



Third United Nations Ocean Conference Themes of the Ocean Action Panels

Proposals of the Government of Iceland

With reference to the consultation meeting of 11 March 2024 on the preparation of the Ocean Action Panels for the third United Nations Ocean Conference, the Government of Iceland hereby submits its written proposals for the themes of those panels and the rationale therefor. As a general remark, the Government of Iceland emphasises that the ten Ocean Action Panels should address the most pressing and pertinent issues of the ocean, which could include harmful fisheries subsidies, marine scientific research, plastic pollution and the importance of gender equality for success on SDG14. In this context, the Government of Iceland specifically submits three proposals for the themes of Ocean Action Panels.

Aquatic Blue Foods – Foods from the Ocean

- Aquatic blue foods – foods from the ocean - are pivotal to advancing food and nutrition security with a low environmental footprint. Globally, blue foods offer a critical part of the solution to malnutrition and food insecurity, providing essential micronutrients and animal-based protein with a lower carbon footprint compared to many terrestrial foods. Locally, blue foods are particularly vital for coastal communities that are most at-risk for malnutrition, where they serve not only as a key source of sustenance but also support livelihoods and cultural traditions, often in regions where alternative food sources are limited.
- The Government of Iceland considers the opportunity of the UN Ocean Conference to be to elevate discussions of the ocean on the international scene and to embed a much-needed ocean-oriented perspective into wider discussions on sustainable development and climate action. The role the ocean plays in global food systems is a key bridging issue to mainstream ocean issues at large into those forums. The Government of Iceland therefore emphasises that themes pertinent to discussions of blue foods be prominent throughout the programme of the Conference. This could be achieved through an Ocean Action Panel dedicated to the theme or by interpolating a blue food dimension into the programme at large.
- Elements of this proposal are elaborated further in the accompanying policy paper submitted alongside this document, which has been developed in collaboration with the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition.

The Management of Sustainable Fisheries

- As an island nation historically dependent on the ocean for livelihood and sustenance, Icelanders know first-hand the importance of sustainable fisheries and have decades of experience in achieving it through sound, science-based fisheries management. Sustainable fisheries play an important role in supporting sustainable development, particularly in the fight against poverty, hunger, and malnutrition as well as Sustainable Development Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Sustainable fisheries are only achieved in areas where fisheries governance follows, at all levels, from effective fisheries management measures. International cooperation through regional fisheries management organizations, in particular international scientific cooperation, is crucial to this end. The experience gained by regional fisheries management organizations is not only valuable to achieving sustainable fisheries but also for other planning and ocean governance frameworks. For these reasons, the Government of Iceland proposes that the management of sustainable fisheries

be the theme for a dedicated Ocean Action Panel at the third UN Ocean Conference. In this context, the Government of Iceland notes that other States have also expressed an interest in a panel addressing small-scale fisheries, which it would warmly welcome. A panel on small-scale fisheries would be in addition to and separate from a panel on fisheries management.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

- The Government of Iceland submits that it is crucial for the Conference, as a conference dedicated to matters of the ocean, to have an Ocean Action Panel dedicated to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS), the constitution of the ocean and the subject of SDG14 target c). As the comprehensive legal framework governing the way in which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, the Convention, due to its universal and unified character, is the common thread to all discussions with a bearing on the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources. The attainment of international goals and targets, including those set out in the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, will only be actualised through implementation of the provisions of UNCLOS and its implementing agreements – most recently, the BBNJ Agreement. As States increasingly grapple with balancing rights and duties in relation to emerging questions about the use of the ocean and its resources, an Ocean Action Panel addressing UNCLOS can furthermore bring timely focus on the Convention’s comprehensive provisions on compulsory dispute settlement.