



**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**

Preparatory Meeting

New York, 2 July 2024

Interventions by the European Union and its Member States

OPENING REMARKS

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Union and its Member States, I would first wish to express my gratitude to the co-chairs for organising this preparatory meeting (for the upcoming 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 *Life Below Water*).

The UN Ocean Conference is the most important multilateral forum on the ocean. In the run-up to the third edition in Nice next year, it is imperative to ensure a successful and transformative outcome. It is high time that we further intensify our ocean governance efforts, and we should start by accelerating our actions to implement what has been negotiated and agreed in the last years. As we will share in more detail during this preparatory meeting, we believe that the international community should focus on implementing the BBNJ Agreement, the ocean-related goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the outcome of the negotiations on the Plastics Treaty. Furthermore, we should take action to fulfil past commitments, enhance international cooperation and advance with ongoing processes.

In 2016, the EU was the first economy in the world to develop an International Ocean Governance agenda. This agenda was updated in 2022 and strongly commits us to integrated action for a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainably managed ocean. The EU and its Member States stand by this strong engagement today. As we prepare for the third UN Ocean Conference, we are ready to work on delivering joint, concrete, and rules-based measures, to conserve and sustainably manage marine resources and biodiversity, to increase the ocean's resilience to climate change, and to safeguard its health for generations to come.

The international community cannot afford to miss the opportunity that the third edition of this important Conference presents.

Thank you for your attention.

THEMES OF THE OCEAN ACTION PANELS

Panel 1: Fostering sustainable fisheries management and supporting small-scale fisheries.

- We can generally support the proposed theme of the first panel on sustainable fisheries management and small scale fisheries, but we suggest two small amendments to the wording.

- First, we suggest changing the word “and” into “, including”. This is to clarify that fostering sustainable fisheries management should concern all types of fisheries, including small scale ones.
- Second, we propose to change “supporting small-scale fisheries” to “support to small-scale fishers”. This would more closely align the theme with the text of Target 14B¹, which refers to small-scale “fishers” not “fisheries”.
- Overall, the amended theme would then read:
“1. Fostering sustainable fisheries management, ~~and~~ including supporting to small-scale fisheries”.

Panel 4: Tackling marine pollution in all of its forms.

- In the proposed theme of panel 4, we would have preferred to have an explicit reference to plastic pollution and an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. This was an explicit ask from us in our written contribution.
- We are prepared to go along with the current wording as a compromise, but we would like to add something else to it.
- In particular, we propose to at the end add the words “, including source-to-sea pollution”. The reason for this is that we believe it is essential to highlight the importance of addressing the complex nature of pollution pathways in order to prevent contaminants from reaching freshwater systems and eventually the ocean. We would like this to be clearly reflected in the theme.
- The theme of panel 4 would accordingly read:
“4. Tackling marine pollution in all of its forms, including source-to-sea pollution”

Panel 7: Promoting sustainable food production from the ocean to address food security

- We had proposed to have a theme on sustainable aquatic food production and are therefore happy to see that this is included for panel 7.
- We do suggest to slightly amending the wording to make it clear that food production from the ocean is one way of contributing to food security. We specifically suggest to add the words “the contribution of” before the words “sustainable food” and to delete the word “production” and the word “address”.
- The theme of panel 7 would accordingly read:
*“7. Promoting **the contribution of** sustainable food ~~production~~ from the ocean to ~~address~~ food security”.*

Panel 8: Increasing scientific knowledge and the science-policy interface for ocean health.

- We had proposed a panel on the science policy-interface and are pleased that this has been reflected in the proposed theme of panel 8.
- We believe it is important to come up with ways to reinforce science-policy interaction and to further build up ocean knowledge, including through enhanced collaboration.
- To fully reflect this in the title of this panel, we propose two small amendments:
- First, we propose to add after “Increasing scientific” the words “cooperation and” to reflect that scientific cooperation and knowledge are a means to an end.

¹ 14.B Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.

- Second, we propose to delete the word “and” and replace it with “to strengthen”, because we believe that the specific end we are pursuing in this case is to strengthen the science-policy interface.
- The amended theme would accordingly read:
*“8. Increasing scientific **cooperation and** knowledge ~~and~~ **to strengthen** the science-policy interface for ocean health.”*

MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE UNOC3 OUTCOME DECLARATION

1. The ocean is facing a range of unprecedented threats, extending in scope, in scale, and in urgency, which take the form of warmer waters, increased acidity, deoxygenation, overfishing, unsustainable and destructive exploitation of marine resources, biodiversity loss and pollution.
2. These threats are projected to grow even more over the coming decades, resulting in profound and wide-ranging changes that will challenge human and ecosystems survival.
3. With that background, the SDG14 targets are not being met and SDG15 is the most underfunded of all. The Declaration, forward-looking, focused and concise, should state this clearly, repeating a strong sense of urgency.
4. The Declaration should identify the concrete actions and means for accelerating and strengthening the full achievement of SDG 14 and the other ocean-related targets of the UN 2030 Agenda.
5. It should also acknowledge the obstacles hampering achievement and the necessary actions to overcome them. Such actions should be in line with the ecosystem approach, based on the best available science and in line with the precautionary principle when information is uncertain, unreliable or insufficient.
6. The background note prepared by the Secretariat underlines there many initiatives are already ongoing. The issue is actually to connect all these initiatives and capitalise on them. Adding new initiatives would only add to the fragmentation of ocean governance, which is one of the drivers of our collective poor performance on the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean.
7. It should focus on effectively implementing what we have already agreed, in particular the BBNJ Agreement and the outcome of the negotiations on the Plastics Treaty, on fulfilling past commitments, on pooling efforts and proceeding forward with implementation, for example achieving the “30 by 30” target under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Declaration should therefore underline the importance of putting cooperation at all levels in motion and promote a rules-based international order.
8. After the historical adoption of the BBNJ Agreement in June 2023, we must now proceed swiftly with its ratification and implementation. A call to do so should be properly and duly laid down in the Declaration. The Declaration should acknowledge the efforts made by the Parties that have ratified it and call on the others to do so as quickly as possible. It should propose concrete actions to implement the BBNJ Agreement.

9. The Declaration should also acknowledge the importance of addressing pollution, including chemical pollution, marine litter, micro-plastics, and nutrient pollution from sources like untreated wastewater and agricultural run-off through coordinated and integrated water and coastal management. Collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches to policy making, research, and resource allocation to jointly implement SDGs 14 and 6 should be highlighted.
10. It should also contain a strong reference to the relevant outcome the negotiations on an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution
11. The Declaration should reiterate the important role of ocean climate nexus, specifically ocean-based action in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, ensuring synergies with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement through the acknowledgment of the developments under the Ocean and Climate Dialogue and the Decisions of the COPs in this regard.
12. On IUU fishing, the Declaration should urge all relevant actors to give the highest priority to preventing, deterring and eliminating what is really a curse, mobilising energies at all levels to ensure compliance with the existing international agreements in this area as well as the necessary cooperation for their effective implementation.
13. The Declaration should promote greater awareness of the essential role of ocean foods in today's food systems and stimulate reflection on the conditions under which ocean foods can contribute to meeting the major challenges of food security and nutrition in the years to come.
14. In view of the essential role of scientific knowledge in evidence-based decision-making to protect and sustainably manage the ocean, the Declaration should contain a clear call to strengthen the science policy interface for ocean sustainability.
15. The Declaration should acknowledge the need to change humanity's relationship with the ocean, aiming to encourage behavioural changes and ensuring that the multiple values and services of the ocean for human wellbeing, culture, and sustainable development are widely understood.
16. Finally, the Declaration should clearly recognize the role played by regional organisations, including Regional Seas Conventions and Actions Plans and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, in implementing SDG14 and relevant ocean-related goals and targets set at the global level, while fostering their participation in global processes and fora relevant to ocean and seas as well as in the related preparatory processes.
17. We will engage actively in the upcoming negotiations on the draft Declaration, and we will continue to provide input throughout the process.