



HIGH LEVEL PANEL *for*
**A SUSTAINABLE
OCEAN ECONOMY**

Ocean Panel Report Launch, ‘How can a healthy ocean improve human health and enhance wellbeing on a rapidly changing planet?’, UN Ocean Decade Conference, Centre de Convencions Internacional de Barcelona, 6.15 pm 11 April 2024, remarks by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG’s Special Envoy for the Ocean

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity of speaking to you all this evening. This will be my last speaking engagement at the Ocean Decade Conference. So, I want to say here and now how much I admire the Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission for the extraordinary success of their efforts. That such a small group of people could inspire the world to the great levels they have at this conference is truly remarkable and they should never underestimate their achievement here in Barcelona.

I have to depart tomorrow morning for Greece, where I’m hosting an Ocean Retreat over the weekend aimed at bringing together the many strands of ocean action. That will be followed in the first half of next week by the Our Ocean Conference in Athens, and then in the latter part of the week, by the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting in Cyprus.

No doubt you’ve noticed the rising tide of ocean action meetings around the world this year, all rolling on in the direction of the Third UN Ocean Conference happening in Nice in June next year. The first half of next year promises to be even more intense.

The old adage says you cannot sell in silence, and all these international gatherings provide precious opportunities to elevate and socialise ideas contained in globally significant reports like the Ocean Panel’s Blue Paper we’re here to discuss this evening. This rising tide of ocean action is no accident of fashion or phase. For as sure as sea levels are rising, there’s a growing certitude around the blue planet that we must correct our relationship with the ocean, to embrace one imbued with respect, mutual protection and immutable principles of sustainability. Slowly but surely, we’re coming to understand the power of a truly sustainable blue economy to provide the security we seek for coming generations of humanity and Nature.

You know the mantra, no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean’s health is currently measurably in decline. And you know the corollary, that it is the great existential task of our times is to stop the decline, to reverse it through an enlightened Nature-positive relationship with the ocean.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



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As a supporting member of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, I'm very proud of all that the Panel has achieved. Surveying the years since we launched SDG14 back in 2015, the Ocean Panel's work stands out like a lighthouse of unyielding intent for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean's resources. It is particularly notable, befitting the UN Decade of Ocean Science and the conference we are currently attending, that the Ocean Panel has always kept its feet firmly in the best of ocean science.

From ocean finance to coastal tourism, from ocean-based renewable energy to plastic pollution, from crime in the fisheries sector to deep sea mining, from ocean equity to marine genetic resources, and so much more, the Panel's reports and blue papers have covered the field; providing us with clarity, with practical solutions and considered options for action.

The Panel's conclusion that comprehensive sustainable ocean plans must be put in place for SDG14 to succeed and for the Sustainable Blue Economy to flourish, has had positive reverberations around the globe, with Panel Leaders all committing their own countries to legislation of Sustainable Ocean Plans for their Exclusive Economic Zones.

Meanwhile, the Ocean Panel has been a much-quoted force in international efforts to combat climate change. The Panel's 2019 report, 'The Ocean as a Solution to Climate Change: Five Opportunities for Action' was seminal on the mitigation potential of ocean-based initiatives to close the emissions gap. In 2023, the Panel doubled down by publishing the updated analysis showing that full implementation of ocean-based climate solutions now ready for action could reduce the emissions gap by up to 35 percent on a 1.5°C pathway in 2050.

When hundreds of hard-working people have put their hearts and minds into the Panel's good works, it would be churlish of me to mention names of some exceptional individuals who've driven the Panel's achievements. But they know who they are, so I say now to them on behalf of the great whale of ocean awareness, thank you for determination to be of service to our great cause.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This new Blue Paper continues the Panel's support for the UN Decade of Ocean Science, sharing with it a common foundation of promoting and using the best available science and knowledge to help us achieve the ocean we want – a healthy ocean that is both protected and productive. The paper's title is provocative: "How can a healthy ocean improve human health and enhance well-being on a rapidly changing planet?" and one need take just a quick look at the paper's executive summary to see that it demonstrates the ongoing thought leadership of the Ocean Panel.



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This is the first of the Ocean Panel's reports to explicitly focus on human health, delving into positive relationships between ocean and human health, with the provision of sets of actions to strengthen these relationships. I'd like to thank and congratulate the authors of the paper, co-led by Professors Lora Fleming and Philip Landrigan. There were in total twenty-five individuals in the expert author team, hailing from North and South America, Europe, Asia and Oceania, including amongst their ranks practicing physicians, academics, and employees of NGOs. Echoing words I said earlier in these remarks, thank you to all the authors for their solid contribution to our universal task of reversing the decline in the ocean's health.

I'm going to leave it to Jacqueline Uku, and her distinguished panel to dive into the implications of this blue paper, so I'll confine myself to highlighting for you three actions of overarching importance that arise from it. Firstly, that we must collaboratively protect, restore and sustainably manage ocean biodiversity, including by ratifying and implementing key international agreements. Secondly, that we must combat climate change and eliminate pollution, including by upholding commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement and the outcomes of UNFCCC COP28, and concluding a game-changing, nature-positive Plastics Treaty. And thirdly, that we must improve human health and equity measurement by incorporating evidence and linked indicators of both ocean health and human health into meaningful policies. Accomplish these three overarching imperatives over the seven years remaining in the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and we will hit the high targets we've set ourselves.

I find it quite understandable that the majority of terrestrial mammals seem to have long had their backs to the sea. But wide dissemination of this report's findings will make them realise it is in their vital self-interest that they and their communities turn around to respectfully engage with the ocean. The report elucidates the immense value of a healthy ocean for human health, including new medicines to fight disease, inspiration for new technologies to support societal development, new ocean-based energy sources, blue food resources that hold promise for ending hunger and food insecurity, and access to nature to support recreation and promote mental health. We will forge forward in the production of new medicines and biotechnology from the ocean by supporting research and development, by creating digital DNA libraries and developing biotechnological processes and products that are socially relevant, economically sustainable, and environmentally friendly. And by building global partnerships and promoting protection of human rights, including the right to health and a healthy environment, we will find our way to equity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, we can all act, at individual and communal levels to strive for a healthy ocean supporting a healthy human population. We should be thinking about exercising our rights of access to the health and wellbeing benefits the ocean provides. We should be applying our talents and resources to increasing ocean literacy, both within ourselves and our



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interacting communities to foster pro-environmental behaviour. A practical example would be that in shops and restaurants we always use our purchasing power to support sustainable fisheries and sustainable aquaculture.

We should also be pushing for governmental and intergovernmental action to promote the health of the ocean, even if just for the sake of protecting the future health of humanity. Such efforts must include the equitable delivery of 30 by 30, and the full implementation of both WTO's pending Fisheries Subsidies Agreement and the BBNJ High Seas Treaty. And when it comes to the dual health of ocean and humanity, it is inescapably on our watch that we must deal with plastic and chemical pollution. When it comes to chemical pollution, the proposed Back to Blue roadmap demands our attention; while on the subject of plastic pollution, we are on the cusp of magnificent achievement or otherwise in our Plastics Treaty negotiations.

These are not ideas for the future; they are achievable actions in the here and now, which properly enacted can ensure a positive, healthy future for our children and future generations to come. I commend this report to you, along with the actions which we all now know are our moral duty to follow.
