



## UNEP’s contributions to:

**The Secretary General’s Background Note for the preparatory meeting of the 2025 UN Ocean Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 to be held in July 2024 at UN Headquarters.**

***“Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”***

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## I Introduction

Healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems rich in biodiversity provide invaluable services and benefits for human well-being and prosperity. Today, however, our ocean and coasts face multiple threats from the triple-planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution due

to escalating human activities and impacts. Addressing the urgent need for action to preserve and sustainably manage our ocean and coasts is paramount to safeguarding our life-support system and securing the well-being of present and future generations. The invaluable services provided by healthy and well-functioning oceans span social, economic, and environmental domains, profoundly impacting millions of lives worldwide. Healthy and resilient oceans and coastal ecosystems are essential regulators of climate, offering vital nature-based adaptation and mitigation pathways in the face of climate change. Ocean health plays a critical role in poverty reduction, offering essential social and economic benefits to coastal communities. They serve as vital sources of livelihoods, providing jobs and contributing to food and energy security on a global scale. Moreover, the prosperity of maritime industries and the maintenance of maritime security and peace are intricately linked to the health and resilience of our ocean.

Ocean and coastal infrastructure development, unsustainable fisheries and resource extraction are rapidly degrading biodiversity and whole ecosystems. Marine pollution, stemming from sources such as marine litter, micro-plastics, and untreated wastewater, continues to degrade ocean health. Rapid climate change causes ocean acidification, warming, and shifting currents and disrupts ecological processes, posing significant challenges to marine food webs.

Enabling a shift towards sustainable, resilient and equitable blue economies represents a key avenue to halt and reverse the triple-planetary crisis locally, nationally and globally. Well-managed oceans have the potential to underpin robust and sustainable economic development for the benefit of both current and future generations.

The international community recognizes the ecosystem approach as fundamental to the sustainable management and use of marine and coastal environments and resources. This approach emphasizes *inter alia* the importance of science-based assessment, management and governance of human uses and impacts on ecosystems, and the sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services for economic, social, and environmental benefits. Mainstreaming and implementing the principles of the ecosystem approach across ocean-related policy areas is key to fostering sustainable blue economies.

The UN is the only mechanism with a global mandate that can catalyze coordinated actions to bolster ocean sustainability and security for future generations. In this regard, UNEP plays a central role in fostering innovative partnerships, convening key actors, supporting governance and implementing environmental policies through regional coordination, supporting nations worldwide in their endeavors to conserve, restore, and sustainably manage marine and coastal ecosystems. Through its collaborative efforts, UNEP integrates various initiatives – as one example, the convergence of the Global Partnership on Marine Nutrient Management (GPMN) and the International Nitrogen Management System (INMS). Moreover, UNEP's unique proficiency extends to addressing the challenge of plastic pollution and the Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE). This convergence, addressing multiple challenges encompasses *inter alia* scientific research, robust assessment mechanisms, comprehensive policy frameworks, data inventories, and the cultivation of national, local, and sectoral commitments. This holistic approach delineates a narrative akin to a value chain, wherein each component contributes synergistically to the overarching goal of ocean preservation.

By leveraging its expertise, UNEP orchestrates a multi-faceted approach, including the deployment of financial instruments and the cultivation of innovation to address the triple planetary crisis in our ocean. Crucially, UNEP harnesses the collaborative potential of key partners such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the European Union (EU) and the International Climate Initiative (IKI). By building on these partnerships, in a whole-of-society approach and by aligning the elements of UNEP's Plan of Work (PoW) and Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) along the temporal, spatial and human dimensions on local to global scale, a coherent vision for a sustainable future ocean becomes tangible.

UNEP serves as co-custodian agency for 26 SDG indicators out of which three are directly related to SDG 14 and these are: 14.1.1, 14.2.1 and 14.5.1. Furthermore, UNEP's legal and normative prowess, complemented by the Regional Seas and Action Plans along with their associated protocols, constitutes a formidable framework for action<sup>1</sup>.

These mechanisms, alongside other pivotal Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), form the cornerstone of UNEP's comprehensive approach to supporting ocean governance. Together, they provide the requisite legal and regulatory scaffolding to underpin sustainable ocean management practices on a global scale.

## II Status and Trends

### SDG 14.1 REDUCE MARINE POLLUTION

***By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.***

For indicator 14.1.1a *Index of coastal eutrophication*, UNEP is monitoring the amounts of nutrients in coastal waters in partnership with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC-UNESCO) and Utrecht University in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The amounts of nutrient (nitrogen, phosphorus and silica) for Large Marine Ecosystem was calculated for the period 1900–2015, and consequently reported for coastal eutrophication potential relevant to 14.1.1a from 2000 to 2015. UNEP continues to work IOC-UNESCO and Washington State University to calculate the non-riverine components of coastal nutrient input and the comparison between the indicator measurements for coastal eutrophication potential and the occurrence of harmful algal blooms in susceptible coastal systems. The results are expected to be published at a date to be determined in 2025 [at the following link](#).

For 14.1.1b Plastic debris density, UNEP is monitoring beach litter in collaboration with Ocean Conservancy and Citizen Science. UNEP is also monitoring plastic patches in High Seas beyond National Jurisdiction in partnership with Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg.

The main objective and ambition for the monitoring of the above is to be able to establish a baseline for monitoring and to achieve the SDG target 14.1 by 2025, prevent and significantly

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP supports 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, of which 7 are administered by UNEP, to enable effective regional implementation on sustainable ocean solutions and governance.

reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

In 2023, UNEP carried out a data collection exercise for both SDG indicators 14.1.1 and 14.2.1 from countries through our Regional Seas and directly for countries that are not members of any Regional Seas. The data for both indicators will be published in the SDG Global Database by 31 March 2024 [at the following link](#).

### **Key milestones achieved: Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter**

- **The UN Environment Assembly [resolution 5/14](#) adopted in February 2022** requested the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC), to begin its work during the second half of 2022, with the ambition of completing its work by the end of 2024. The INC is tasked with developing an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, which could include both binding and voluntary approaches, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic. An ad hoc Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to prepare for the work of the INC was held from 30 May to 1 June 2022 in Dakar, Senegal in a hybrid format. A [Multi-stakeholder Forum](#) took place on 26 November 2022 where stakeholders were able to exchange information and activities related to plastic pollution. The [first session](#) of the INC (INC-1) took place in Punta del Este, Uruguay from 28 November to 2 December 2022, followed by a [second session](#) (INC-2) in Paris, France from 29 May to 2 June 2023. The negotiation process reached its halfway point at the [third session](#) (INC-3) in November 2023, in Nairobi, Kenya. The latest [revised draft text of the instrument](#) has been compiled based on the outcomes of INC-3 and will be the starting point and basis for textual negotiations at INC-4. INC-3 established the momentum needed for the fourth session (INC-4) taking place from 23-29 April 2024 in Ottawa, Canada. The ambitious timeline to develop a treaty by the end of 2024 and the strong engagement in the process attest to the determination to move forward rapidly and reach an agreement at the fifth session (INC-5) in Busan in November 2024.
- There are a significant number of actors, initiatives and projects working on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, and coordination amongst them to maximize resources continues to be of utmost importance. [The Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter \(GPML\)](#)<sup>2</sup> continues to facilitate multi-stakeholder cooperation, including through its Communities of Practice, to enhance the scientific foundation for action at national, regional and/or sectoral levels, while scaling up its work through its Action Tracks<sup>2</sup> to streamline efforts and increase positive impact. It is a voluntary multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together governments, civil society,

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<sup>2</sup> The GPML officially changed its name to the Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML), formally acknowledging the broad focus of the partnership, which includes prevention and reduction approaches across the lifecycle of plastics, as had already been reflected in the GPML's 2021 revision to its Framework Document.

academia, and the private sector under the common goal of eliminating plastic pollution and marine litter. Resolution UNEA 5/14 requested the Executive Director to continue to support and advance the work of the GPML, while strengthening scientific, technical and technological knowledge with regard to plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, on methodologies for monitoring, and sharing available scientific and other relevant data and information which is underway through various areas of work.

- [\*\*\*The GPML Digital Platform\*\*\*](#), seeks to facilitate knowledge exchange, foster coordination, and propel collective action by all the relevant stakeholders working to eliminate plastic pollution and marine litter at all geographic levels, from local to global. It now provides access to 2600+ global, transnational, regional, national and subnational resources including 71 roadmaps/strategies/plans; 702 policies; 892 technical resources; 115 financing resources; 641 initiatives; 79 technologies; 164 events; 207 capacity development material; and 400+ data layers. Efforts continue in consolidating data and information on plastic pollution and marine litter through the GPML Digital Platform. This integration was prominently highlighted at UNEA-6 by the UNEP World Environment Situation Room (WESR), signaling the aspiration to create a centralized data hub encompassing comprehensive information on plastic pollution and marine litter. The current Phase 6 is in development of the Digital Platform which aims to upscale and replicate the Platform to include other pollution source categories.
- [\*\*\*The 7<sup>th</sup> International Marine Debris Conference \(7IMDC\)\*\*\*](#) took place in September 2022 in Busan, Korea, organized by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea and UNEP, with organizational support of the Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation, and with technical support of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the GPML. Over 1,000 participants attended from 93 countries, presenting over 500 technical sessions and over 200 posters from over 3,000 co-authors. The conference promoted coordination, sharing of information and inspiration for action.
- UNEP is currently implementing the project ***“Capacity development to catalyze actions and commitments at the national and global level to reduce plastic pollution including in the marine environment”***, which aims to support countries to address plastic pollution through the development of national source inventories along the plastics lifecycle as a basis for the formulation and implementation of roadmaps/strategies/action plans to reduce plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. Participating countries (17 formally engaged thus far) span the regions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. This project is linked to the work of the Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML), including the [\*\*\*GPML Digital Platform\*\*\*](#), which directly supports knowledge sharing activities. UNEP is also currently implementing the ***“CounterMEASURE II extension”*** project. The project aims to promote science-based and evidence-driven action to reduce and prevent the influx of plastic into Asian rivers through the formulation of

bankable project proposals in 5 countries in Asia and strengthening regional, national and local capacities for an enhanced systematic approach for plastic pollution management. These two projects follow-on to prior support for the development of source inventories and action strategies/roadmaps/plans to address plastic pollution and marine litter, including for 5 countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa (at the national level) and the Northeast Pacific (at the regional level), all of which were finalized between 2022 and 2023.

- **A Workflow for the development of source inventories to inform strategies/roadmaps/plans** has been created on the GPML Digital Platform, in consultation with the GPML Community of Practice to harmonize approaches for informing action on plastic pollution and marine litter. It aims to provide resources and guidance for developing national source inventories of plastics, using a lifecycle approach. Without being prescriptive, this digital workflow aims to offer a wide range of information, case studies and other useful resources to countries undertaking this process, regardless of the specific stage in which they currently are. The Community of Practice on harmonization of plastic flow quantification methodologies and models also provided feedback to the workflow, as well as to the statistical guidelines to measure plastic flow across the plastic lifecycle which are under development through a collaboration between UNEP and UNITAR.
- Recognizing that rivers are a major source of plastic pollution in oceans, the **GPML risk and warning system for macroplastic litter in rivers** has been developed by UNEP-DHI in collaboration with the UNEP Freshwater Ecosystems Unit and the GPML for all major river systems in the world. Simulations are produced for over 870,000 points. The GPML early warning system can help map where the problem is and how it is changing in the upcoming 9 months. Using the forecasts, one can identify upcoming freshwater hotspots and accumulation points. This information can support local authorities and NGOs in planning and prioritizing interventions and monitoring activities.
- In August 2022, UNEP published the Foresight Brief **“Plastics in agriculture – an environmental challenge”**, highlighting this emerging topic within the broader plastic pollution issue. UNEP has been collaborating closely with FAO since 2021 in raising awareness of this topic through several publications and joint events in relevant conferences, including 7IMDC.
- In October 2023, UNEP and the Open University of the Netherlands finalized the **masterclass on Unnecessary, Avoidable and Problematic (UAP) Plastic Products and Polymers**, developed within the framework of the GPML. The masterclass functions as a standalone course, accessible to any interested participant online at no cost.

- The One Planet Network and its programmes have released a compendium of solutions to support governments and businesses in implementing ambitious commitments on the circular economy of plastics. [The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative \(GTPI\)](#) has been working to engage tourism stakeholders in adopting reusable solutions and eliminating single-use plastics from their operations. Several initiatives, including bilateral training sessions and the Goa Roadmap for Tourism, have been implemented to support this effort.
- [The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia \(COBSEA\)](#) supports participating countries in addressing marine litter and plastic pollution through the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI). The RAP MALI consolidates, coordinates, and facilitates cooperation, and guides implementation of necessary environmental policies, strategies and measures for sustainable, integrated management of marine litter in the East Asian Seas region across four main actions: Action 1: Preventing and reducing marine litter from land-based sources; Action 2: Preventing and reducing marine litter from sea-based sources; Action 3: Monitoring and assessment of marine litter; Action 4: Activities supporting the implementation of the COBSEA RAP MALI. The COBSEA Secretariat coordinates closely with other Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, the GPML and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) to support effective action in the East Asian Seas region to achieve SDG target 14.1.
- To facilitate an ecosystem approach and monitoring of ecological objectives, the [Regional Seas indicators monitoring framework](#) was developed. The framework encompasses 22 core indicators that have been mapped against regional frameworks and the Sustainable Development Goal. Three major indicators include the indicator for coastal eutrophication, quantification of beach litter and marine protected area coverage.
- Under the [Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast \(IMAP\)](#), monitoring is ensured through 27 IMAP indicators. In 2023, UNEP/MAP published the [Mediterranean Quality Status Reports](#), encompassing three themes: pollution and marine litter, biodiversity and fisheries, and coast and hydrography. In relation to eutrophication, the current report shows that three out of four Mediterranean sub-regions (Adriatic Sea, Central and Western Mediterranean Sea) maintain a good environmental status.
- Similar OSPAR Convention published [Quality Status Report in 2023](#). The report highlights a substantial reduction in plastic litter on beaches across most OSPAR Regions and improvements in wastewater treatment. However, the sustained progress in addressing eutrophication has been hindered by the expansion of aquaculture within the region.
- In June 2022, the Mediterranean Sea was designated as an [Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides and Particulate Matter \(Med SOx ECA\)](#), a major milestone that the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) was instrumental in securing. The Med SOx ECA is set to become effective in 2025. Under this regulation, ships entering the Mediterranean Sea will be prohibited from using fuel with a sulphur content exceeding

0.10% m/m. Practical monitoring will focus on ensuring compliance with this rule. Ships will need to either utilize fuel oil that already meets the stipulated low sulphur content or install an appropriate exhaust "alternative" method to adhere to the requirements of the Med SOx ECA.

- UNEP is co-leading with WWF the implementation of the GEF-funded '[Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution](#)' [Integrated Program \(IP\)](#), a global initiative designed to transition countries toward a circular plastics economy, particularly in the food and beverage sector. This program is worth a substantial USD 107 million and represents the largest global investment tackling plastic pollution to date. The IP will be delivered through 15 national pilot projects and one global pilot project (Global Platform). This program will support countries in reducing the amount of plastic pollution entering transboundary marine and freshwater ecosystems.
- In August 2023, Colombia, Jamaica and Panamá joined forces to reduce plastic pollution from coastal and urban environments through the GEF-funded '[Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach](#),' project. The USD 42 million initiative of which USD 7M is funded through the GEF will do this by facilitating circular actions at the city level to accelerate the transition to a circular economy, in line with government and business commitments on addressing marine plastics and plastic pollution.

#### Key milestones achieved on: Nutrients

Member states have demonstrated heightened political interest and commitment, as evidenced by their active engagement in the nitrogen working group. Furthermore, they have expressed a collective request for support in the development of national action plans.

- [The UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen](#)<sup>3</sup> was established pursuant to UNEA resolution 4/14 to follow up on the tasks set out in the resolution. Following UNEA resolution 5/2 the scope of the Working Group was expanded to facilitate the implementation of both resolutions and strengthen the engagement and ownership of their implementation by Member States and stakeholders. On 30 August 2022, the Executive Director of UNEP invited Member States to nominate focal points and Co-Chairs to the Working Group. The appointment of the two Co-Chairs from India and Romania was coordinated by the Committee of Permanent Representatives under the leadership of the President of UNEA-6. The growing number of focal point nominations reflects the increased interest from Member States in the topic. A total 95 focal points were nominated by Member States to the [Working Group](#) as of 5 March 2024. The Working Group held five meetings prior to UNEA-6.

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<sup>3</sup> The Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM) has provided technical support to the Working Group through: a) information-sharing, including organizing technical webinars between Working Group meetings, b) informal expert meetings, and c) direct support to Member States by sharing existing information and knowledge in the development of an evidence-based and inter-sectoral coherent approach to domestic decision-making to promote sustainable nitrogen management, where appropriate.



- At the first meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen, it was agreed to establish an ad hoc Task Team to examine, among others, the possible Terms of Reference for an Interconvention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism (INCOM).
  - Since its second meeting, the Working Group has made significant progress on identifying action areas for the consideration of Member States on the development of national action plans for sustainable nitrogen management. A baseline screening of existing actions and action plans was conducted towards the preparation of a [voluntary national action plan](#). Thus, by the analysis of more than 20 received baseline screening documents, the findings and recommendations were processed for being included in a voluntary national action plan template with ten action areas which was further consulted within the working group. Member States have started to request UNEP for support in the development of national action plans for sustainable nitrogen management. As of 5 March 2024, UNEP received formal requests for support from more than ten countries.
  - The Working Group considered several options and modalities for improved coordination of policies across the global nitrogen cycle at the national, regional, and global levels, including an intergovernmental coordination mechanism for nitrogen policies.
- Options for better management of the global nitrogen cycle were explored in close collaboration with relevant United Nations entities, including FAO and CBD. At the initiative of UNEP and FAO, the Environmental Management Group (EMG) held a nexus dialogue on sustainable nitrogen management in April 2023 to look at the role of nitrogen in the context of the work of the UN in helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In the outcome of the nexus dialogue it was recommended, amongst other things, that **a mapping of mandates and activities to address nitrogen waste within the United Nations be done** to ensure coherence and coordination of programs and related activities. Considering the input received from this dialogue, UNEP is mapping out mandates across activities of UN organizations on sustainable nitrogen management to enhance coherence in planning and implementing UN related initiatives on sustainable nitrogen management.
  - UNEP is developing guidance on **Legal, Policy, and Regulatory Frameworks for an Integrated Approach to Reduce Nitrogen Footprint from Sectors**. The purpose of developing the guide is to support countries with information that can assist them to strengthen, develop, and implement laws, policies, and regulations to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste. This guide, which is being prepared in pursuance of resolution 5/2 and the Montevideo Programme V, recommends an integrated approach to address fragmentation in this area. The guidance on legal, policy, and regulatory changes required to reduce the nitrogen footprint from sectors to lead to the establishment of integrated regulatory and policy changes to reduce nitrogen waste globally is currently being completed.

- The Group’s support to the achievement of the GBF Target 7 and Global Framework for Chemicals provides new opportunities for strengthening policies, methodologies, tools, and approaches to support sustainable nutrient management. The Executive Director reported the progress of the Working Group to the UNEA-6 and included a focal area on “Advancing cooperation around nutrients especially phosphorus”.
- In March 2023, the UNEP-led, GEF-funded project, ‘[Targeted Research for Improving Understanding of the Global Nitrogen Cycle towards the Establishment of an International Nutrient Management System](#)’ (INMS) project, played a significant role in the adoption of UNEA 5.2 resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management. The importance of INMS’ contribution to the development and eventual adoption of this Resolution is made clear in the Resolution text itself, which takes note of the INMS project as well as the ‘International Nitrogen Assessment’ (INA) which will be the first publication of its kind, and a major output of the INMS project, set for publication in early 2025.

#### **Key milestones achieved on: *Reducing marine pollution from wastewater***

Wastewater from domestic, industrial and agriculture activities (including aquaculture) is a significant contributor to marine pollution. Almost 50 per cent of wastewater still enters our environment untreated. Wastewater can contain a wide range of biological, chemical and physical contaminants including heavy metals, microplastics, pharmaceuticals, pathogens, endocrine disruptors, and nutrients. Discharge of partially treated and/or untreated wastewater into the rivers, seas or the ocean is a common practice, particularly in low-income countries. This practice results in significant negative environmental, human health, and economic impacts, as well as a range of socioeconomic costs.

- The report, [Wastewater. Turning problem to solution](#) (launched Aug 2023), urges governments and businesses to treat wastewater as a circular economy opportunity, rather than a problem to be disposed of. Today, only 11 per cent of the world’s treated wastewater is reused and around half of the world’s untreated wastewater still enters rivers, lakes, and seas. The direct release of untreated wastewater and agricultural runoff, with elevated levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and organic matter, results in oxygen decline, ultimately leading to eutrophication.
- However, it should be noted that recovered energy, water and nutrients from wastewater can be used to help solve environmental and climate challenges. Rather than seeing wastewater as an ever-growing and costly problem, it should be looked to as a solution. There is about 16.6 Tg nitrogen embedded in wastewater produced across the world annually. Phosphorus in wastewater stands at 3.0 Tg. There are 6.3 Tg of potassium in wastewater produced globally.
- To safely fulfill the potential of wastewater as a valuable resource, the report calls to:
  - Reduce the volume of wastewater being produced.
  - Prevent and reduce contamination.
  - Manage wastewater to capture the resources that can be safely reused.

To tackle this issue, UNEP works through the [Global Wastewater Initiative](#) (GWWI) and seeks to change the paradigm of how wastewater is commonly seen, from simple waste to a valuable and rich resource. Wastewater, when managed properly, can also help address other challenges, including climate change, biogas production and the creation of green jobs. The initiative focuses on four areas: policy support and development, technology and innovative approaches through demonstration projects, awareness-raising and capacity-building through knowledge sharing webinars and events. The GWWI is the only global platform bringing together different United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, development banks, and other stakeholders to implement and scale-up efforts to protect freshwater and marine ecosystem from wastewater pollution worldwide.

#### **Key milestones achieved: Preventing oil pollution**

- To facilitated coordinated oil pollution prevention and response in the event of an oil spill, regional seas have established **five regional activity centres** and expert groups in collaboration with International Maritime Authority, particularly in the [Mediterranean](#), [Northwest Pacific](#), [Wider Caribbean](#), [Red Sea and Gulf of Aden](#), [Persian/Arabian Gulf](#). For instance, in the Northwest Pacific region, the Marine Environment Emergency Preparedness and Response Regional Activity Centre (MERRAC), established by the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) secretariat, has developed an online pollution reporting system, which acts as an early warning system and information-sharing platform.<sup>4</sup>

#### **SDG 14.2 PROTECT AND RESTORE ECOSYSTEMS**

***By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.***

#### **Key milestones achieved towards 14.2**

- **Three regional ICZM Protocols have been adopted through Regional Seas Programmes and Action Plans:** Under the Barcelona Convention, Mediterranean countries adopted the Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in 2008. Entering into force in 2011, it has provided a legal basis for integrated management of the Mediterranean coastal zone, including protecting coastal ecosystems (e.g. wetlands and estuaries, marine habitats, coastal forests and dunes) an ensuring sustainable use of coastal resources. The second ICZM Protocol was adopted in 2019 in the framework of the Abidjan Convention to strengthen management of coastal areas. After 13 years of negotiations, Contracting Parties to the Nairobi Convention in September 2023 adopted the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol. The Protocol serves as a framework to promote regional and national integrated coastal zone management and

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<sup>4</sup> In 2018, it was successfully used to allow information-sharing between member countries and organizations to inform effective action to mitigate and contain the Sanchi oil tanker spill, the largest marine pollution incident since the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill

foster cooperation for sustainable development and ocean governance in the Western Indian Ocean region.

- **The Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) approved a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework managed and implemented by UNEP.** If global temperatures rise by 1.5°C, 90% of coral reefs could disappear. To combat the rapid degradation of coral reefs, the GFCR supports bankable businesses that tackle local stressors on climate resilient coral reefs.
- **The GFCR** is the first and only blended finance vehicle dedicated to the conservation of coral reefs. Convening a global coalition of public and private partners dedicated to closing the coral reef funding gap, it facilitates an innovative Reef-Positive Investment Ecosystem with an array of financial tools designed to incubate, de-risk and attract private investment.
- The M&E Framework is an innovative tool to measure the impact of GFCR programming. GFCR investments and interventions will bolster the climate change adaptation capacity of coastal coral reef-dependent communities and reduce pollution in coastal areas, helping address biodiversity loss in coral reef ecosystems.
- The M&E Framework helps understand the impacts of blended finance vehicles related to SDG 14, supports the delivery of the GBF Target 2 and 3, provides a framework to measure impactful interventions and feeds into the efforts of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. The various project documents being prepared by the GFCR programmes, and the data sets being collected by the various programmes showcase evidence of the usefulness and effectiveness of the M&E Framework.
  
- In a push towards sustainable tourism, the Cartagena Convention Secretariat elaborated the [Coral reef restoration guidelines for tourism sector](#), in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA). The guide provides an overview of the tourism sector's engagement with coral reef conservation\* efforts in the Caribbean region, including results of the public opinion research, considerations before implementing a coral reef restoration project, and guiding principles and best practices for the tourism sector to implement coral reef protection and restoration efforts more effectively.
  
- **SIDS Ecosystems Restoration Flagship:** Through the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, UNEP, UNDESA and FAO have launched the *SIDS Ecosystem Restoration Flagship Initiative*. It aims to promote the integration of marine and coastal ecosystem restoration/conservation and sustainable blue finance into economic recovery and growth in three SIDS countries (Comoros, Saint Lucia and Vanuatu) through a connected 'ridge to reef' approach to build back better and bluer. By putting marine and coastal ecosystems at the heart of economic policy and decision-making, the initiative aims to guide and document transformative investments unlocking blue economy potential at SIDS level and in turn inspire further actions. At CBD COP15, the SIDS Restoration Flagship was recognized among the first 10 Global Restoration

Flagships. The SIDS Flagship is co-led by the Governments of Comoros, St Lucia and Vanuatu with the technical support from UNEP, UNDESA, FAO. Global SIDS-to-SIDS learning and policy advocacy is delivered in collaboration with The SIDS Coalition for Nature and the UN Decade on Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The flagship is funded by the German and Danish governments through the UN Decade Multi-Partners Trust Fund.

- UNEP's [Into the Blue: Securing a Sustainable Future for Kelp Forests](#) (May 2023) global synthesis report is the most comprehensive knowledge review on kelp to date, revealing the state of science on the world's kelp forests and providing recommended actions to build the recovery of the world's kelp forests. Aiming to improve our understanding of the value of kelp forests and provide recommendations to protect and sustainably manage them, the report also provides a range of policy and management interventions and options that can be used to maintain these remarkable ecosystems into the future and to support the people and economies that have depended on them for generations.
- UNEP's publication [Decades of Mangrove Forest Change: What does it mean for nature, people and the climate?](#) (May 2023) reviews the extent of mangrove forest cover and considers the potential consequences of changes in mangrove extent for more than 1,000 mangrove associated species including birds, fish, plants, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Further, the report analyses the potential consequences of changes in mangrove extent on carbon storage and for small scale fishers, demonstrating that restoration is clearly needed but showcases encouraging examples of mangrove recovery. The report highlights the need to improve our knowledge of what species use and depend upon mangroves in order to better understand the consequences of changes in mangroves on people and our natural world. It also emphasizes the need for integrated thinking, by conserving, restoring and sustainably managing mangrove ecosystems in a coherent and inclusive way, and coordinating management and governance actions across local, national, regional and international scales.
- **Enabling a sustainable blue economy transition:** To tackle the triple-planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity and pollution impacting marine and coastal ecosystems, UNEP is piloting a novel 'Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) Transition Planning and Readiness approach'. It supports holistic governance within national boundaries and in transboundary contexts across the water continuum. The SBE Transition tool provides a practical, stepwise approach to design, plan and implement pathways to sustainable, resilient and equitable blue economies tailored to countries specific context and needs. The approach provides a whole-of-government framework to support coherent policies across blue sector interests and trade-off across policy objectives. It helps guide sector interactions and resolves conflict across connected seascapes and landscapes. Key features of the framework include equitable sharing of environmental, social and economic benefits; application of nature-based climate solution; and protection and restoration of ecosystems underpinning the sustained delivery of economic and social

benefits. The accompanying UNEP 'SBE Rapid Readiness Assessment' tool helps decision-makers, planners and stakeholder getting started on the transition, setting direction, and operationalizing the process through tailored enabling actions (e.g., knowledge generation, finance, stakeholder engagement). The SBE Readiness Assessment approaches has been piloted in Caribbean SIDS (Antigua & Barbuda, Trinidad & Tobago) and Vietnam, and is being applied in Indonesia and Kenya for integrated land-sea planning to unlock sustainable blue economies. UNEP has also supported the preparation of Indonesia's national Blue Economy Framework and creation of the Indonesian National Blue Action Agenda Partnership led by the UNRC and national ministries.

- **COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Framework for sustainable blue economy:** The nine participating countries of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) in 2023 formally adopted The COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework as an essential concept of Sustainable Blue Economy, where the wellbeing of people in the East Asian Seas, particularly of the most vulnerable, are prioritized while ensuring the sustainability of the marine and coastal ecosystems. This will be achieved by building enhanced national capacity for marine and coastal spatial planning, Marine Protected Areas and MPAs Networks, habitat conservation and restoration. The Framework is based on successes and recommendations from previous COBSEA projects, international frameworks and targets including the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and regional studies and guides commissioned by COBSEA.
- **UNEP ACP MEAs 3 Project:** UNEP in partnership with the European Union, the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) progressed to the third phase (2020-2024) of the [ACP MEAs Programme](#). The programme is being implemented in 79 countries in Africa, Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP) regions. ACP MEAs 3 focusses on four core areas, including i) Strengthening environmental governance by focusing on building and supporting institutional and individual capacities of stakeholders; ii) Improving enforcement of and compliance with MEAs related to biodiversity (CBD, CITES, CMS) and chemicals and waste (Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata); iii) Improving the capacity of ACP countries on ocean governance and strengthening the regional seas conventions in the regions; and iv) mainstreaming of biodiversity and of the sound management of chemicals and waste in agriculture.
- **BBNJ Agreement:** After years of formal negotiations by the intergovernmental conference convened under the auspices of the UN, a new international, legally binding agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (the "BBNJ Agreement") was adopted in June 2023 as the third implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) - the overarching legal framework governing all activities in the oceans and

seas. The overall objective of the BBNJ Agreement is to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction for the present and in the long term, through effective implementation of the provisions of UNCLOS and further international cooperation and coordination.

- UNEP is supporting Member States with ratification and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, including through information and awareness raising, capacity building support for ratification through the Montevideo Environmental Law Programme and via technical assistance on applying area-based management tools, including MPAs, working through Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans alongside other MEAs. UNEP is well positioned to support Member States with science based environmental impact assessments as well as providing other tools including arrangements for equitable access and benefit sharing for marine resources. UNEP has a strong portfolio on integrated ocean governance. Working on implementation of the BBNJ agreement on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction presents a natural continuation of UNEP's authority on ocean and coastal management in areas within national jurisdiction, including UNEP longstanding work on marine protected areas globally and through the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, as well as programs applying marine spatial planning tools, ecosystem restoration for resilience, waste management, and sustainable blue economy policy and readiness support, among others.

#### **SDG 14.4: FISH STOCK SUSTAINABILITY**

*By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics*

#### **Key milestones achieved**

- **A UNEP-led regional project, funded by the GEF, aims to enhance fisheries management** in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand by expanding the network of fisheries refugia – an innovative approach that prioritizes sustainable utilization of fisheries resources and habitats. In Thailand for instance, the [Fisheries Refugia Project](#) focuses on protecting blue swimming crabs, particularly berried female crabs often caught as by-catch. Trawlers are encouraged to release these crabs back to the sea for spawning and record their numbers, with fishers contributing via mobile phones and social media. Over 6 months, 45 trawlers participated, releasing over 4,000 berried females for natural spawning. This successful initiative has fostered sustainable changes in fishers' attitudes, promoting support for ocean conservation and sustainable fisheries.
- The GEF-funded **FISHEBM MED project**, is co-implemented by FAO and UNEP. The agreement was signed between UNEP and the executing agency, UNEP/MAP in March

2023 – signalling the start of implementation. The project aims to reverse the over-exploitation of select commercial living marine resources by enhancing the capacity of Mediterranean countries to manage fisheries, including through the application of ecosystem-based management tools, in their blue economy development pathway. The initiative is a comprehensive effort involving various regional stakeholders such as the Mediterranean Action Plan (Barcelona Convention and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)).

- In 2017, parties to the Abidjan Convention established the **Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership**, a multi-stakeholder collaboration between the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, CBD, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), OceanCare and Born Free, among others. The Partnership focuses on raising awareness and encouraging action among governments, relevant industries and local communities in West, Central and Southern Africa to reduce overharvesting of coastal and marine species for aquatic wild meat, wildlife trade and fishing bait. The mapping of capture and trade hotspots and a threat assessment have been undertaken by the West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change programme and the Abidjan Convention secretariat to raise awareness of the extent of the issue. The partnership also facilitates the exchange of information on threatened aquatic species, helping to optimize resource use and support the implementation of the African Common Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa.

#### **SDG 14.5 CONSERVE COASTAL AND MARINE AREAS**

*By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.*

#### **Key milestones achieved on 14.5:**

- **Marine protected area coverage:** UNEP is the custodian agency for tracking indicator SDG 14.5.1 on global coverage of marine protected areas.
- UNEP-WCMC's latest protected planet data (March 2024) demonstrates that 17.28% of terrestrial and inland waters are within protected areas or other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and 8.19% of marine protected area and OECM coverage, respectively.
- Upscaled efforts and resources from governments and stakeholders are required to implement national commitments to effectively protect larger marine areas, including ensuring good representation of areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- **Facilitating an MPA network approach through the Regional Seas Programme:** In the **Northeast Atlantic region**, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment



of the North-East Atlantic (the OSPAR Convention) has adopted a recommendation to develop a network of ecologically coherent and well-managed MPAs. By the end of 2022, the OSPAR network comprised [of 592 MPAs with a total surface area of 1 471 597 km<sup>2</sup> or 10.9 %](#) of the OSPAR Maritime Area. A total of 581 MPAs are within national waters and 11 MPAs are beyond the limits of national EEZs. Guidance on how to assess the ecological coherence and management effectiveness of the MPA network has also been developed, and contracting parties are requested to provide information on implementation to support annual assessments.

- **In the Arctic region**, Arctic Council's Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group has developed a framework for a Pan-Arctic Network of MPAs, which sets out a common vision for international cooperation in MPA network development and management. The framework builds on extensive work on the ecosystem-based management and arctic biodiversity approach conducted previously by several working groups. The framework is not binding; each Arctic State proceeds with MPA-network development based on its own priorities and timelines. However, the common vision supports and enhances the work of individual States, allowing them to achieve national objectives and international commitments. Furthermore, in order to support the implementation of the framework, PAME developed an MPA network toolbox and guidance for decision makers, practitioners, indigenous peoples and stakeholders in the region.
- The Regional organization for the conservation of the environment in the **Red Sea and Gulf of Aden PERSGA** created a network of MPAs that includes MPAs from each member country and, as such, has helped to strengthen relationships between countries by opening a dialogue between MPA managers. This has included the transformation of small community settlements into ecovillages and their inclusion in the MPA network. Ownership and environmental stewardship have increased across the region as a result of this improved engagement (for example, an increase in management effectiveness in the Wadi el Gemal National Park, Egypt, as determined via a management effectiveness tracking tool evaluation). Furthermore, a key success of this network is the designation of three of its MPAs as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- **In the Mediterranean**, only 8.3% (209,303 km<sup>2</sup>) of marine area is under protection, with a total of 1,087 officially designated (MPAs). A total of 39 sites are recognised as Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs), including a 1.350km Cetaceans Migration Corridor off the Spanish Mediterranean coast. The corridor benefits around 3,500 fin whales migrating through this strip of water, and more than 19,000 loggerhead turtles and 6,000 striped dolphins. To advance and strengthen the network, UNEP/MAP Regional Activity Centre on Specially Protected Areas developed several key documents such as the [Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and other effective area-based conservation measures in the Mediterranean \(2023\)](#), and Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (2021), in line with the new Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework.
- **In the Baltic Sea**, a total of 188 HELCOM MPAs have been established, which cover 16.5% of the Sea area. In addition, 9 Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in the Baltic Sea were described by the workshop. Five of these areas are

transboundary areas, covering waters of two or more countries. Altogether, the described EBSAs cover 23% of the Baltic Sea waters.

- In the **Western Indian Ocean**, the Nairobi Convention secretariat in 2021 produced a [regional MPA outlook](#) and [dashboard](#) to inform policymaking for enhanced coastal and marine conservation. According to the outlook, the WIO region has 143 MPAs, covering a total of 555 436.68km<sup>2</sup>, representing 7 percent of the total combined exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the nine countries - Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Tanzania, and the Republic of South Africa. The outlook also provides lessons and opportunities to increase momentum for achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets.
- **In the wider Caribbean region**, the Caribbean Marine Protected Areas Management database, established under CEP, contains a wealth of information for 1,069 Caribbean MPAs, including an interactive map and easy search and download options. It is used to support the tracking of progress towards the achievement of indicators at the national, regional and global scale. Recently, the Cartagena Convention secretariat supported an independent evaluation of the database, updating information for more than 80 MPAs in the region.
- **The Abidjan Convention in 2020 supported Côte d'Ivoire** to designate its first marine protected area. Encompassing 2,600 km<sup>2</sup> (1,000 square miles) of pristine ocean off the coast of Grand-Béréby coast, this MPA serves to safeguard marine biodiversity, including threatened shark and turtle species.

#### ***SDG 14.7 INCREASE THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE RESOURCES***

*By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.*

#### **Key milestones achieved on: Sustainable Blue Economy**

- UNEP's [Seaweed Farming: Assessment on the Potential of Sustainable Upscaling for Climate, Communities and the Planet | UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#) UNEP recognizes the growing global interest in seaweed farming as a potentially scalable ocean-based solution to climate change that may provide environmental and social co-benefits as part of the advancement of resilient and climate smart aquaculture. To critically examine this potential, the report, Seaweed Farming: Assessment on the Potential of Sustainable Upscaling for Climate, Communities and the Planet, delivers an in-depth literature review and situational analysis scientifically assessing the potential for the sustainable expansion of seaweed farming to deliver climate benefits with minimal environmental and social risks. The report collates and scrutinizes existing research on the quantifiable climate benefits as well as the associated environmental and social risks and benefits of global seaweed farming. The scope of the report includes an investigation into the full value chain of seaweed farming with an emphasis on the potential for climate benefits realized through various natural and commercial

use pathways, and the feasibility of upscaling global farmed seaweed production. The findings are synthesized in a situational analysis with a SWOT design for sustainable expansion of global seaweed farming. In advancing science for the sustainable use of ocean resources, building global partnerships and working together with coastal communities helps safeguard the environment while maximizing climate and environmental co-benefits, maximizes the co-benefits of seaweed farming to people while protecting lives and livelihoods, and enhances the sustainability of future upscaling.

- UNEP and other UN bodies supported the Government of [Indonesia's National Blue Economy Roadmap 2023-2045](#). Launched in July 2023, it outlines how the country can sustainably develop its marine resources for economic development. UNEP also supports Indonesia under the High Impact Initiative on Nature Driving Economic Transformation, part of a broader UN effort to supercharge progress on the SDGs.
- [Through the HESBERSGA Project](#), UNEP is supporting countries including Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen to create an inclusive approach for harnessing marine ecosystem services and transforming to sustainable blue economy in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. In November 2022, the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) was approved by the GEF and is currently awaiting a CEO approval for the full-size project. The initiative will benefit the region alleviating threats posed by exposure to trans-boundary ecological and anthropogenic stresses for the region whose population is projected to reach over 380 million people in 2030 from the current 235 million persons.
- [The UNEP-led South China Seas Project](#): funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is leading the pioneering of an innovative financing model in the Asia-Pacific region. This new model aims to introduce a financing mechanism for conservation and sustainable development initiatives in the South China Sea and the adjacent marine ecosystems. It seeks to achieve this by boosting the existing regional cooperation mechanisms in the COBSEA Action Plan to embrace a trust fund structure similar to the one operated by the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund (CBF) in the Caribbean region. The decision to replicate this structure is not only due to its high potential for replication but also because of the possibility it holds for delivering global environmental benefits, akin to the success witnessed with initiatives such as the [Caribbean Blue Fin](#), another UNEP-led, GEF-funded project that began implementation in December 2023.

### **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.*

### **Challenges and Opportunities for SDG 14.1 REDUCE MARINE POLLUTION**

***By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.***

UNEP has been a major player global interlinking actions between of **SDG target 14.1** “By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, especially land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution” and **SDG target 6.3** “By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally”. UNEP adopts a **Source to Sea approach** to protect marine and freshwater ecosystems from land-based activities.

**Some of the major challenges to strengthen the interlinkages between SDG 14.1 and 6.3 are:**

- Absent/weak policies, plans and strategies hidden countries’ capacities to protect fresh water and marine ecosystems from land and sea-based activities.
- Adoption of the source-to-sea approach to prevent and address pollution into policies and practices at national and sub-national level. This would recognize the complex nature of pollution pathways, where contaminants from land-based activities often find their way into freshwater systems before reaching the ocean.
- Limited adoption/investment of best practices by governments, private sectors and financial institutions for tackling pollution and ecosystem degradation, including limited resources and political priority on sustainable wastewater and nutrient management.
- Poor/Inadequate decision making by key stakeholders, including by governments, private sectors and financial institutions.

### **Challenges for SDG14.1**

#### **Marine litter and plastic pollution**

**(a) Legal** (any impediment or barrier established by, founded upon or generated by law, the absence of it or the lack of its implementation and/or enforcement). Examples of legal barriers include:

- i) the lack of an internationally binding agreement as per the mandate provided in UNEA resolution 5/14;
- ii) measurable targets or global standards;
- iii) geographical gaps in coverage of existing agreements such as on the high seas, and gaps in signatories to agreements and their instruments;
- iv) poor implementation of policies and enforcement, often the result of no single authority being responsible for overseeing the management of plastic pollution and marine litter; and

v) a general absence of legal and market-based instruments to reduce consumption of difficult-to-recycle products and to stimulate industry's involvement in solutions.

Additional ones include the lack of definitions, clear targets and hard numerical limits in regulations; gaps in legislation, including sustainable public procurement; lagging or incomplete implementation or enforcement of legislation; inconsistent national implementation of international legislation; and legislation conflicting values, for example hygiene regulations conflicting with regulations on food waste.

### **Towards a legally binding treaty on plastic**

Challenges to be addressed include:

- Differences of views of what the “full life cycle of plastics” referred to in resolution 5/14 encompasses.
- Level of ambition remains dependent on significant flexibility being shown and, on the financing, correlated with substantive obligations.
- Resolution 5/14 states that the instrument could include both binding and voluntary approaches. While strong convergence on the need for national plans is emerging in negotiations, different views remain as to whether national plans should be the primary obligation of parties under the future instrument, a tool for implementation of the instrument, or both.
- Important work remains to be done, including at the technical level, especially where detailed annexes are envisaged. Significant input of a scientific and technical nature required.
- Duplication with existing MEAs, in particular the Basel and Stockholm Conventions has been mentioned by several Members.
- Great level of flexibility needed for countries with different levels of ambitions to reach and agree on compromised text

**(b) Financial** (when high costs make a certain activity difficult to afford or implement; some also constitute economic barriers). Examples of financial barriers include: i) fossil fuel subsidies; ii) a chronic lack of funds in developing countries for waste infrastructure; iii) the absence the polluter pays principle, especially in areas such as the high seas, leaving governments with the burden of clean-up costs; iv) limited cross-border investments; v) absence of global and national markets for end-of-life plastics; and vi) a failure to internalize or make explicit the costs to human health and the environment.

**(c) Technological (including aspects related to the production, manufacturing and design of products, consumption systems and all aspects of waste collection, management and recovery)**. Examples of technological barriers exist for all aspects of the production, manufacturing and design of products, waste collection and recovery. In the absence of global standards, there has been a proliferation of widely different approaches to recovery, sorting and reprocessing technologies, across the informal and formal sectors and between developing and developed countries, undermining the viability of financially viable and effective markets. Waste management is often highly fragmented, with rural areas very often poorly serviced. Regarding upstream processes, there is a clear disconnect between innovation in the design and

production phases and after-use systems, and little prioritization of the reduce-reuse-recycle waste hierarchy, for example how to increase the recycled content of products. There are also gaps in understanding of the best available technologies, especially in how to deal with new alternative materials appearing in the marketplace.

**(d) Information (access to data, research, transparency, and education and awareness).** Whilst there are multiple barriers relating to information, access to data, research, education and awareness raising, and transparency in reporting, which hamper decision-making and priority-setting, they are not sufficient to stop concrete actions in the short-term in parallel to longer-term responses. In other words, there is enough knowledge to act immediately in many areas. Significant efforts are still needed to close the knowledge gaps on the levels and sources of marine litter and microplastics, their accumulation in organisms and associated impacts on human health and ecosystem functioning.

### Nutrients

- Policy action across the nutrient cycle is highly fragmented, which leads to a lack of coherence with sustainable management of nutrients including phosphorus, and potassium. Improved nutrient management requires strong inter-agency coordination and collaboration at national level.
- Countries are at different stages of developing national action plans and strategies. Greater support will need to be provided at both technical and institutional levels, including capacity development for nutrient assessments and management, and sharing of best practices and lessons learned.
- Data, information, and knowledge gaps hamper efficient and sustainable nutrient management, including pollution prevention, nutrient recovery, circularity, resource efficiency and ecosystem-based approaches.

### Opportunities for SDG 14.1

**Early warning systems:** UNEP contributes to UN-wide early warnings by providing early warning services that target nature and pollution-free actions and by enhancing the well-established work of climate information and early warning services. Anthropogenic nature and pollution risk drivers that degrade ecosystems, which are largely slow-onset risks, exacerbate climate change by way of depleting natural carbon sinks and diminishing the capacity of ecosystems to buffer against the worst of the changing climate effects. This cumulatively drives up climatological and meteorological risk events that further damage ecosystems and escalate pollution risks, in addition to impacting human lives and livelihoods, to create a vicious cycle of vulnerability. Such climatological risks manifest mostly as rapid onset risks and are covered by early warning systems against weather and climate-related hazards. Given these interactions, early warning systems targeted at addressing ecosystem and pollution risk drivers are critical to complement and enhance the effectiveness of early warning systems against weather and climate-related hazards and ultimately enhance solutions to the triple planetary crisis towards the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The importance of ocean observation and prediction to better understand coastal areas, to protect local ecosystems and populations, to evaluate and predict the impact of coastal hazards and provide support to the development of a sustainable blue economy and of the needed infrastructures has never been more pressing.

**Towards an internationally legally binding treaty on plastic pollution:** The negotiation of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, represents a significant opportunity to leverage action in this area in moving forward. Finalizing the text of the instrument in 2024 still requires significant effort, including at the technical level and with respect to related financing to support implementation. Fostering strong linkages with existing MEAs and other initiatives is also essential.

**Opportunities on wastewater:** Major opportunities for UNEP are related to create enabling environments to reducing marine pollution from wastewater, including:

1. Ensuring effective and coherent governance and legislation to create an enabling political and regulatory environment
  2. Mobilizing adequate and sustained investment and access to financing to optimize the wastewater value chain; to create markets for resource recovery; and to facilitate business opportunities and investment by the private sector
  3. Enhancing human, technical and institutional capacity at all levels (from global to local)
  4. Enabling technical and social innovation to establish new approaches and equitable solutions that are appropriate to different socioeconomic-environmental situations
  5. Delivering robust data collection and information management to support implementation, learning and ensure accountability
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly Target 7, and The Global Framework for Chemicals provide new opportunities for strengthening policies, methodologies, tools, and approaches globally, regionally and nationally to support sustainable nutrient and wastewater management.
  - Member states committed to preventing and reducing nutrient pollution through UNEA and other international forums. Sharing best practices and experiences on what works and awareness-raising to foster greater cooperation and collaboration have been identified as key needs by countries.
  - UNEP has been requested by the United National Environmental Assembly to support countries in implementing several resolutions, such **UNEA resolutions:** 6/16. Strengthening Water Policies, 6/18. Strengthening Ocean Efforts, 5/2 and 4/14. Sustainable Nitrogen Management; 4/11. Protection of the marine environment from land-based activities; 3/10 as well as the plastics and marine litter resolutions (1/6, 2/11, 3/7, 4/6 and 5/14). Addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems. UNEP, through the work of the Marine and Freshwater Branch, integrates the protection of marine and freshwater ecosystems, adopting an ecosystem approach.
  - Several projects and initiatives led by UNEP contribute toward ocean action leveraging interlinks between SDG target 14.1 and target 6.3, including the project “Protecting the Marine Environment from Land-based Pollution through Strengthened Coordination of Global Action” (2018-present), and more than 2 decades of UNEP’s work on preventing source to sea pollution through the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA).

## *Challenges and Opportunities for SDG 14.2 PROTECT AND RESTORE ECOSYSTEMS*

*By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.*

### **Challenges for SDG 14.2**

Restoration of coastal ecosystems provides both a number of challenges and opportunities for implementing SDG 14.2. Challenges to restoration include cost-efficiency and scalability, including:

- (a) Marine ecosystem restoration has developed relatively recently compared to terrestrial restoration and, as such, there is a divergence in planning, implementation, managing, monitoring and reporting efforts and success. There is a lack of information regarding the effects of restoration action on the health and productivity of oceans and best practices for restoration to strengthen resilience;
  - (b) The connection between the health and function marine and terrestrial ecosystems is often lacking within restoration efforts and with pressures on land and sea often not considered within management and policy;
  - (c) There is a lack of clarity on the priorities, policies and practices for translating marine ecosystem restoration targets in success on the ground and how to mainstream ecosystem restoration into consumption and production sectors and society.
- Funding gaps and financing in protection of coastal ecosystems also present challenges and opportunities. The Global Fund for Coral Reefs and Coral Reef Breakthrough is working to address the funding gap. Exploration of innovative financing mechanisms, such as insurance for coral reefs in the Mesoamerican Reef, or carbon market payments in Kenya and Madagascar, also provide promising avenues.
  - Payments for ecosystem services schemes similarly pose both challenges and opportunities for improving the condition and resilience of coastal ecosystems. UNEP, through the GEF Blue Forests Project, has supported the development of successful payment for ecosystem services projects (including blue carbon projects) in mangroves and seagrass areas in Kenya, Madagascar and Ecuador (see <https://gefblueforests.org/>), which have led to additional coastal areas under ecosystem-based management. Technical challenges include scientific challenges around understanding carbon stocks and flows, financial challenges include the high start-up costs for projects, and policy challenges exist around tenure of resources. However, the opportunities for developing sustainable schemes for ecosystem management are also great and have been proved with best practice case studies.
  - Sustainable tourism offers more challenges and opportunities for delivering on SDG 14.2, as one of the largest economic activities globally which can both impact ecosystems negatively but also provide resources for their protection. The UNEP/Reef World Green Fins initiative is an environmental code of conduct for diving and snorkeling



activities, with a robust assessment system to measure compliance. It supports sustainable tourism management, including strengthening of relevant regulatory frameworks, and contributes to marine conservation efforts such as Marine Protected Area management. In 2022, the industry-backed digital platform was expected to scale up reach from about 700 operators across 14 countries to a potential 30,000 worldwide, thus increasing coral protection and conservation worldwide.

- There is still an inequitable geographic distribution of monitoring and consistent, accessible data required to inform decision-making and indicators at national, regional and global scales. Among other barriers, a shortage of data and data sharing in some regions was acknowledged in a recent IPBES report as having impeded the widespread and productive use of scenarios and models of biodiversity and ecosystem services in policy- and decision-making.
- Inadequate collaboration and resources have been identified as key issues that need to be addressed to fill these gaps and support better management of marine resources and ecosystems, particularly in locations with limited human, technological or financial capacity. Limited global coordination presents a major challenge to establishing consolidated global in situ data related to coral reefs, seagrasses and mangroves, for example, as data are currently collected by different organisations within countries with varying protocols and/or levels of capacity. Insufficient resources, particularly in developing countries, has been identified as a key impediment to accurate and reliable data collection for fisheries, and is likely to contribute to the continuation of illegal and unreported fishing activity.
- There is a need to focus more attention on monitoring the state and condition of ecosystems at the land-sea interface, including the impacts of land-based activities on marine and coastal ecosystems, and their relevance for achieving sustainable blue economies.

### Opportunities for SDG 14.2

- Strengthening and mainstreaming action plans for ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management, including MSP, in line with national SDG actions, is a measure to overcome challenges faced in regard to 14.2. Formulation of national and regional policy on ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management is another opportunity as well as conducting a review of existing national and regional legal and policy frameworks.
- Enhancing cooperation and synergies in implementing biodiversity-related conventions. Examples of indicators related to marine habitats with relevance to multiple frameworks, which can feed into the delivery of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, include the Marine Trophic Index (SDGs 2, 12 and 14 as well as CITES), the Living Planet Index, providing trends in targets and bycatch species (related to SDG 14), and the Ocean Health Index (SDGs 2, 8, 12, 14, 15 and Ramsar). Many of these align with the indicator set of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).
- The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) provide unparalleled opportunities to improve approaches to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid

significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience. Opportunities related to ecosystem restoration includes increasing the resilience of ecosystems if correct techniques are used.

- Marine habitat datasets such as those related to the conservation or restoration of seagrasses, kelps, mangroves and coral reefs may also help with reporting on Nationally Determined Contributions in accordance with the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), while also aligning with SDG Target 13.2 and Indicator 13.2.1. There are further opportunities for synergies linked to reporting at regional scales (e.g. the EU Habitats Directive, or the Regional Seas Conventions). Proactive consideration of these synergies can support more efficient data collation and use in reporting, following a “collect once, use many times” philosophy. UNEP works closely with global networks to develop global reports on the status of critical coastal ecosystems and habitats, for example:
  - [2023 Global report on status of mangroves with the Global Mangrove Watch](#)
  - [2023 Global report on status of kelp with the Norwegian Blue Forests Network](#)

### ***Challenges and Opportunities for SDG 14.5 CONSERVE COASTAL AND MARINE AREAS***

***By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.***

#### **Challenges for SDG 14.5**

- While MPA coverage has grown significantly over the last decade, the geographical distribution of MPAs is very biased with a small number of countries making up the majority of the area of MPAs. There is a trend towards larger MPAs in light of scientific studies demonstrating the conservation benefits of scale in MPA establishment. There are questions over the effectiveness of these sites where they are not appropriately established or managed. Many regions of the world have minimal MPA coverage in national waters. Coastal MPAs are thereby underrepresented with implications for ecological representativity.
- There are gaps in terms of integration of MPAs within broader spatial planning efforts. National legal and policy frameworks often do not sufficiently enable or encourage integration of coastal and marine spatial planning and management across sectors.
- There is considerable discussion on what should be 'counted' as an MPA (e.g. Sala et al., 2018; Horta e Costa et al., 2016; Dudley et al., 2017). Much of the confusion of what constitutes an MPA comes from a misunderstanding or under-appreciation of the core principles of MPAs, coupled with the conflation of the legal establishment of an area equating to the site having effective management and governance (IUCN WCPA, 2018a). Moreover, there have been questions raised about the strength and efficacy of some protected areas, which allow industrial fishing including destructive bottom trawling (Sala et al. 2018).
- While the general outlook for increasing marine protected area coverage is positive, to truly meet the target will require, amongst other things, the increased protection of ABNJ, of which only 1.2% is currently protected. Designating MPAs in ABNJ is

significantly more difficult than in territorial waters, although the designation of the approximately 2 million km<sup>2</sup> Ross Sea Marine Protected Area shows how this can be done.

- Another challenge is tracking progress towards specific aspects of SDG 14.5. Currently, there is no global indicator for marine connectivity. This leaves a significant gap in one of the key areas of marine health and requirements for many ocean and coastal species. There is a need to develop a process that includes discreet sequential activities, that could inform the development of connectivity measures in the context of the SDGs.

### Opportunities for SDG 14.5

- Overall, SDG14.5 has links to SDGs 1; 2; 5; 7; 8; 9; 11; 12; 13; 16 and 17, because the achievement of some of those SDG's may either positively or negatively impact the achievement of SDG14.5.
- Integrate MPAs within larger EEZ-scale ocean management, zonation and multiple-use plans to ensure 100% of EEZ is under "good" management and where at least 10% of the EEZ receives stronger protection from extractive uses.
- Integrating MPAs into national strategies related to sustainable development is currently weak. Need to integrate policies, build institutional bridges and clarify governance frameworks between sector-specific policies and policies relevant to MPAs at national level. Promote synergies and agreements between conservation, the fishing industry, but also in tourism, surveillance, tax and finance, and legal framework and policies for territorial development reinforcement.
- MPAs represent an effective tool to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts and to increase the resilience of social and ecological ecosystems. For example, MPAs that protect coastal habitats such as barrier islands, coral reefs, mangroves and wetlands reduce human vulnerability in the face of climate change and provide the natural infrastructure (e.g. storm protection) on which people rely.
- Consider the challenges of climate change both in MPA management plans and their monitoring activities, for example (a) explore possibility to have mobile boundaries of MPAs adopted at national level, and (b) utilise MPAs and other area-based management measures in the face of a changing environment in

## 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.*

### 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.

- **Guidance on Sustainable Blue Economy Financing Principles:** UNEP FI has launched a series of guidance resources on the Sustainable Blue Economy Financing Principles to

help close the financing gap for actions towards ocean sustainability. Fourteen voluntary Principles were developed to promote the implementation and achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14, including to help ensure that ocean-related investment delivers long-term value without damaging marine ecosystems, increasing carbon emissions, or eroding the livelihoods and nutrition of the billions of people who depend on the oceans and their resources. By providing a global framework to drive sustainable ocean economy-related financing, the Sustainable Blue Economy Financing Principles and Initiative addresses the risk of natural capital loss resulting from unsustainable economic activity. It also supports efforts to reduce carbon emissions and maintain the sustainability of ocean-based businesses, as well as the livelihoods of people who depend on them for their prosperity and their way of life, thus securing the long-term health, resilience and integrity of our ocean. Rent guidance includes "**Setting Sail: Target setting in the Sustainable Blue Economy** (UNEP 2024) to support financial institutions in implementing sector-specific guidance and setting targets for the Sustainable Blue Economy.

- **Blue bonds to finance the sustainable blue economy – a Practitioners Guide:** The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, together with the International Capital Market Association (ICMA), United Nations Global Compact (UN Global Compact), United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2023 launched a global practitioner’s guide for bonds to finance the sustainable blue economy. This voluntary guidance provides market participants with clear criteria, practices, and examples for “blue bond” lending and issuances. Gathering input from the financial markets, ocean industry and global institutions, it provides information on the key components involved in launching a credible “blue bond,” how to evaluate the environmental impact of “blue bond” investments; and the steps needed to facilitate transactions that preserve the integrity of the market. The new global guidance helps: Define blue economy typology and eligibility criteria; Suggest key performance indicators; showcase latest case studies from the field; and highlight the critical need for increased financing to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14, and other global sustainability targets.
- **The Global Fund for Coral Reefs** - <https://globalfundcoralreefs.org/> - is a blended finance instrument to mobilize action and resources to protect and restore coral reef ecosystems, which are the world’s most vulnerable ecosystems to climate change. It is hosted by the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, and is an alliance between member states, philanthropy, financial institutions and United Nations agencies (UNEP, UNDP and UNCDF), who are collaborating to establish a new paradigm for coral reef conservation – blending public and private finance to support reef-positive businesses. It is currently the only global UN fund dedicated to SDG 14 and is now active in 18 countries. UNEP is co-chairing the GFCR with the UK Government and is also responsible for leading on the M&E for the fund.
- **The Global Environment Facility, GEF, International Waters** - Through the UNEP International Waters Focal area projects and programs, UNEP and the GEF have mobilised over USD 173 million in grant and a further USD 1.9 billion in co-financing for countries where initiatives that contribute directly to SDG 14 are implemented. GEF IW projects complement other activities across all three areas of the global planetary crisis

demonstrated in fostering Sustainable Blue Economy, its financial means of implementation, tackling marine pollution including but not limited to plastics as well as nutrients. On the pathway toward larger Integrated Programming the GEF will leverage and accelerate UNEP's efforts and those of the many global partnerships and instruments including the Regional Seas and Actin Plans. Scalability, and solid science base are key for boosting just transitions across the relevant ocean and coastal communities and sectors.

## **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.*

- **UNEP/EA.6/L.18** - The UNEA 6 resolution “**Strengthening Ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution**” calls on Member states to adopt, ratify or implement the regional seas conventions, protocols and action plans for the protection and conservation of the marine and coastal environment while promoting high visibility of the regional dimension in all relevant global processes, among others. Member states also requested UNEP to strengthen its role in supporting Regional Seas Conventions, Protocols and Action Plans to deliver their mandates; support member states in implementing their respective obligations, including assessment of marine biodiversity, development of marine and coastal planning and management tools in particular marine protected areas, integrated coastal zone management, and marine spatial planning as well as support the promotion of a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement.
- **Global Environment Monitoring System for Ocean and Coasts** (GEMS ocean) is a transdisciplinary partnership convened by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). GEMS Ocean aims to support sustainable Governance through available data and analytics by informing, inspiring and enabling data integration and data solutions downstream from the global level to scale through the early warning for the environment initiative. The programme convenes a global Community of Practice across experts and society at large to provide capacity, analysis, innovation and synthesised information to policymakers, civil society, international organisations, as well as coastal communities worldwide in a holistic approach to keep the global ocean and coasts healthy and productive. GEMS Ocean is officially recognized as a UN Ocean Decade programme, paired with the UN Ocean Decade Collaborating Centre on Ocean Prediction. GEMS ocean work is supporting the 10 UN Ocean Decade challenges, focusing on challenges 7 and 8. The programme supports universal access to ocean data, works with partners including data holders, analysts, and other technical experts to bring data sets, analytics and forecasting into our World Environment Situation room.
- Through the partnership with Mercator Ocean a customized **My Ocean Tool** is available for member states and regions for Essential Ocean Variables (EOV). This is being integrated to the second level of interoperability by linking and making available other data sources for integration with the International Ocean Data Exchange.
- The Ministry of Infrastructure, Water and the Sea of The Netherlands provided support which initiated the development of the Caribbean Sea Digital Twin prototype that can be

used to monitor, model, and manage the region's coastal and marine ecosystems. The Marine Spatial Planning Challenge developed by the Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUAs) was used in the simulation for bringing the data together.

- The Caribbean Sea Digital Twin prototype (CSDTp) [Data Workshop and Hackathon](#) was held from 3-5 October 2023 in Oranjestad, Aruba and brought together participants with varying backgrounds and expertise in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), including data experts, fisheries scientists, hydrologists, marine spatial planners, policy makers, and other stakeholders. Participants investigated the MSP simulation platform through a series of scaffolded co-learning and critical thinking exercises. The results of the Hackathon were presented at the High-Level meeting of the responsible ministers at the 2023 Conference of Parties (COP) for the Cartagena Convention on 6, October 2023 in Aruba. The lessons learnt centered on themes such as requirements for a regional MSP Challenge Platform, geopolitical context and considerations, gaps in capacity such as lack of financing for data collection and training of individuals to use the MSP Challenge simulation platform.
- [The annual meeting of the Regional Seas Programme](#) convenes the 18 coordinators of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), along with partners, to assess advancements in the program's implementation and addressing emerging issues related to oceans and seas. The 22nd annual meeting in Seychelles in 2022 addressing plastic pollution, chemicals and waste management, blue economy, and the conservation of biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ). Notable outcomes included supporting countries in the Plastics Treaty negotiations, formulating a blue economy guideline, and strengthening collaboration with global Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) like the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions on chemicals and waste, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations/Bodies.
- Building on the outcomes of the 22nd meeting, the [23rd annual meeting in Barbados in 2023](#) furthered discussions on common actions to implement the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, promote blue economy, provide support for small island developing states, and expedite the ratification of the BBNJ agreement. The meeting also included reflections on the 50 years of the Regional Seas Programme, deliberations on regional seas strategic engagement at the UN Ocean Conference slated for June 2025, and explored opportunities for partnerships with the International Coral Reef Initiative on coral conservation, the BRS Conventions on minimizing transboundary movement of waste, and GPML on consolidating marine litter data.
- UNEP's partnership with the [International Coral Reef Initiative](#) (ICRI – a global partnership between Nations and organizations which strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world) is of critical importance for defining the global coral reef conservation agenda. ICRI is currently chaired by the US Government, and UNEP currently provides the majority of operational funding for ICRI through a partnership with the US Department of State. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of ICRI took place in September 2023 in Hawaii (largely supported by UNEP), and led to various important outcomes including the launching of the Coral Reef Breakthrough, initial workshops to start the process of developing an updated global report on the status of the world's coral reefs, and the creation of an ad hoc committee on integrating coral reefs into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), among other

resolutions. UNEP will also continue to support ICRI into 2024, under the US Government as chair, and will also provide major support for the planned 38<sup>th</sup> General Meeting planned for September 2024. UNEP is a major supporter in implementing ICRI's Plan of Action 2021 – 2024.

## 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 above areas of expertise and UNEP priorities from our approved programme of work and latest UNEA-6 resolution mandates, UNEP would suggest the following panels:

- ***GBF Ocean-related Target Implementation: including Target 1, 2, 3, and 7***
- ***High Seas Agreement – Ratification and Fast Action***
- ***Innovative Ocean Finance – Closing the SDG 14 Funding Gap***
- ***Delivering on the High-Level Climate Champions Ocean-related breakthroughs – spatial and funding targets & curating a common indicator achievement dashboard***
- ***Deep Sea Mining Guardrails – avoiding mistakes of the past***
- ***Panel on Prevention and Reduction of Marine Pollution***
- ***Panel on Ocean-Climate Solutions***
- ***Delivering UNEA-6 Resolution-Strengthening Ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution (This theme would also address targets 14.2 and 14.5).***
- ***Panel on equitable sharing of sustainable blue economy benefits***
- ***Increasing resilience of over 600 Mio coastal urban people at risk of flooding and subsiding deltas by fostering land, river basin and coastal management with sustainable urbanisation***

## VI Way Ahead/Next Steps

As we move towards the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3), it is imperative that we join forces and take decisive action to address pressing issues facing our ocean. We must combine our efforts to both promote and focus major topics of common interest to the UNOC-3 agenda that will enable impact and ensure accountability.

UNOC-3 should drive participating Member States to take major commitments to protect, conserve and restore ocean health. The various multilateral processes concerning the protection of the ocean are expected to converge on this occasion to an impetus to the global governance of the ocean. Ocean governance must be based on a better understanding of the ocean, involving all scientific disciplines as well as traditional and indigenous knowledge. The relationship between scientists and political decision-makers must be strengthened, for better mutual understanding and more effective public action. One of the challenges of this knowledge-gap regarding the ocean lies in the definition of indicators that are simultaneously scientifically sound, intelligible to the greatest number of people, and relevant to decision-making.

**UNEP suggests 5 Action Tracks for Transformation - Where Countries Can Meet Commitments by 2025** for announcement at UNOC3—all underpinned by ambitious ocean finance to close the funding gap on SDG 14; and implementation through Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans to help advance successful implementation.<sup>5</sup>

As mirrored in the above Ocean Action Panels, UNEP recommends:

**Action Track 1: GBF Ocean-related Target Implementation:**

**a) 30x30 Global Biodiversity Framework Spatial Targets are Being Met-** Countries have illustrative plans designating 30% of their marine and coastal areas (including kelp, coral, seagrass, mangroves, peatlands, salt marshes) for greater protection (including country partnerships for high seas). Including mapping of biodiversity hotspots and those areas that have the greatest concentrations of the range of interconnected ecosystems.

**b) 30% GBF Restoration Targets for Marine and Inland Waters –** Countries have illustrative plans designating 30% of marine and inland waters along the water continuum for restoration; this action is accelerated by the Freshwater Challenge (launched at the UN Water Conference in New York in March 2023 by the governments of Colombia, DR Congo, Ecuador, Gabon, Mexico and Zambia. The challenge is part of the Water Action Agenda and under the auspices of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration) that aims to have 70-80 countries join the Challenge at COP28 (Ministerial Roundtable Event); and the Saltwater/Blue Ecosystems Challenge (in final development/France as a lead champion?).

**c) Target 7 on tackling excess nutrients**

- o **Indicators:** High Level Climate Champions [Marine Conservation Ocean](#) Breakthrough: by 2030, investments of at least \$72b secure the integrity of ocean ecosystems by protecting, restoring, and conserving at least 30% of the ocean for the benefit of people, climate and nature.
- o **Indicators:** High Level Climate Champions [Mangrove](#) and [Coral Reef](#) Breakthroughs (kelp and seagrass are in works).
- o **Indicators:** [Freshwater Challenge](#) - aims to restore 300,000 km of degraded rivers and 350 million hectares of degraded wetlands by 2030 as well as conserve intact freshwater ecosystems

**d) Raise international financial flows from developed to developing countries,** in particular least developed countries, small island developing states, and countries with economies in transition, to at least \$30 billion per year by 2030.

**Action Track 2: High Seas Agreement – Ratification and Fast Action**

Successful Momentum towards High Seas Treaty Adoption- 60 countries announce successful national ratification of BBNJ on the occasion (so far 82 countries pledged at UNGA to ratify)

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<sup>5</sup> Note that all indicators are taken from GBF targets and High-Level Climate Champion Breakthroughs.



### **Action Track 3: Legally Binding Plastics Instrument**

Legally binding Plastic Instrument is agreed; adopted and signed by countries with enough ratifications (decided in the Treaty) to enable entry into force.

### **Action Track 4: Ocean Climate Nexus**

[By 2050, a healthy and productive ocean has delivered up to 35% of GHG emissions reductions and contributed to a resilient nature positive and net-zero future](#), with focus on:

- o *Green Shipping*, by 2030, zero emission fuels make up 5% of international shipping's energy demand. 450,000 seafarers need to be retrained and upskilled. At least 30% of global trade needs to move through climate- adapting ports.
- o *Aquatic/Blue Foods*, by 2030, provide at least \$4b per year to support resilient aquatic food systems that will contribute to healthy, regenerative ecosystems, and sustain, the food and nutrition security for 3 billion people. + *Seaweed Farming: Assessment on the Potential of Sustainable Upscaling for Climate, Communities and the Planet- building off UNEP report and recommendations*.
- o *Ocean Renewable Energy*, by 2030, install at least 380GW of offshore capacity while establishing targets and enabling measures for net-positive biodiversity outcomes and advocate for mobilizing \$10 bn in concessional finance for developing economies to reach that goal.

### **Action Track 5 Deep Sea Mining Guardrails – avoiding mistakes of the past**

DSM Mining has a clear path for decision making grounded in science with ecosystems health at the heart of decision-making<sup>6</sup>; x countries agree with ensuring that safeguards are in place to balance industry interest with biodiversity concerns; no exploitation licenses are given until this decision-making mechanism.

As always, UNEP stands at the ready to support preparations towards UNOC-3 though development of background notes, technical guidance and advocacy support and observance of key milestones; including UNEA-6 where UNOC preparations took a prominent role through a number of high-level side events.

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## **Annex – key trends**

### **Nexus of Ocean & Pollution**

Marine litter and plastic pollution are recognized as threat multipliers as they act together with other stressors to cause compounded damage to ocean ecosystems. The amount of marine litter and plastic pollution has been growing rapidly. releases of plastic waste into aquatic

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<sup>6</sup> Internal note: France and UK pushing for moratorium, Monaco incoming and possibly Kenya.

ecosystems are projected to nearly triple by 2040 without meaningful action (UNEP, From Pollution to Solution: A Global Assessment of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution, 2021)

**Eutrophication:** Resulting primarily from land-based nutrient input from agricultural runoff and domestic wastewater discharge, coastal eutrophication can lead to serious damage to marine ecosystems and vital sea habitats and can cause the spread of harmful algal blooms

**Health:** Many species are affected by the ingestion of litter, especially plastics, and there is an increasing concern that animals could be ingesting persistent organic pollutants and toxic compounds, leading to impacts on fish stocks and ultimately risks for wildlife and humans (UNEMG Synthesis Report, 2022)

**Financial Cost:** In 2018 alone, impacts on tourism, fisheries and aquaculture together with other costs such as those for clean-ups, were estimated to be at least US\$9-19 billion globally.

**Biodiversity:** Microplastics can raise the temperature of the sand on beaches, and since sand temperature determines the sex of turtles, warmer nests may alter the ratio of male and female turtles that hatch on heavily polluted beaches.

Pollution is a serious global environmental, social and economic problem that negatively affects marine life and biodiversity, ecosystems, livelihoods, fisheries, maritime transport, recreation, tourism and economies.

A healthy ocean is critical to meeting global climate, sustainable development and biodiversity goals. The main sources of pollution must be addressed.

Most marine pollution comes from land-based sources, including urban and storm runoff, sewer overflows, beach visitors, inadequate waste disposal and management, industrial activities, construction, agriculture, tyres and illegal dumping.

Coastal wetlands, including salt marshes, mangroves and seagrasses, improve water quality by filtering runoff and metabolizing excess nutrients

### **Nexus of Ocean & Biodiversity**

The ocean is the world's largest ecosystem and is understood to host up to 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity.

**Food:** Unsustainable consumption patterns threaten the health of nature and people. Currently, we consume 34 per cent of fish stocks at unsustainable levels, largely due to illegal, unreported or unregulated activities (IPBES, 2022).

**Shifting the Rhythm of Nature (Phenology):** Disrupted and unpredictable weather patterns affect the lifecycles (breeding, egg laying, spawning, migration, etc.) of countless species (Frontiers, 2022).

**Protected Areas:** Marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective, area-based measures to conserve biodiversity – including marine sanctuaries, parks and reserves – have seen substantial growth over the last decade (SDG Report, 2022).

When managed, protected, and restored, the ocean and ocean ecosystems deliver wide-reaching vital services to people and the planet.

A healthy ocean is critical to meeting global climate, sustainable development and biodiversity goals. Utilizing nature-based solutions and developing sustainable seafood and aquaculture practices creates opportunities for both people and nature.

UNEP's 'Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative' aims to facilitate sustainable ocean-based economic, social and environmental benefits within the planetary boundaries of the world's ocean and coastal ecosystems.

Marine Protected Areas generate wide-ranging benefits by preserving and protecting biodiversity and recovering biomass in the marine environment.

Coral reefs support more than 1 billion people through their invaluable ecosystem services and are home to more than 25 per cent of all marine life. They harbor the highest biodiversity of any ecosystem globally, making them one of the most biologically complex and valuable habitats on the planet.

Salt marshes provide food, refuge and nursery habitats for many species, making them essential for healthy fisheries and communities.

Mangroves support rich biodiversity and are documented to be associated with 1,533 different species. - source: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/decades-mangrove-forest-change-what-does-it-mean-nature-people-and-climate>

Seagrass meadows cover just 0.1 per cent of the ocean floor but provide valuable nursery habitats for 20 per cent of the world's largest fisheries. - source: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/out-blue-value-seagrasses-environment-and-people>

### **Nexus of Ocean & Climate**

UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.2 states that by 2020 we should have: sustainably managed and protected marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience and act for their restoration, to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

"The ocean is the great regulator of the climate, through the water cycle, oceanic circulation and the oceanic biological pump." -Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Ocean

Heatwaves: In 2020, more than 80 per cent of the world's oceans experienced marine heatwaves

Sea Level Rise: Sea-level rise impacts tourism infrastructure and beaches, and affects agriculture by submerging land, salinizing soil and groundwater, and eroding coasts (HLP Ocean Solutions, 2020).

Acidification: Increasing acidification is limiting the ocean's capacity to moderate climate change by diminishing its capacity to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>

Financial Cost: Without meaningful and proactive mitigation measures, by 2050, the cost of damage from climate change could reach US\$322 billion per year (MPA Finance, 2022).

Shifting the Rhythm of Nature (Phenology): Climate change precipitates disrupted and unpredictable weather patterns, which in turn affect the lifecycle (breeding, egg laying, spawning, migration, etc.) of countless species among other affects.

When better managed, protected, and restored, the ocean and ocean ecosystems help mitigate climate change and provide adaptation co-benefits.

A healthy ocean is critical to meeting global climate, sustainable development and biodiversity goals. It is vital we utilize nature-based solutions, innovate in key sectors including renewable energy and shipping, and address the many human activities that threaten our ocean.

The shipping industry contributes nearly 3 per cent of all global GHG emissions, making addressing shipping emissions vital for ocean-climate action.

Mangrove Forests sequester carbon at a rate up to 4 times faster than tropical forests on land and by acting as a natural coastal defense against storm surges, tsunamis, rising sea levels and coastal erosion, they help protect coastal communities from the various adverse effects of climate change.

Seagrass Meadows cover just 0.1 per cent of the ocean floor, yet they store around 18 per cent of all oceanic carbon.

Coastal Wetlands such as salt marshes have an annual carbon sequestration rate up to 50 times greater than terrestrial forests. They provide a valuable coastal defense against sea-level rise and protect coastal ecosystems and communities as they store and dissipate floodwaters.

Protecting and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems promotes cost-effective carbon sequestration while ensuring that the high levels of sequestered carbon in soils and vegetation remain where they are. Restoration of mangroves and coastal wetlands also reduces risks associated with seaweed level rise and severe weather events by reducing coastal erosion and protecting coasts from storm surges (IPCC AR6, 2021).