



General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 May 2024

Original: English

Seventy-eighth session

Agenda items 13, 18 and 75 (a)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Sustainable development

Oceans and the law of the sea: oceans and the law of the sea

Preparatory process of the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

The present note was prepared in response to paragraph 23 of General Assembly resolution [78/128](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare, in coordination with the two Presidents of the Conference, a background note, including a proposal for themes of the ocean action panels, for the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, to be considered at the preparatory meeting, to be held at Headquarters in July 2024. Outlined herein are the status and trends and challenges and opportunities of leveraging interlinkages between Goal 14 and other Goals towards ocean action. The theme of the Conference, “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”, is addressed, and proposals for the 10 themes for the ocean action panels are presented.



I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution [77/242](#), decided to convene the high-level 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in France in June 2025. In its subsequent resolution, [78/128](#), the Assembly decided that the overarching theme of the Conference should be “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”.

2. The present note was prepared in response to paragraph 23 of General Assembly resolution [78/128](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare, in coordination with the two Presidents of the Conference, a background note, including a proposal for themes of the ocean action panels, for the preparatory meeting. It should be read together with the contributions received for the present note,¹ the background note prepared by the Secretary-General for the 2020 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development ([A/74/630](#)), the report of the Conference held in 2022 ([A/CONF.230/2022/14](#)) and the reports of the Secretary-General and other relevant reports on oceans and the law of the sea and on sustainable fisheries issued since 2019 (e.g. [A/74/70](#), [A/74/119](#), [A/74/350](#), [A/75/70](#), [A/75/340](#), [A/76/311](#) and [A/76/311/Add.1](#), [A/77/68](#), [A/77/331](#), [A/78/67](#) and [A/78/339](#)).

II. Status and trends, including key milestones²

3. The ocean is in a state of emergency as increasing eutrophication, acidification, ocean warming, deoxygenation and plastic pollution worsen its health. In addition, the alarming trend of overfishing persists, leading to over one third of global fish stocks being fished at biologically unsustainable levels. However, since the most recent Ocean Conference, some important milestones have been reached. After nearly 20 years of discussions held under the auspices of the United Nations, the historic Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction was adopted in June 2023. With a scope of application covering nearly two thirds of the ocean, the timely and effective implementation of the Agreement can make vital contributions to addressing ocean challenges, including the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. As at 22 April 2024, there were 88 signatories to the Agreement, with 4 of them having become parties.³

4. Other key milestones in global efforts to conserve and sustainably use ocean resources, include the adoption, in March 2022, by Heads of State, Ministers and other representatives of United Nations Member States at the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly of a historic resolution entitled “End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument” and the related ongoing negotiations within the intergovernmental negotiating committee convened under that

¹ Contributions received can be found at the Conference website, <https://sdgs.un.org/conferences/ocean2025/documentation>.

² The present section is to be read in conjunction with *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet* (United Nations publication, 2023); and [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#).

³ Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

resolution; the adoption, in June 2022, of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies; and the convening, in March 2023, of the Review Conference on the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. Discussions on the ocean have been integrated into other intergovernmental processes, including climate change- and biodiversity-related negotiations. The adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity is a major development, while steps towards ocean sustainability have also been taken under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. In addition, progress in relation to the number of signatories and parties to key binding legal instruments, such as the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, marks a further positive trend.

5. Progress towards Goal 14 targets has also been made in marine environments. According to the recent *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*,⁴ progress includes expansion of marine protected areas; combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies; and supporting small-scale artisanal fishers. However, action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet Goal 14.⁵ Coordinated conservation efforts are needed to maintain and restore ocean health through advancing nature-based solutions, ecosystem-based approaches, sustainable livelihoods and ocean protection. Furthermore, understanding and addressing the cumulative impacts of multiple human pressures on ecosystems is key to turning the tide on enhancing the health, resilience and continued productivity of the planet's largest ecosystem. These actions should be based on the best available science and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

III. Leveraging interlinkages between Goal 14 and other Goals towards ocean action: challenges and opportunities⁶

6. The holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the indivisibility of the Goals therein, implies that all Goals connect with Goal 14 to differing degrees and aspects. Interlinkages can exist among a given Goal's targets, between the targets of different Goals and between Goals more generally. The 10 targets of Goal 14 are linked to different Goals-related areas. While some targets have limited or narrow connections to other Goals, others are linked to several different Goals and targets in multiple ways. The present section is based on the contributions received and is focused on highlighted interlinkages.

1. Marine and coastal ecosystem conservation and addressing pollution in all forms (targets 14.1, 14.2 and 15.5)

7. Threats caused by cumulative human impacts remain the foremost challenge driving degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems. Coastal erosion, coral reef and mangrove destruction, increasing marine heatwaves, tropical cyclones, ocean acidification, deoxygenation and rising sea levels are caused by climate change, overexploitation and pollution, resulting in unprecedented environmental change to marine and coastal habitats, threatening life below water and on land.

⁴ United Nations publication, 2023.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This section should be read in conjunction with [A/CONF.230/2022/8](#).

8. Pollution, including chemical pollution, marine litter, microplastics and nutrient pollution from sources such as untreated wastewater and agricultural run-off, continue to deteriorate the marine environment. There are now an estimated 30 million tons of plastic waste in the ocean, with an additional 109 million tons accumulating in rivers, indicating ongoing leakage into the ocean for decades to come.⁷ Eutrophication, associated with increased nutrient loading, remains among the leading causes of water quality degradation and is a major threat to human sustainability worldwide.⁸ Approximately 50 per cent of wastewater containing high levels of nutrients enters the environment untreated, exacerbating eutrophication, causing harmful algal blooms and deoxygenation, with resulting dead zones covering approximately 245,000 km² globally.⁹

9. Plastics and microplastics, pervasive in the marine environment, endanger marine life by disrupting ecosystems, with estimates of over 800 species affected by ingestion or entanglement. Microplastics also pose risks to human health, as they can accumulate toxic chemicals and enter the food chain, where humans consume them in seafood, water and salt. Efforts to conclude a legally binding instrument on plastics pollution offer a historic opportunity to end plastic pollution, including microplastics, in the marine environment, and implement Goals 14, 15, 8, 12 and 6.

10. Coordinated and integrated water and coastal management, such as source-to-sea and ridge-to-reef, presents opportunities to mitigate pollution and restore marine and coastal ecosystems. Addressing the complex nature of pollution pathways is key to preventing contaminants from reaching freshwater systems and eventually the ocean. This requires collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches to policymaking, research and resource allocation to jointly implement Goals 14 and 6. Cities can significantly control marine pollution through regulating plastic waste and nutrient run-off. Implementing sustainable waste management practices and promoting plastic reduction initiatives in urban areas contributes to Goals 14 and 11.

11. Marine ecosystem restoration is growing in popularity, including in mangrove, salt marsh, coral, oyster, seagrass and kelp ecosystems. Most restoration efforts are currently small-scale,¹⁰ and many face challenges across various stages, including planning, implementation, management, monitoring and reporting. The integration of the health and functionality of marine and terrestrial ecosystems into restoration initiatives remains limited, with insufficient consideration given to the interconnected pressures on land and sea within management and policy frameworks. This results in a lack of incorporation of restoration practices into consumption and production sectors, as well as broader societal contexts.

12. Habitat destruction, resulting from activities such as uncontrolled coastal development and destructive fishing practices, further compounds the pressures on marine and coastal ecosystems, including deep-sea ecosystems, leading to the loss of critical habitats and species. Deep-sea ecosystems play a major role in climate change mitigation by storing a large part of CO₂ produced by human activities and moderating surface warming. However, changes in temperature and oxygen levels, and acidity are already having an impact on deep-sea biodiversity. The impacts of anthropogenic ocean noise on many marine species are also a source of concern.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Global Plastics Outlook: Economic Drivers, Environmental Impacts and Policy Options* (Paris, 2022).

⁸ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *State of the Ocean Report 2022*, pilot ed. (Paris, 2022).

⁹ Robert J. Diaz and Rutger Rosenberg, "Spreading dead zones and consequences for marine ecosystems", *Science Magazine*, vol. 321, No. 5891 (August 2008).

¹⁰ Avigdor Abelson and others, "Challenges for restoration of coastal marine ecosystems in the Anthropocene", *Frontiers in Marine Science*, vol. 7 (2020).

13. Marine protected areas play a crucial role in enhancing the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems. Progress has been made in achieving global targets on marine protected areas. However, only about 8 per cent of coastal and marine areas are covered by marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, compared with 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas. Well-designed and well-implemented marine protected areas can represent an effective tool for climate adaptation by increasing the resilience of socioecological systems.

14. The integration of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures into national strategies on sustainable development is currently insufficient. There is a pressing need to promote an integrated approach to ocean management through approaches such as marine spatial planning, enabled by harmonizing policies across sectors, building institutional bridges and clarifying governance frameworks between sector-specific policies relevant to ocean use and conservation at the national level.

15. Enhanced national efforts and regional cooperation are needed especially for marine protected area management and long-term monitoring. There have been growing commitments from governments and stakeholders, with billions of dollars pledged to achieving the “30 by 30” target under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.¹¹ Translating these commitments into tangible outcomes offers opportunities to effectively preserve marine ecosystems.

2. Ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus (targets 14.3 and 14.a)

16. Ocean, climate and biodiversity are intrinsically interlinked. The ocean plays a central role in regulating climate and is a major reservoir of biodiversity. It has absorbed 93 per cent of the extra energy from the enhanced greenhouse effect, and between 20 and 30 per cent of anthropogenic CO₂ from the atmosphere.¹² Marine and coastal habitats cover a diverse spectrum, from coastal environments, such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass beds and estuaries, to the deep sea – considered to be the area below 200 m. Approximately 50 per cent of the surface of the Earth is an ocean deeper than 3,000 m. While the deep sea is largely unexplored, it is thought to host between 500,000 and 10 million species uniquely adapted to these environments.¹³ Climate change is projected to alter deep-sea biodiversity and associated ecosystem services, interacting with other anthropogenic disturbances.¹⁴

17. Inadequate climate action, together with other unmanaged anthropogenic impacts, exacerbates the deterioration of ocean health, habitat destruction and biodiversity loss and diminishes the ocean’s ability to adapt to and mitigate future climate change impacts.¹⁵ As anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, the ocean is becoming warmer, less oxygenated and more acidic – currently

¹¹ Convention on Biological Diversity, decision 15/4, target 2.

¹² Gregory C. Johnson and John M. Lyman, “Warming trends increasingly dominate global ocean”, *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 10, No. 8 (August 2020); and Nerilie Abram and others, “Summary for policymakers”, in *The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹³ Paul V. R. Snelgrove and Craig R. Smith, “A riot of species in an environmental calm: the paradox of the species-rich deep-sea floor”, in *Oceanography and Marine Biology: An Annual Review*, vol. 40, R. N. Gibson, Margaret Barnes and R. J. A. Atkinson, eds. (London, Taylor and Francis, 2002).

¹⁴ Lisa A. Levin and others, “Climate change considerations are fundamental to management of deep-sea resource extraction”, *Global Change Biology*, vol. 26, No. 9 (September 2020).

¹⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022).

30 per cent more acidic compared with during pre-industrial times. It is projected that the ocean will become 150 per cent more acidic by the year 2100.¹⁶

18. Numerous calcifying organisms, including coral reefs and phytoplankton, support economically important fisheries species and are gravely affected. The predictions of the International Coral Reef Initiative for 2024 signify that a fourth global mass bleaching event due to ocean warming is highly probable and has been confirmed by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States of America.¹⁷ Coral bleaching is further exacerbated by El Niño climate patterns. Ocean acidification has already had an adverse impact on food production from shellfish aquaculture and fisheries in some oceanic regions.¹⁸ Disruption of marine ecosystems and marine food chains poses significant threats to food security and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

19. This deterioration in ocean health compromises the ocean's ability to provide goods and services and act as a climate change mitigator, forming a feedback loop whereby increasing climate change further exacerbates ocean degradation and biodiversity loss, creating a dangerous cycle of environmental decline. Synergy and alignment in ocean, climate and biodiversity actions that leverage the interlinkages between Goals 14, 13 and 15 are critical to break this cycle.

20. Coastal "blue carbon" ecosystems, such as mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrass meadows, are known for their efficient sequestration of CO₂. These coastal habitats also serve as crucial breeding grounds, nurseries and feeding areas for a diversity of marine life. Preservation and restoration of these coastal ecosystems offer tremendous opportunities for nature-based approaches to mitigate climate change while protecting biodiversity and the ocean.

21. The ocean's significant role in climate has been widely recognized in recent years. The ocean and climate change dialogue 2023 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change¹⁹ outlined how parties could continue to integrate ocean-based climate solutions into national climate policies and strategies, including nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans.²⁰ In the outcome of the first global stocktake, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement noted that ocean-based adaptation and resilience measures could reduce a range of climate change risks and provide multiple co-benefits, and invited parties to preserve and restore oceans and coastal ecosystems and scale up, as appropriate, ocean-based mitigation action ([FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.17](#)).

22. Coastal communities, including people on the move (migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees) in coastal areas, are often among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Climate change can reduce the supply of natural resources and exacerbate communal tensions over access to and use of marine and coastal resources.²¹ Fishing grounds may shift as species move towards the poles due

¹⁶ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis – Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2021).

¹⁷ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "NOAA confirms 4th global coral bleaching event", 15 April 2024.

¹⁸ H. Lee and J. Romero, eds., *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report – Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023).

¹⁹ See United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "Ocean and climate change dialogue", informal summary report by the co-facilitators of the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue 2023–2024, 15 September 2023.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Elisa Mosler Vidal, *Leveraging Human Mobility to Rescue the 2030 Agenda: IOM Flagship Report for the SDG Summit* (Geneva, International Organization for Migration, 2023).

to climate-induced changes.²² Ecosystem-based management in the context of climate change and human movement should include both host communities and migrants in decision-making processes, mindful of pre-existing tensions relating to natural resource management. Likewise, conservation projects should take into account their impacts on local and mobile populations to avoid intensifying tensions or creating new challenges.²³

23. For some small island developing States and low-lying coastal areas, sea level rise may make land uninhabitable, requiring planned relocation initiatives. Human movement is often influenced by interconnected factors, such as human security, economic opportunities and climate and environmental degradation. Response measures must take into account interlinkages across Goals.²⁴ Anticipating ocean-related hazards can help to reduce the vulnerability of communities and strengthen socioecological resilience. Including human mobility considerations in nationally determined contributions can increase the effectiveness of response measures,²⁵ with options for people to stay in their areas of origin in dignity, or facilitate movement to safer locations through safe and regular migration pathways. Offering livelihoods opportunities in destination communities can provide benefits for all, thereby contributing to Goals 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 15 and 16.²⁶

24. In a policy context, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction marks a major opportunity to integrate the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus into measures to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in nearly two thirds of the ocean. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has catalysed new political attention and commitment to the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity, and to the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources. They provide important opportunities to ensure that biodiversity actions are aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

25. Policies and actions that reflect the interconnectedness of the ocean, climate and biodiversity are imperative. Investment in accessible data, technology and science-informed policymaking offers vital opportunities to address climate change and biodiversity in an integrated manner. Inter-agency coordination at all levels, including through regular dialogue and by co-developing projects, is required to achieve coherent results that maximize impacts and avoid resource competition.

3. Sustainable fisheries management and artisanal fisheries (targets 14.4, 14.6 and 14.b)

26. Unsustainable fishing practices, including overfishing, unregulated seabed trawling, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, continue to deplete global fish stocks. Moreover, industrial illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing has been associated with labour abuse, forced labour and human trafficking.²⁷ Such unsustainable fishing practices pose significant challenges not only to marine ecosystems and fishing communities but also to the global economy and food security.

27. Notwithstanding a steady increase in the contribution of fish stocks to global marine fish landings within biologically sustainable levels, from 66.7 per cent in 2015 to 82.5 per cent in 2019, the percentage of global fish stocks fished at sustainable

²² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022*.

²³ Vidal, *Leveraging Human Mobility to Rescue the 2030 Agenda*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ ILO, *Caught at Sea: Forced Labour and Trafficking in Fisheries* (Geneva, 2013).

levels has declined, from 90 per cent in 1974 to 64.6 per cent in 2019.²⁸ Maintaining and, where needed, restoring stocks to levels that support full replenishment under current conditions and harvesting rates is crucial for the ecological, economic and social sustainability of fisheries.

28. The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted at the twelfth Ministerial Conference of WTO, marks a major step towards ocean sustainability by prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.²⁹ This landmark agreement presents an opportunity to halt unsustainable fishing practices. By reallocating financial resources once designated for harmful fisheries subsidies, it enables a shift towards sustainable fishing practices and the broader implementation of Goal 14. It is also important to completing negotiations on related outstanding issues still before WTO.³⁰

29. Small-scale fisheries, which account for at least 40 per cent of the production of total capture fisheries, play a fundamental role in food security, poverty eradication and gender equality, underpinning the livelihoods of those who are often the most vulnerable. It is estimated that nearly 500 million people depend at least in part on small-scale fisheries for their livelihood. Women constitute nearly half the total labour force in this sector globally. In many communities, women are actively involved in various fishing-related activities, including processing, marketing and selling fish products. Women are the primary breadwinners in households dependent on small-scale fisheries in some regions. Achieving target 14.b will therefore contribute significantly to Goals 1, 2 and 5.

30. Challenges, including that of developing legal, regulatory and policy frameworks that recognize and protect market access for small-scale fisheries, must be addressed to create an enabling environment at the national level. Enhancing institutional support and capacity-building is essential to help countries to effectively develop, implement and enforce these frameworks, providing small-scale fisheries with fair opportunities to participate in and benefit from the market economy.

31. Marine foods, including from mariculture, present opportunities for employment, economic growth, social development and climate change mitigation. They are indispensable to many developing countries due to their small carbon footprint, high feed conversion efficiency and role as a rich source of essential micronutrients that are difficult to find in other foods. They provide highly nutritious food for those in critical need, such as children, lactating women, and marginalized rural and coastal communities, contributing significantly to achieving many Goals, including Goals 2, 5, 8 and 13.

32. Compared with terrestrial animal-source food systems,³¹ many marine food production systems have smaller environmental footprints, in particular unfed aquaculture systems, such as bivalves and seaweeds. On average, aquatic food production also results in lower greenhouse gas, nitrogen and phosphorus emissions and requires limited or no freshwater and land inputs, as aquatic animals convert feed to flesh more efficiently than land-based animals.³² In addition, promoting fuel-efficient fishing vessels and sustainable fishing methods can contribute to global climate action while ensuring the long-term resilience of fishing communities.

²⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022: Towards Blue Transformation* (Rome, 2022).

²⁹ General Assembly resolution 78/68, para. 147.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 148.

³¹ Michael J. MacLeod and others, "Quantifying greenhouse gas emissions from global aquaculture", *Scientific Reports*, vol. 10 (2020).

³² Jillian P. Fry and others, "Feed conversion efficiency in aquaculture: do we measure it correctly?", *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 13, No. 2 (February 2018).

4. Sustainable ocean-based economies (target 14.7)

33. Ocean-based economies are vital to the world's economy, with an estimated value of \$3 trillion to \$6 trillion per year, sustaining at least 150 million jobs across diverse sectors.³³ Sustainable ocean-based economies, sometimes referred to as “sustainable blue economies”, offer tremendous opportunities for States, in particular small island developing States, to achieve economic growth and social development while safeguarding the health and productivity of marine ecosystems for present and future generations, underpinning nearly all the Goals. The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States: A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity, the new 10-year plan to be adopted during the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, will be focused on practical and impactful solutions to ensure that small island developing States maintain developmental gains and provide their citizens with a sustainable and safe future (A/CONF.223/2024/4, annex).

34. Conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources are fundamental to fostering robust and sustainable ocean-based economies. Challenges that hinder progress include the transition of traditional ocean-based economic sectors, such as tourism, fisheries and maritime transport, to sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires concerted action to identify and implement sustainable business models, investing in environmentally sound technologies and infrastructure, fostering enabling governance frameworks and formulating policies that drive the transition. This provides opportunities for the implementation of Goals 8, 12 and 13, among others.

35. Shipping is responsible for over 80 per cent of international trade by volume, resulting in approximately 3 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Marine and air pollution, as well as greenhouse gas emissions from ships and ports, directly affect human and ocean health. Decarbonization of these sectors continues to be an urgent priority for the implementation of Goals 13 and 14.

36. Coastal and marine tourism serves as an economic lifeline for many States, in particular small island developing States. Prior to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, tourism comprised over 30 per cent of total exports in 22 small island developing States, with 5 of them relying on tourism for over 80 per cent of their export revenue.³⁴ Nonetheless, the increasing alteration of coastlines for infrastructure development and the carbon-intensive nature of air and cruise travel have contributed to habitat destruction and ocean acidification, with considerable damage to marine ecosystems.³⁵ Opportunities exist in adopting sustainable tourism practices on a large scale and enhancing tourism governance for sustainability and resilience.

37. Insufficient funding and investment are key challenges facing many States, in particular small island developing States and coastal African States. Investment in sustainable ocean-based economies provides significant opportunities for economic returns. It is estimated that at least \$5 is gained for every \$1 invested in sectors such as offshore wind energy, decarbonizing shipping and sustainable ocean food production.³⁶

³³ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) contribution.

³⁴ See www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-to-reach-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024.

³⁵ See www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/10/why-the-tourism-industry-should-care-about-the-state-of-the-ocean.

³⁶ Manaswita Konar and Helen Ding, *A Sustainable Ocean Economy for 2050: Approximating Its Benefits and Costs* (Washington, D.C., World Resources Institute, 2022).

38. Small island developing States face a unique set of challenges in developing sustainable ocean-based economies due to their small land mass, limited resources and vulnerability to climate change, among others. Many such States grapple with regulatory barriers, lack of access to finance and technology, and infrastructure limitations to develop sustainable ocean-based economies. Capacity-building and innovative and effective partnerships (Goal 17) are vital to strengthening support for small island developing States to address these challenges.

39. The burgeoning potential within emerging sectors, such as offshore energy, seaweed farming and plastic substitutes production, presents a promising outlook, addressing Goals 2, 7 and 13. An analysis by the International Energy Agency shows that offshore wind has the potential to generate more than 420,000 TWh per year – more than 18 times the current global electricity demand. Other forms of ocean energy also show promising results. Tidal power and wave power are close to reaching maturity and have the potential to be applied on a global scale.

40. Enabling sustainable ocean economies that safeguard ocean health requires securing accessible long-term financing at scale in both traditional and emerging sectors, facilitating knowledge exchange and best practice-sharing, ensuring effective ocean governance frameworks at all levels and fostering intersectoral coalitions.

5. Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (target 14.c)

41. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which currently comprises 169 parties, sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, including for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources. Until now, the Convention has been complemented by two implementing agreements, namely the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction has become the third implementing agreement. The international legal framework for the oceans is further complemented by various instruments developed by international organizations, including at the regional level, addressing a wide range of ocean-related issues. As is shown in the present section, advancing international law, as reflected in those instruments, is important not only for achieving target 14.c but also for promoting integrated and cooperative efforts to achieve all the targets of Goal 14.

42. The adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction marked a vital turning point in collective efforts to strengthen the international rule of law, with a view to addressing the cumulative effects of anthropogenic pressures on marine biodiversity and ecosystems. It addresses a package of issues under the overall objective of ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, for the present and in the long term, through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the Convention and further international cooperation and coordination. The Agreement includes provisions on marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits; measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas; environment impact assessments; and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. By establishing specific mechanisms for cross-sectoral cooperation to implement its various provisions, it has the potential to have a profound impact on more holistic and integrated approaches to the management of ocean activities, as is called for in the

preamble to the Convention. The Agreement can also significantly contribute to achieving Goal 14 and other ocean-related Goals and targets.

43. Discussions on the draft regulations on the exploitation of mineral resources in the international seabed area (the Area) have continued in the International Seabed Authority. Particular attention is being paid, in that context, to devising the measures necessary to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects of activities related to the exploitation of mineral resources of the Area, in line with article 145 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. To implement this provision, the Authority also promotes the development and review of regional environmental management plans to inform decision-making, taking into account resource development and conservation objectives.

44. Likewise, negotiations continue within the intergovernmental negotiating committee convened to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, which could include both binding and voluntary approaches. Discussions on diverse alternatives to address the full life cycle of plastics, the design of reusable and recyclable products and materials, and the need for enhanced international collaboration to facilitate access to technology, capacity-building and scientific and technical cooperation, are continuing. The committee aims to complete its work by the end of 2024. Such a treaty would contribute significantly to strengthening the implementation of the provisions of Part XII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the protection and preservation of the marine environment, pursuant to which States are, among others, required to take all measures consistent with the Convention that are necessary to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment from any source.

45. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework includes a new set of global goals and targets for biodiversity.³⁷ Targets 2 and 3 are of particular relevance to the objectives of Part XII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as they address measures to reduce threats to marine and coastal biodiversity. Several decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity address matters related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity and call for increased cooperation and coordination among relevant instruments, frameworks and bodies. Moreover, the outcomes of the recent fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals³⁸ addressed conservation priorities for aquatic species, including marine species.

46. The adoption in June 2022 of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies marked an important step towards eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies that have contributed to the depletion of the world's fish stocks. The Agreement on Port State Measures, as a key binding international agreement on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, has tripled its signatories since 2016 to 78 parties, including the European Union, to effectively cover over 101 States and 60 per cent of port States. Furthermore, some progress has been made at the global level in implementing instruments to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing between 2018 and 2024. In May 2023, the Review Conference on the Fish Stocks Agreement adopted a set of ambitious recommendations to further strengthen its implementation as it nears the thirtieth anniversary of its adoption, in 2025. The effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the Agreement on Port State Measures ultimately contributes to the long-term conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources and ecosystems.

³⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity, decision 15/4.

³⁸ See www.cms.int/en/cop14.

47. Progress has also been made in other areas. For example, the recently adopted amendments to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, are aimed at improving the living and working conditions of the world's seafarers by further developing and implementing provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the duties of the flag State, including with regard to labour conditions, crewing and social matters on ships that fly its flag. Drawn from lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, these amendments are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2024. Initiatives have been undertaken to improve the capabilities of the criminal justice systems of Member States in tackling piracy, transnational organized crime at sea and environmental violations within marine protected areas, thereby contributing to action on ocean sustainability while supporting the implementation and enforcement of international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

48. Notwithstanding this progress, various challenges remain, in particular in achieving universal participation in international agreements and addressing capacity constraints in developing States. Furthermore, technical, financial and legal capacity limitations continue to hinder the ability of developing States, including small island developing States, to fully implement the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea relating to the deposit of charts or lists of geographical coordinates describing the outer limits of their continental shelves.

IV. Mobilizing all actors to accelerate ocean action

49. The political declaration "Our Ocean, Our Future, Our Responsibility" and the report of the 2022 Conference underscored the need to invest in Goal 14 for a healthier ocean through the mobilization of finance, the transfer of marine technology and capacity-building, as well as by strengthening partnerships and mobilizing all actors to accelerate ocean action. The present section provides highlights of action undertaken by the international community to address concerns related to ocean health, as well as further priorities.

A. Investing in Goal 14

1. Mobilizing finance for Goal 14

50. Mobilizing finance for Goal 14 and investing in sustainable ocean-based economies will be pivotal to transforming the global economy for greater sustainability while restoring ocean health. Studies suggest that nearly \$175 billion per year is needed to achieve Goal 14 by 2030, but less than \$10 billion was allocated to this goal between 2015 and 2019.³⁹ Compared with other Goals, Goal 14 remains the most underinvested Goal.

51. Financing for Goal 14 is divided into three types of finance: public, philanthropic and private. While the volume of official development assistance (ODA) for the ocean is growing, it remains relatively small and is only partially focused on sustainability (between 0.5 and 1.1 per cent of annual total ODA flows). Moreover, ODA is geographically uneven, being concentrated in just a few countries. The top 20 recipients accounted for 75 per cent of total ODA, with small island developing States poorly served.⁴⁰ Total ODA for Goal 14 was \$1.92 billion in 2019⁴¹

³⁹ World Economic Forum, "SDG14 financing landscape scan: tracking funds to realize sustainable outcomes for the ocean", white paper, June 2022.

⁴⁰ UNCTAD inputs.

⁴¹ World Economic Forum, "SDG14 financing landscape scan".

and 2.7 billion for the ocean economy in 2021,⁴² which is approximately 1.5 per cent of the \$175 billion per year needed for Goal 14.

52. Initiatives of multilateral development banks to support Goal 14 include the World Bank's ocean portfolio (\$5.6 billion), the Asian Development Bank's Action Plan for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies (\$5 billion) and the Clean Oceans Initiative of Agence française de développement (up to €2 billion), as well as initiatives of other financial institutions, such as the European Investment Bank and KfW Development Bank.⁴³ These initiatives total \$12.96 billion and could contribute about 7.4 per cent of the estimated requirement of \$175 billion.⁴⁴ In 2016, philanthropic funding for Goal 14 reached \$1.2 billion, constituting 0.56 per cent of total financing for the Goals by foundations.⁴⁵

53. Enhanced awareness of the potential benefits of sustainable ocean-based economies is attracting investors and policymakers.⁴⁶ Recent years have seen more positive developments, such as leveraging sustainable finance mechanisms under climate financing towards projects relating to sustainable ocean-based economies, resulting in the emergence of “blue finance”⁴⁷ and innovative financing instruments, such as Blue Bonds and Blue Loans, that raise and earmark funds for investment in areas of water, ocean and offshore renewable energy. In addition, on the basis of their commitment, announced at the 2022 Conference, the International Finance Corporation, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative, the United Nations Global Compact and the International Capital Market Association developed guidance for global practitioners on blue bonds⁴⁸ to build investor confidence and catalyse investments for ocean health.

54. To further close the financing gap relating to Goal 14, public and private sectors, as well as charities and philanthropies, will have a role to play. Governments will need to identify their priorities and take a leading role in creating an enabling environment necessary for the predictability and stability required for mobilization of capital. The private sector, including banks, insurers and investors, can redirect their products and services towards the transition to sustainable ocean-based economies and by finding innovative solutions to support the health of the ocean. Charities, philanthropies and other donors are also essential, including in providing grants and enabling capital and through concessional financing.

2. Marine science and technology (including the development and transfer of marine technology) and the use of traditional knowledge for ocean health

55. The achievement of Goal 14 and its targets requires a strong science-policy interface to provide timely, credible and salient scientific information to inform policies and actions. Progress made in improving the scientific understanding of the ocean contributes to supporting science-based measures to accelerate the implementation of Goal 14, in particular in the context of, inter alia, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) and the

⁴² OECD, Data Platform on Development Finance for the Sustainable Ocean Economy, available at <https://oecd-main.shinyapps.io/ocean/>.

⁴³ World Economic Forum, “SDG14 financing landscape scan”.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Tracking conducted in the year 2021.

⁴⁶ European Commission and others, “Introducing the sustainable blue economy finance principles”, 2018; and www.unepfi.org/blue-finance/.

⁴⁷ International Finance Corporation (IFC), “Blue finance at IFC”, 2023.

⁴⁸ Asian Development Bank and others, *Bonds to Finance the Sustainable Blue Economy: A Practitioner's Guide* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines, 2023).

Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, and its World Ocean Assessments.

56. The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, launched by the General Assembly in 2021, is a global action framework for the co-design and co-delivery of ocean science and knowledge to underpin sustainable development. Working across 10 Ocean Decade challenges that are strongly aligned with the targets of Goal 14, the Ocean Decade includes the adoption of a broad definition of ocean science that includes alternative forms of knowledge, as well as the enabling environment required for the successful generation and use of ocean knowledge.

57. Since its launch, progress has been made in implementing the Ocean Decade. Endorsed Ocean Decade actions include 51 programmes, 330 projects and over 80 contributions, which are led by partners from over 60 States, although actions led by small island developing States and least developed countries continue to be underrepresented. The ongoing Ocean Decade Vision 2030 process, finalized following the Ocean Decade Conference (held in Barcelona, Spain, in April 2024), provides a comprehensive global overview of gaps and priorities in ocean science and will serve as an input to the 2025 Conference.

58. Significant action has also occurred at the regional level, including the establishment of the Africa Ocean Decade task force and the planning of new regional coordination structures in Africa, the Arctic, the Caribbean and the South Pacific.

59. The Ocean Decade comprises the development of an initial framework to ensure that the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is embraced along with ocean science as a complementary and equal source of knowledge. Recognizing the important role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is collaborating with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues to develop cooperation within the United Nations systems on the engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the Ocean Decade.

60. The Regular Process is a global mechanism under the General Assembly aimed at regularly reviewing the environmental, economic and social aspects of the state of the world's oceans, thus contributing to enhancing the scientific basis for policymaking, including through its World Ocean Assessments. Work is under way towards the development of the third World Ocean Assessment, which is aimed at further enhancing the delivery of rigorous, policy-relevant ocean science by integrating diverse perspectives, such as equity, gender and traditional knowledge, into its analysis. Activities are also undertaken under the Regular Process to build capacities at various levels to strengthen the ocean science-policy interface.

61. Other initiatives undertaken within the United Nations system to support science-based ocean actions include the Marine Environment Laboratories of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which provide data quality assurance services relating to marine pollution data reported by Member States, and open, online access to the results of radioactivity measurements in the marine environment. The Early Warnings for All initiative, co-led by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, is intended to protect every person on the globe with a multi-hazard early warning system by 2027, covering ocean-related hazards.

62. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the legal framework for conducting and promoting of marine scientific research and for the development and transfer of marine technology. Intergovernmental Oceanographic

Commission (IOC) criteria and guidelines on the transfer of marine technology,⁴⁹ which are aimed at operationalizing Convention provisions on the development and transfer of marine technology, provide a tool to promote capacity-building in ocean- and coast-related matters through international cooperation.

63. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction provides new opportunities to promote marine scientific research and to facilitate the generation and dissemination of data and information. This is expected to help to improve knowledge on the nearly two thirds of the ocean that are largely underexplored, as well as to support science-based conservation and management measures. It will also help to address the uneven capacity of States to undertake activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction through capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.

64. Notwithstanding the commitment to strengthening international, regional, subregional and national scientific and systematic observation and data collection efforts,⁵⁰ many countries still lack the resources and capacities necessary to respond to data demands, resulting in significant gaps in the geographical coverage, timeliness and disaggregation of Goals indicators.⁵¹ Well-structured, integrated marine geospatial information management, including of infrastructure and systems, populated with reliable, timely and high-quality marine data, would contribute to: (a) an improved understanding of the challenges related to sustainable ocean and planetary futures; and (b) developing risk mitigation strategies and closing the gaps in data coverage.

3. Capacity-building

65. Following consultations and assessments, IOC-UNESCO adopted the Capacity Development Strategy (2023–2030) to respond to regional and national capacity-building needs. The Ocean CD-Hub, a central database of capacity-development opportunities, was developed as a tool to increase access to information on such opportunities. IOC-UNESCO also expanded the global network of training centres and increased the outreach of the OceanTeacher Global Academy. It recently launched the Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility to provide an interface for access to capacity-development initiatives for partners engaged in the Ocean Decade, with a focus on early-career ocean professionals and representatives of small island developing States and least developed countries.

66. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has developed sustainable and resilient freight transportation and trade logistics capacity-building tools, training, instruments, insights, knowledge products and guidance. They include the UNCTAD Toolbox, which provides technical assistance, including methodological tools, as well as training and guidance materials relating to climate change impacts and adaptation for critical coastal transport infrastructure.⁵²

67. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), through its Integrated Technical Co-operation Programme, helps developing countries to improve their ability to comply with international rules and standards relating to maritime safety and the prevention and control of maritime pollution. This gives priority to technical assistance programmes focused on human resources development and institutional capacity-building. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is

⁴⁹ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, *IOC Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology (CGTMT)* (Paris, UNESCO, 2005).

⁵⁰ United Nations, “Marine geospatial information management”, September 2024.

⁵¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/breaking-through>.

⁵² See <https://sidsport-climateadapt.unctad.org>.

continuing its work to improve the capabilities of the criminal justice systems of Member States to prevent, interdict, investigate and prosecute maritime crime through a sound rule of law framework and effective international cooperation, including through new and expanded initiatives.

68. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific provides support to national Governments in data collection by leading work in ocean accounting by co-chairing the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership and by developing national pilot activities in Asia and the Pacific. Ocean accounts represent a new pathway to integrate statistics to better understand the complex interactions between human societies, their economies and the ocean ecosystem. Better integration of ocean data and statistics will lead to better regional and global policies that advance sustainable oceans. Through additional work, including by capturing the differentiated roles of women and men, the way in which human activity contributes to ocean degradation and conservation can be better explored.

69. The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs has provided assistance to States and intergovernmental organizations in ocean affairs and the law of the sea since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁵³ Assistance includes development of human capacity under the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship and the United Nations-Nippon Foundation Capacity-Building Programmes⁵⁴ in the uniform and consistent application of the Convention, its implementing Agreements and related instruments, as well as ocean affairs more broadly. In response to General Assembly resolution 77/321, the Division, in performing interim secretariat functions for the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, has delivered a programme of activities to promote a better understanding of the Agreement and prepare for its entry into force. The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals are mainstreamed into the activities, as are other contemporary and emerging topics, including ocean governance, the science-policy interface, the ocean-climate nexus and sustainable ocean-based economies.

70. Education and awareness-raising complement capacity development, and the media can play an important role in raising awareness of ocean challenges. The media can take the conversation on advancing the Goals out of the policy sphere and into public discourse. Furthermore, the media are critical in bridging the gap between science, policy and public action when it comes to ocean protection and sustainable use.

B. Strengthening partnerships, including voluntary commitments

71. The present section is focused on partnership initiatives at the global, regional and national levels, which comprise a diverse set of stakeholders, highlighting a few actions taken in support of the health of the ocean.

72. During the first Conference, in 2017, approximately 1,400 voluntary commitments were registered, with a further 700 registered between the first and second Conferences. The voluntary commitments, which were a key outcome of the Conferences, were pledged by a range of entities, including Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic

⁵³ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/.

⁵⁴ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/UNNF.

and research institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors.

73. An assessment of the impacts of the initial 1,628 voluntary commitments⁵⁵ was prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs prior to the 2022 Conference. While it was concluded in the assessment that voluntary commitments had collectively furthered the attainment of Goal 14, the progress was unlikely to be at a scale sufficient for a significant difference in ocean health. The importance of sustainable, shockproof, long-term funding was highlighted as essential for achieving Goal 14. The analysis included the recommendation that future commitments incorporate simple monitoring, with a baseline and agreed-upon metrics.

74. During the second Conference, participants announced over 300 voluntary commitments,⁵⁶ ranging from protecting marine areas and investing in ocean renewable energies to banning single-use plastics and supporting enhanced scientific cooperation. In April 2024, there were 2,121 voluntary commitments registered. While some commitment holders have submitted progress reports to share achievements and challenges, more reporting is needed to obtain an accurate picture of implementation status.

75. The United Nations system has implemented partnerships in various areas of Goal 14. IMO, in partnership with donors and Member States, is running a series of long-term, high-impact projects that support the 2023 IMO strategy on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from ships, a strategy to address marine plastic litter from ships, the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009 and the Guidelines for the control and management of ships' biofouling to minimize the transfer of invasive aquatic species.⁵⁷ In addition, the second meeting of the Joint ILO-IMO Tripartite Working Group to identify and address seafarers' issues and the human element, held in February 2024, adopted a list of comprehensive and coordinated recommendations aimed at protecting seafarers from violence and harassment.⁵⁸

76. UNODC and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have developed a partnership to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and crimes in the fisheries sector, leading to a unified approach to the topic. UNODC is also working with the World Wide Fund for Nature International to reduce the occurrence of crimes that affect the environment and their impact on coastal and marine ecosystems, including crime in fisheries and maritime sectors. Working with other partners, including the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, UNODC has been supporting Member States in strengthening legal frameworks, boosting inter-agency collaboration and building capacity in maritime law enforcement.

77. The World Tourism Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are co-leading the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative⁵⁹ and the Global Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction in the Tourism Sector⁶⁰ within the

⁵⁵ *Assessment of the Impacts of the United Nations Ocean Conference Voluntary Commitments: Sustainable Development Goal 14* (United Nations publication, 2021).

⁵⁶ The list of the voluntary commitments is included in annex II to the report of the 2022 Conference (A/CONF.230/2022/14). The registry of voluntary commitments (available at <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/ocean-commitment/register>) has been kept open since the conclusion of the 2022 Conference.

⁵⁷ See www.imo.org/en/OurWork/PartnershipsProjects/Pages/default.aspx; and www.imo.org/en/OurWork/TechnicalCooperation/Pages/Default.aspx.

⁵⁸ See www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS_905706/lang--en/index.htm.

⁵⁹ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-tourism/global-tourism-plastics-initiative.

⁶⁰ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-tourism/sustainable-food-systems.

framework of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, supporting a shift towards a circular economy by addressing marine litter, plastic pollution at the source and food waste. UNEP partnerships include the Global Environment Monitoring System for the Ocean and Coasts Programme,⁶¹ the MyOcean tool, in collaboration with Mercator Ocean, a partnership with the International Coral Reef Initiative and meetings of the Regional Seas Programme.

78. FAO is streamlining its partnership efforts through its Blue Transformation road map, which is currently being implemented in many countries as a pathway to maximize the contribution of aquatic food systems. This includes 200 projects relating to fisheries and aquaculture, worth more than half a billion dollars. Other FAO multi-stakeholder partnerships include the Coastal Fisheries Initiative, the Global Sustainable Fisheries Management and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Programme (Common Oceans Programme), the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) Nansen Programme, the FISH4ACP programme and the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture.

79. UN-Oceans, as an inter-agency mechanism among 30 United Nations agencies,⁶² is intended to enhance the coordination, coherence and effectiveness of competent organizations of the United Nations system and the International Seabed Authority, in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the respective competencies of each of its organizations and the mandates and priorities approved by their respective governing bodies. In January 2024, the principals of organizations participating in UN-Oceans endorsed a statement of commitment to strengthening and promoting coordination and coherence of United Nations system activities in relation to the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

80. The Ocean dialogues under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change discussed key initiatives, including those undertaken in partnership at the global, regional and national levels with a diverse set of stakeholders, including the 2030 Ocean Breakthroughs⁶³ launched by the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action⁶⁴.

81. The Ocean Acidification International Coordination Centre of IAEA continues to facilitate and promote global efforts to tackle ocean acidification through targeted action in the areas of science, capacity-building and communication. IAEA is also actively involved in the United Nations Environment Management Group coordination mechanism, through which IAEA contributed to the preparation of the report entitled *The United Nations System Common Approach Towards a Pollution-Free Planet*.

82. In the Asia and the Pacific region, the Pacific Islands Forum leaders endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent in July 2022. The leaders highlighted concerns about the region's enduring challenges, such as climate change-related impacts, coupled with the intensification of geostrategic competition, exacerbating the region's existing vulnerabilities.

⁶¹ See www.unep.org/topics/ocean-seas-and-coasts/science-and-innovation/ocean-and-coastal-observations.

⁶² In April 2024.

⁶³ See https://racetozero.unfccc.int/system/breakthroughs/?_gl=1*_ordyst*_ga*NTUzMDAzODY1LjE3MTY0OTQ0MjI.*_ga_7ZZWT14N79*MTcxNjQ5NDQyMi4xLjEuMTcxNjQ5NDU1NC4wLjAuMA.

⁶⁴ See <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/marrakech-partnership-for-global-climate-action>.

83. The Small Island Developing States Global Business Network of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States harnesses the innovation of the private sector to achieve sustainable development. The Network's biennial forum has included the ocean as a major theme since 2016. The United Nations Development Programme is one of the founding partners of the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, launched in 2020, which aids in leveraging \$625 million over 10 years to spur investment in the blue economy.

C. Mobilizing all actors

84. Mobilizing and engaging all relevant stakeholders is vital for accelerating ocean action, transforming into sustainable ocean-based economies, and achieving Goal 14 and its targets. Partners for ocean action include a range of global and regional entities, national and local governments, the private sector, including small and medium enterprises, and civil society. Ocean action needs to be inclusive of vulnerable groups, women, young people and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, all of whom play vital roles in ocean action, and will be critical to leaving no one behind. Indigenous Peoples and local communities and stakeholders should be engaged from the early stages of project design, to build trust. Indigenous knowledge systems, traditional knowledge and local practices could be integrated into science and policy while adopting a rights-based approach.

V. Possible themes for the ocean action panels

85. Accelerated and urgent implementation of Goal 14 will require the leveraging of the interlinkages between Goal 14 and other Goals, focusing on its specific targets and including enabling activities as set out in sections I and II. The following are the proposed themes of the 10 ocean action panels, based on the input received:

- (a) Fostering sustainable fisheries management and supporting small-scale fisheries;
- (b) Conserving, sustainably managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems, including deep-sea ecosystems;
- (c) Harnessing all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional level;
- (d) Tackling marine pollution in all of its forms;
- (e) Leveraging ocean-climate-biodiversity interlinkages;
- (f) Enabling sustainable ocean-based economies that leave no one behind;
- (g) Promoting sustainable food production from the ocean to address food security;
- (h) Increasing scientific knowledge and strengthening the science-policy interface for ocean health;
- (i) Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its implementing agreements;
- (j) Mobilizing finance for ocean actions in support of Goal 14.

VI. The way forward

86. The ocean's health is under threat, and the international community's response is insufficient to reverse its decline. Moreover, Goal 14 remains the most underfunded of all Goals. Rapid and coordinated action is needed to respond to the state of emergency faced by the ocean. The Ocean Conferences held in 2022 and 2017 ensured that the international community rallied around the health and sustainability of the ocean with strong commitments. A call was made in Lisbon in 2022 to all stakeholders to urgently implement the political declaration adopted at the end of the second United Nations Conference, held in 2022, entitled "Our Ocean, Our Future, Our Responsibility", as well as the voluntary commitments made at the Conference. The third United Nations Ocean Conference, to be held in Nice, France, in 2025, will be aimed at accelerating action to that end by mobilizing the international community and working in a spirit of collaboration and solidarity.
