**Draft Outline**

**Secretary-General's background note for the preparatory meeting of the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14**

## I. Introduction

- Background of the Conference.
- Mandate for the background note as per General Assembly resolutions 78/128 and 77/242.
- Structure of the background note, including aim of the note, taking into consideration the overarching theme of the Conference "Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean".

## II. Status and Trends

*1. Status and trends including key milestones.*

Contributions are sought on the status of progress and trends in the implementation of SDG 14, since the United Nations Ocean Conference held in Lisbon in 2022. Entities are requested also to provide updates on the key milestones achieved of relevance to SDG14 in their respective areas since 2022.

Due to climate change, pollution and overexploitation of natural resources, the challenges faced by marine and coastal ecosystems are increasing.

### *Climate change impacts*

At the start of July 2023, the world experienced its hottest week on record, which followed the warmest June since official records began, as well as unprecedented warm sea surface temperatures and marine heatwaves.[1]

As climate change heats the oceans, ocean-related hazards such as storms, sea level rise and salt intrusion have the potential to become more intense. In this sense, one crucial component to mitigate the risks of ocean-related hazards is the development and strengthening of multi-hazard and impact-based early warning systems for anticipatory and early action.

In 2022, the UN Secretary-General launched the Early Warnings for All initiative (UNDRR, 2023c), which seeks to cover every person on the globe with an early warning system by 2027 and is being implemented by several UN entities, international organizations and development partners under the lead of UNDRR and WMO.

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[1] WMO, "Preliminary data shows hottest week on record. Unprecedented sea surface temperatures and Antarctic sea ice loss", 10 July 2023. Available at https://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/preliminary-data-shows-hottest-week-record-unprecedented-sea-surface-temperatures-and.

### *El Niño*

In July 2023, the World Meteorological Organization announced the onset of El Niño conditions in the tropical Pacific, setting the stage for a surge in global temperatures and disruptive weather and climate patterns around the globe. Following the development of a strong and mature El Niño episode in late 2023, ocean temperatures peaked and began declining again by January 2024. The tropical Pacific is expected to return to neutral conditions during second quarter of 2024.

The General Assembly expressed its deep concern over the current El Niño phenomenon in resolution 78/152, and requested the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council to co-organize a one-day dedicated thematic event. The meeting, scheduled for 30 April 2024, will discuss action-oriented recommendations to address the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the current El Niño phenomenon on affected countries, in order to provide substantive input to the report of the Secretary-General to be submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session. The one-day dedicated thematic event will consider the improved opportunities that recent advancements in climate predictions bring and the range of actions required to turn enhanced scientific predictability into global, regional, national and local level plans and actions that minimize and address the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the 2023-2024 El Niño phenomenon conditions on affected countries.

### *Plastic pollution*

Plastic pollution has been particularly affecting marine and coastal ecosystem resilience. Both microplastics and plastic waste have been recognized as hazards of relevance to risk reduction and resilience building[2], and must be addressed to strengthen the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems. They diminish ecosystem resilience, including the capacity of ocean and coastal ecosystems, such as coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, to adapt to a changing climate.

They also pose threats to water and food security and the livelihoods of millions of people and communities, particularly by impacting fishing and tourism. This heightens vulnerability and puts people at increased risk of disasters, including from flooding, storm surges and other meteorological hazards. In addition, the significant carbon footprint of plastics (as of 2019 plastics have an estimated emission of 3.4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions throughout their lifecycle[3]), exacerbating disaster risks contributing to the intensification of extreme weather events, including those related to the oceans.

### *Nature-based solutions*

Promoting marine and coastal nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches for disaster risk reduction and promoting risk-informed integrated coastal zone management is

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[2] Hazard Information Profiles Online Reference (2023). United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. www.preventionweb.net/drr-glossary/hips

[3] www.oecd.org/environment/plastics/increasedplastic-leakage-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions.htm

key to achieving SDG14. The ministerial declaration adopted at UNEA-6 calls for action on incorporating environmental considerations, including related to biodiversity and water, into disaster risk management policies and actions. However, the reverse is also needed, for risk-informed, forward-looking approaches to be included in environmental agreements, agendas and processes, including in the context of coastal and oceanic ecosystems.

Nature-based solutions are one solution that connects biodiversity, climate change and disaster risk reduction challenges and provides benefits to address all three, as well as for human wellbeing. This is particularly relevant for SIDS and in coastal areas that are increasingly vulnerable to environmental and hydro-meteorological hazards and subsequent disasters threatening livelihoods.

## III. Leveraging interlinkages between SDG 14 and other SDGs towards ocean action: Challenges and opportunities:

Contributions are sought on the interlinkages between the 10 targets of SDG 14 and other SDGs in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to address:

- Challenges to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources (e.g., areas where gaps and challenges exist, where more action is needed);
- Opportunities for conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources, in particular considering interlinkages with other relevant SDGs.

### *Data gaps in ocean observation systems*

Ocean observation is a cornerstone for early warnings and coastal resilience[4]. Extreme events, such as flooding and storms, are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change and its impacts on the ocean, such as increasing sea surface temperatures. The key to mitigating these threats lies in our ability to produce accurate and timely forecasts and warnings - a capacity that critically depends on the continuous flow of ocean data. Advancing ocean science and relevant technology under SDG14 can help address these gaps.

### *Marine ecosystem resilience*

Action to reduce disaster risk is a vehicle for the coordinated and integrated action necessary to achieve SDG 14, and healthy marine ecosystems and biodiversity are essential to reduce disaster risk. The promotion of risk-informed green, blue and grey infrastructure, including nature-based solutions for DRR such as mangrove reforestation to improve coastal buffers is critical to achieve SDG Targets 14.2 and 14.5 by 2020, laying the foundation to achieve Target 14.7 by 2030.

As more than 3 billion people rely on the marine environment for 20% of their dietary protein and up to 120 million people for their livelihood, the restoration of healthy marine ecosystems

[4] https://www.ioc.unesco.org/en/articles/ocean-observing-cornerstone-early-warnings-and-coastal-resilience

is also critical for the reduction of people's vulnerability to hazards. The reduction of marine pollution, Target 14.1, in particular from plastic waste and microplastics (both considered hazards in the Hazard Information Profiles), and promotion of sustainable fishing practices, Target 14.4, are critical to reduce risk to human health and wellbeing and to build the resilience of coastal communities.

Finally, it is also important to consider the linkages between ecosystems from source to sea. For example, in terms of pollution, most of the plastic pollution littering oceans is generated on land. Similarly, the reduction of other risks on land can mitigate ocean-related hazards, particularly in regard to coastal resilience. In this regard, policy integration specifically through investing in integrated approaches to disaster risk reduction and resilience, and ocean conservation, is key.

***Ocean trade***

As laid out in the 2023 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, with over 80 per cent of the volume of global trade in goods carried by sea, seaports are key nodes in the network of global supply chains as well as the ocean economy, and vital to trade and development. At the same time, these complex infrastructure assets, often integrated within large urban agglomerations, are at the frontline of climate change. Related impacts can result in significant damage, as well as costly disruption and delay across supply chains, with potentially far-reaching consequences for international trade and the sustainable development prospects of the most vulnerable nations, including SIDS, that depend on their seaports as lifelines for trade, energy, food, tourism and in the context of DRR.

Global port-specific risk from natural hazards has been estimated at US$ 7.5 billion per year, with 32 per cent of the risk attributed to tropical cyclone impacts, and an additional US$ 63.1 billion of trade estimated to be at risk. Under increased global warming, seaports will be exposed to rising mean and, particularly, extreme sea levels (ESLs) that could overwhelm their current defences and lead to extensive flooding and operational disruptions.

With maritime trade expected to triple by 2050 and climate-driven hazards expected to increase, significant acceleration of investment in climate change adaptation and resilience-building for ports is needed to avert, minimize and address damages or losses and safeguard supply chains. Major scaling-up of affordable investment in infrastructure adaptation will be critical for developing countries, particularly vulnerable SIDS that are sea-locked and therefore depend particularly on their ports and airports.

## IV. Mobilizing all actors to accelerating ocean action:

Contributions are sought on ways to promote collaboration, cooperation and partnerships to accelerate implementation of SDG 14. The following issues will be highlighted:

*1. Investing in SDG 14*

This section will focus on ways and means to support the implementation of SDG14. The following cross-cutting issues relevant to support the implementation of SDG 14 will be explored among others:

- Mobilizing finance for SDG 14.
- Marine science and technology (including technology development and transfer) and the use of traditional knowledge for ocean health.
- Capacity-building.

The instrumental and cross-cutting role of science, technology and innovation in strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of disaster risk reduction, including for tsunami hazards, was reiterated by UN Member States in the Political Declaration of the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/RES/77/289). Member States also acknowledged that insufficient access to technology continues to hinder progress.

- **Need for research and data:** There is a significant need for more sophisticated and comprehensive methodologies to understand and manage ocean risks in a wide range of locations. For example, sparse datasets and a lack of knowledge lead to a great deal of uncertainly in tsunami models, and an inability to characterise the tsunami risk on specific coastlines. The change in the risk landscape in light of climate change and sea level rise must also be studied further.
- **Early warning systems:** Resilient mechanisms which can issue clear early warning to coastal residents in the case of ocean hazards are essential. It will be key to invest in emerging technologies and support governments, particularly the most vulnerable ones, such as Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, in enhancing their proficiency in innovations that allow for better early warning systems. Initiatives such as the **UN Secretary-General's Early Warnings for All initiative**, co-led by UNDRR and WMO and which seeks to cover every person on the globe with an early warning system by 2027, can spur action to increase resilience to ocean-related hazards and disaster risk at large, including for coastal communities.

*2. Strengthening Partnerships (including Voluntary Commitments)*

This section will focus on key initiatives undertaken in partnership at the global, regional and national levels with a diverse set of stakeholders. Contributions may also highlight voluntary commitments made and their impact as relevant.

Strengthening national, regional and inter-regional collaboration is key to develop and implement the technology and innovation solutions described above. The United Nations system can play an important role in supporting these solutions, leaning on its convening role and technical expertise on this topic. Collaborations such as the UN Secretary-General's Early Warnings for All initiative, which is being implemented by several UN entities, international organizations and development partners, can spur action and enable partnerships amongst different stakeholders.

The recent Arab Africa Conference on Science and Technology for Disaster Risk Reduction found that the lack of collaboration and coordination amongst the science and technology community and the private sector remains a barrier to integrating scientific research and private sector innovation into disaster risk reduction policy-making processes (Tunis Call for Action, 2023). The creation of global hubs for innovation, which pool the resources and know-how of ocean and coastal hazard-prone communities, is a concrete action that could help accelerate the development, testing and implementation of solutions.

*3. Mobilizing All actors*

This section will consider the relevant stakeholders that need to be mobilized to accelerate ocean action, with a focus on the role of women, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities to leave no one behind.

All actors must be mobilized to reduce disaster risks connected to ocean-related hazards. Inclusive partnerships serve as the cornerstone of effective implementation for global frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, including governments, local communities, NGOs, academia, and private sector entities, these partnerships foster collaboration, share knowledge, and leverage resources to address the multifaceted challenges of disaster risk reduction. Emphasizing inclusion ensures that marginalized voices are heard, local knowledge is valued, and solutions are tailored to the needs of different communities, thereby enhancing the resilience of societies worldwide. UNDRR has been committed to this objective, and recent key initiatives are highlighted below:

- **Sendai Gender Action Plan:** UNDRR, jointly with UN Women and UNFPA, has co-led a multi-stakeholder consultation process during 2023 to develop the Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (Sendai GAP), which will be launched on 18 March on the margins of CSW68. The overall goal of the Sendai GAP is to accelerate achievement of the Sendai Framework by substantially increasing resource allocations, activities and impacts of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and substantially decreasing gender-related disaster risk by 2030.
- **Persons with Disabilities:** To understand the progress made in disability inclusion in DRR, UNDRR conducted the 2023 Global Survey on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters as a follow-up to the 2013 Global Survey. The results show limited progress in disability inclusion over the past 10 years, with no significant differences across the regions. Within UNDRR's new Strategic Framework for 2022-2025, disability inclusive disaster risk reduction activities are not only mainstreamed throughout strategic objectives but also included for the first time as dedicated results and deliverables in support of disability inclusive disaster risk reduction. This is an important step recognizing the importance to move from selected engagement to

systematic implementation. The results of the 2023 Survey on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters will inform UNDRR's committed efforts to continue to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of disaster risk reduction, at all levels.

- **Early Warnings for All:** Special emphasis is being given to the last mile of communication, ensuring delivery of warning messages to at-risk population, such as older persons, children, women and persons with disabilities, in both urban and rural regions. In 2023, UNDRR published practical guidance on how to ensure accessible early warning systems.

## V. Possible themes for the Ocean Action Panels

Recommendations will be made for the themes of the ten Ocean Action panels in this section, based on the input received.

- Navigating the Blue Horizon: Understanding of and action on systemic risks to build resilience and achieve SDG 14;
- Nature-based solutions to reduce ocean and coastal hazards connected to the triple planetary crisis.