely absent from the political table, and especially the international negotiations on climate change. Since the first turning point at COP21, in Paris in 2015, which marked the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the Ocean-Climate nexus has been gaining considerable momentum.

And here, I would like to briefly highlight 4 areas:

1- Science: with the publication in 2019 of the IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC) which clearly put forth the interconnections between the ocean, climate and biodiversity and highlighted the role of marine and coastal ecosystems in mitigating and adapting to climate change. And more recently, the launch of the UN Decade of Ocean Science;

2 - National commitments: an increasing number of countries have included ocean-based climate solutions in their national strategies for both mitigation and adaptation; And I will come back to this.

3 - Mobilisation: we’ve seen unprecedented mobilisation from civil society in the last few years, especially through the Global Climate Action agenda of the Marrakech Partnership that brings together non-state actors to accelerate action and increase ambition. At COP26, the ocean community was strongly mobilised to speak as one voice. For the first time, 120 organisations - from NGOs to private companies - signed the “Ocean For Climate” Declaration, committing, among other things, to scaling-up ocean-based solutions, as well as mobilising scientific and financial resources to support effective ocean action; and finally

4 - Policy mainstreaming: indeed, at COP26, Nature, and especially the ocean, took centre stage for the first time. The ocean and its ecosystems were recognised as carbon sinks, contributing to the UNFCCC’s net-zero carbon objectives. The final decision emphasised the importance of preserving, protecting and restoring

marine and coastal ecosystems. Additionally, the Glasgow Pact also introduced an annual Ocean-Climate Dialogue, to be held under the SBSTA. That decision formally anchors the ocean within climate negotiation and gives us a platform to officially discuss the ocean-climate nexus under the UNFCCC, identify knowledge gaps and priorities to put forth.

An important consideration here is that, every step of the way, civil society has played a critical role in securing these strong outcomes. The only way forward is through strong and genuine partnerships.

Now, the next step is to build on these significant achievements, and accelerate our collective efforts to restore the health of the ocean.

If reducing GHG emissions is the utmost priority, scaling-up strong ocean-based solutions, that are climate-smart and biodiversity-positive, is paramount. If we are to succeed in addressing the decline in ocean health, we must learn to live in harmony with Nature and urgently implement measures to speed up the transition towards sustainable societies and territories.

Let's take a moment here and think about what that means.

First — Living in harmony with nature requires rigorous and immediate action to further protect coastal and marine ecosystems (especially carbon sinks such as blue carbon ecosystems), ensure resilient aquatic food production and ensure resilience-building for coastal communities.

Second — Speeding up the transition includes the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices in ocean-based industries to reduce their impact on the ocean and coasts while promoting sustainable blue growth and boosting blue economies.

In order to achieve this vision, we have several tools at our disposal.

First of all, let's focus on the cornerstone of the Paris Agreement, the Nationally Determined Contributions. Since 2015, we have seen Parties further recognising the ability of ocean-based measures to advance climate mitigation and adaptation objectives. Across most recent NDCs, we have identified a wide-range of actions — going from scaling-up offshore renewable energy and reducing emissions from shipping to creating climate-ready fisheries and aquaculture, developing climate-smart Marine Protected Areas, and of course continue to protect blue carbon ecosystems.

A crucial next step in the run-up to COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh is to encourage all coastal countries to revise their NDCs with increased ambition, and in doing so make sure they fully take into account the potential of the ocean in tackling the climate crisis. The ocean is not just a victim of climate change, it is an integral part of the solution for the sustainable world we must build.

Secondly, and in the same vein of Blueing the Paris Agreement, we now have a dedicated space under the UNFCCC to discuss advancements and identify priorities to strengthen the ocean-climate nexus. This anchor is the annual Dialogue on Ocean and Climate Change under the SBSTA. The first in-person dialogue took place a couple of weeks in Bonn - and I think positively surprised us all by the level of attendance, over 50 countries, and the quality of the discussion. Indeed, we not only need to scale-up ocean-based action and place such measures at the heart of national climate policies and strategies. We also need to create the enabling conditions, by optimising institutional connections and leveraging the necessary funding, both public and

private to enable concrete action. The next step for the dialogue to be an efficient tool, is to define a roadmap of the work ahead and continuously take stock of the progress made and remaining gaps to fill.

Finally, since we are at the UN Ocean Conference, we need to make sure that, in Lisbon, we build on the momentum to start walking the talk.

To achieve this, we will need a strong and mobilised ocean community - which quite truthfully, I have no doubt about. Over the last 5 years, I have had the privilege of working with many ocean states and organisations - most of whom are here in the room today - and I am continuously impressed and humbled by the level of passion, commitment and creativity.

So let's roll up our sleeves and do this together!