**Draft Outline**

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

**I. Introduction**

As a useful resource for reference on the background of the Conference and links between SDG 14 and other SDGs, [Life Below Water (2022, eds. Filho et al.)](https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-3-319-98536-7) may prove to be of value.

**II. Status and Trends**

*1. Status and trends including key milestones.*

N/A.

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

The 10 targets of SDG 14 are interlinked with various other SDGs. For instance, research by the United Nations University (UNU) has highlighted the importance of safeguarding the future of the global seaweed aquaculture industry, with one [project noting](https://inweh.unu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/unu-seaweed-aquaculture-policy.pdf) the ways in which the industry not only improves the health of the world’s oceans, but also contributes to global food security (SDG 2), supports rural livelihoods, and alleviates poverty (SDGs 1 & 10). Similarly, [the University’s research](https://cris.unu.edu/Seaweed%20Industry's%20Development%20Potential%20Hampered%20Genetic%20Concerns) has demonstrated how a sustainable seaweed industry could contribute towards gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and climate change (SDG 13). However, these potential opportunities are at risk, [due to challenges such as the effects of climate change and genetic concerns](https://globaldev.blog/world-seaweed-industrys-development-potential-hampered-genetic-concerns/). The seaweed industry is just one example of the many ways in which SDG 14 is interlinked with various other issues of sustainable development. Encouraging and adopting sustainable fishing, aquaculture, and maritime activities, as well as implementing eco-friendly and nature-based solutions are vital in ensuring the preservation of marine and coastal ecosystems and the livelihoods of those that depend on them.

Overall, accelerating action and mobilising all actors to conserve and sustainably use the earth’s oceans remains key not only to ensuring the health of oceans, but to the well-being of the planet as a whole. Urgent, concerted efforts are needed to address the numerous challenges these actors face, including the escalating impacts of climate change, overfishing, pollution, and habitat destruction. The theme "Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean" is a rallying voice for the international community to come together, regardless of sector or background, and work towards a common goal: safeguarding the world’s oceans for current and future generations. To achieve this goal, global and regional cooperation needs to be bolstered in line with targets outlined in SDG 17, strengthening partnerships between nations, organisations, and communities, along with the sharing of knowledge, resources, and technology to develop effective strategies to address the challenges faced by coastal communities.

Finally, it is important to continue to take stock at the national level. For example, [Canada's marine environments are currently undergoing substantial transformations](https://cris.unu.edu/large-changes-canada%E2%80%99s-oceans-and-their-impacts-ecosystems-and-fisheries), marked by shifts in their physical and chemical states over decadal time scales and large spatial expanses encompassing entire ocean basins. These changes profoundly impact biological communities and human societies, influencing marine ecosystems, Indigenous Canadian subsistence practices, commercial and recreational fisheries, ecotourism, and various ecosystem services. To address these challenges, there is a growing emphasis on accelerating action and mobilising all actors to conserve and sustainably use Canada's oceans. Climate models and regional downscaling approaches are crucial for assessing trends and projections, guiding efforts to mitigate the identified issues. Recent national assessments highlight key areas demanding urgent attention: increased atmospheric and ocean warming, especially in the Arctic; modified ocean stratification affecting nutrient supply for marine species; regionally varying changes in primary production; decreasing oxygen levels; advancing ocean acidification, most prominently in the Arctic; decreasing sea-ice extent and thickness; modified sea-ice characteristics and storm waves; and a surge in climate change-related extreme events. By focusing on proactive measures and collaboration across various stakeholders, Canada aims to safeguard its marine ecosystems, support Indigenous communities, and ensure the sustainable use of ocean resources for current and future generations. These types of national and regional experiences are relevant to the international community as a whole and should be drawn upon to inform future ocean action.

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

*1. Investing in SDG 14*

Based on a comprehensive study by a UNU team on [trends and patterns of the seaweed industry and its links to SDGs](https://cris.unu.edu/sites/cris.unu.edu/files/PB21.08%20-%20GSSTAR%20Malaysia%20and%20ASEAN.pdf), the seaweed production system (SPS) has emerged as a vital component in achieving SDG 14. Not only does seaweed cultivation contribute to ocean health and biodiversity conservation, but it also offers tangible benefits to coastal communities. Rich in nutrients, seaweed also presents opportunities in pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. From enhancing food security and providing employment opportunities to generating income, the SPS demonstrates its multifaceted contributions to sustainable development. The [GlobalSeaweedSTAR](https://globalseaweed.org/) (UNU involved) project addresses the detrimental impact of human activities on marine biodiversity. This opens discourse for aligning climate commitments with the SDG 14 commitments, such as the loss and damage fund.

Mobilising finance for SDG 14 is crucial to addressing the challenges posed by climate change and sustaining oceans. The COP28 climate talks, held from 30 November - 13 December 2023, marked a significant milestone in this regard. One notable achievement of COP28 was agreement on the operationalisation of a loss and damage fund, a pivotal step towards recognising and responding to the adverse impacts of climate change. This fund, outlined in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement, underscores the imperative need for financial support to address the losses and damage associated with climate change. Specifically, it emphasises the commitment to assisting vulnerable countries facing severe impacts, particularly those vulnerable coastal communities heavily reliant on marine resources.

The discussions at COP28 urged all parties to deliver on their commitment to mobilise finance for SDG 14 and make tangible progress in mitigating the challenges posed by climate change. The outcome of this high-level event underscored the urgency of accelerating action and mobilising all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean. UNU supports the need to safeguard marine and coastal ecosystems, further emphasising the importance of concerted efforts in this direction.

*2. Strengthening Partnerships (including Voluntary Commitments)*

Sustaining economic interest in seaweed cultivation and ensuring price stability will require coordination of downstream value chain activities, including marketing and trading. Incentives and financial support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and private sector investments could spearhead innovation in diversified seaweed-based value-added products. This has been amply demonstrated by UNU’s research on the [seaweed industry in Malaysia and ASEAN region](https://cris.unu.edu/sites/cris.unu.edu/files/PB21.08%20-%20GSSTAR%20Malaysia%20and%20ASEAN.pdf). Advancing a stable supply of healthy seedlings for cultivation remains key to ensuring the sustainability of seaweed value chains.

Furthermore, another UNU report on the [seaweed industry in East Africa](https://cris.unu.edu/seaweed%20tanzania%20climate%20change%20GGSTAR), observed that in Tanzania, for example, the significant time producers spent growing seed, negatively impacted their ability to expand their farms as by the time they were ready, the seasonal conditions were no longer favourable. This led to financial losses in these communities. A combination of good quality seeds and supportive policy mechanisms can make these ocean-related industries more lucrative, ultimately benefiting the national economy while offering sustainable growth for such industry.

Using the seaweed industry as an example, the findings of this research underscore the critical need for coordinated action at both regional and national levels to address the specific challenges and opportunities of this industry. By fostering partnerships among governments, private sector entities, and local communities, countries can develop tailored strategies to enhance the sustainability and economic viability of seaweed cultivation. Implementing supportive policies and regulatory frameworks, particularly those aimed at improving seedling quality and ensuring price stability, can bolster the resilience of the industry and promote equitable growth. Through these concerted efforts, nations can harness the full potential of their marine resources, contributing to the achievement of SDG 14 targets while fostering economic development and resilience in coastal communities.

*3. Mobilizing All actors*

Water holds profound spiritual significance for Indigenous Peoples worldwide. However, climate change and human disturbances, such as pollution from extractive industries, disrupt hydrological cycles and ecosystems critical to Indigenous livelihoods. These changes [jeopardize local economies and the health and well-being of Indigenous communities](https://www.sciencedirect.com/bookseries/current-directions-in-water-scarcity-research/vol/4/suppl/C). Urgent action is needed to integrate Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and scientific understanding of water, developing tailored strategies to adapt to water-related changes. Mobilising indigenous peoples as custodians of traditional knowledge is essential for sustainable water management.

As illustrated in a [policy brief by UNU](https://cris.unu.edu/seaweed%20tanzania%20climate%20change%20GGSTAR) on the topic, for coastal communities, like those in Tanzania, seaweed farming is vital to local livelihood, particularly for marginalised groups such as women. Women dominate the industry, viewing seaweed production as a means to improve living standards. However, barriers such as limited access to financial resources and technical skills hinder their full participation. Addressing these challenges requires policies and funding schemes tailored to ensure inclusivity and support women's empowerment in the seaweed industry.

Incentivising Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and private sector investments could [spreadhead innovation](https://cris.unu.edu/seaweed-industry-malaysia-and-asean). By supporting local businesses, governments can stimulate economic growth while promoting sustainable practices that benefit coastal communities and marine ecosystems.

**V. Possible themes for the Ocean Action Panels**

Aligning the Ocean Agenda with Biodiversity Goals and Restoration Principles may be included as a possible theme for the Ocean Action Panels. The importance of biodiversity and restoration principles have both been highlighted in [recent research performed by UNU](https://cris.unu.edu/thefutureofourseaweedindustries).

Gender-Sensitive Ocean Conservation may also serve as a valuable theme for the Ocean Action Panels.

**VI. Way Ahead/Next Steps**

As the world faces pressing environmental challenges, the UN must take decisive action to support the implementation of SDG 14 on Life Below Water. The upcoming UN high-level conference in 2025, France, presents a critical opportunity to galvanise global efforts towards ocean conservation and sustainable use. Building upon existing frameworks such as the [United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)](https://cris.unu.edu/standards-practice-guide-ecosystem-restoration-contribution-united-nations-decade-ecosystem-0), the conference must prioritise concrete actions to address the urgent threats facing our oceans.

Firstly, the conference should underscore the interconnectedness between ocean health and the well-being of the planet. The UN Decade guiding framework, which UNU researchers contributed to, advances scientific understanding, and promotes informed decision-making to ensure the sustainable management of marine resources. Leveraging this decade-long initiative, the conference can set a clear commitment to the sustainable use and conservation of oceans, emphasising their critical role in mitigating climate change impacts.

Moreover, discussions at the conference should emphasise the urgency of addressing the adverse effects of various stressors on oceans, particularly in vulnerable coastal countries. Recognising the importance of supporting these nations in coping with severe losses and damages due to climate impacts is paramount. The upcoming ocean assessment marks a pivotal moment for mobilising all forms of support to safeguard marine ecosystems and enhance coastal resilience.

Furthermore, the conference must prioritise ocean conservation as a fundamental strategy in the fight against climate change. The ocean's role as a crucial ally in climate adaptation and resilience measures cannot be overstated. Multilateral environmental agreements, including the three Rio Conventions, serve as guiding principles for bridging the gap between climate action and ocean conservation. By reflecting collective determination to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change, these agreements provide a beacon of hope for sustainable ocean management.

In conclusion, the UN high-level conference in 2025 presents a crucial opportunity to accelerate global action towards achieving SDG 14. By prioritising ocean conservation, mobilising support for vulnerable coastal nations, and leveraging existing frameworks and partnerships, the conference can drive meaningful progress towards ensuring the sustainable use and conservation of our oceans for generations to come.