

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear friends of the Ocean

I want to thank the two Co-chairs for their excellent introductions. As a moderator, let me now give you a few remarks to frame the discussion.

- This discussion about restoring and conserving marine and coastal ecosystems – is really the most important one we can have, because it gives us the right entry point into how we can achieve the totality of SDG 14, and that's why we are here. We cannot solve the ocean crisis by a piecemeal approach. We will not solve it by improvements here and there. We will need to take a step back and look at the whole ecosystem, and will have to make sure that what we are trying to do with one hand isn't destroyed by what we are doing with the other.
- Five years ago Sweden and Fiji were hosting the first UN Ocean conference and I was then the deputy prime minister of Sweden. We took this initiative because we wanted to speed up the implementation of SDG14. Since then we have seen five years of progress, but let's be honest; we have not achieved what we should have:
- Our ocean is still in this very moment - filling up with plastic pollution, fish stocks are not rebuilding, shipping, mining, off shore energy are increasingly impacting the marine and coastal environment.
- And on top of that we have global warming; acidification; marine heatwaves. The Baltic Sea, where I come from has warmed two degrees Celsius in the last thirty years only. A marine biologist told me that adding global warming to the other illnesses – massive eutrofication, chemical pollution and overfishing - is like when an already weak patient attracts covid. In other words, the cumulative effects of all the illnesses are really serious.
- So - we need to strengthen the resilience – or the immune system if you will – of our ocean, by restoring marine and coastal ecosystems, allowing the ocean to heal and to continue functioning even if it still has climate fever. So the question here and now to you all is: What policies could we put in place to give enough resilience to marine and coastal ecosystems - particularly in the light of global warming? How can we really apply the precautionary approach – and how do we define a healthy ecosystem?

- The excellent concept paper that the secretariat has prepared points to this last question that I think is particularly relevant: that we still lack a common understanding of what we mean by “marine ecosystem health”. If we don’t know what we are striving for - marine spatial planning or environmental impact assessments will not be the instruments that will give us a healthy ocean. And all the “ocean action” and “ocean projects” will be like just fireworks here and there, and not the firm pillars for the systemic change, and systematic approach that we really need.
- Two more things stand out that I want to highlight.
- 1) That the cross-sectoral coordination from source to sea that is absolutely necessary if we want real eco-system approach, and the alignment between national, regional and global levels - comes down to political will. Ocean health depends on policy coherence across a number of policy areas. With a regulatory framework, that aims at restoring ocean health as we define it - we can do it, but if we don’t have that clear framework of ocean policy coherence, things will continue going in the wrong direction. Without political will we will not make it.
- 2) The second point is about humankind’s relationship with nature, highlighted in the concept paper. I think all of us in this room would say that we love the ocean. Why do we love it? Because it gives us food or an income? I don’t think that is the real answer. I think we love it because we feel a connection to it, that we are all part of nature. And that is also a real reason for action. That when we save the ocean, we actually save ourselves.
- So this discussion can not only be about economy, or efficiency – it is about responsibility. We are the last generation that can do this, we all know that, and you in this room are the ones that can do it, with political will, so let me repeat that’s this conversation that we are going to have this afternoon is the most important one we can have.

Now, thank you for listening. I am now going to present our panelists, and lead discussants: