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

Input of the European Union and its Member States to the concept papers on the Ocean Action Panels

Panel a. Fostering sustainable fisheries management including supporting small-scale fishers.

(1) Topics to be discussed

- Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing as a major global challenge, with a focus on small-scale fisheries.
- Performance benchmarks for providing public support to national fishing fleets and small-scale fishers in view of the need for modernisation, including further digitisation, and how could they be linked to sustainability targets.
- Providing financial assistance and market access to small-scale fishers.
- Role of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) in sustainable management of fish stocks.
- Role of small-scale fishers in food security and nutrition.
- Particular vulnerability of small-scale fishers to climate change, conflicts and other disruptions.
- Role of women in the value chain in fisheries and how to ensure their full participation in resources management and policymaking.
- More strategies to minimize bycatch and discard rates.

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) depletes fish stocks, destroys marine habitats, distorts competition, puts traditional fishers at disadvantage, and weakens coastal communities, particularly in developing countries. Combatting it worldwide must therefore remain a priority.
- The increasing pressure to modernise fishing fleets and small-scale fishers, notably with respect to more energy efficient vessels using sustainable fishing techniques and further digitisation through different policies applied at global level in supporting fleets, results in different impact on marine environment.
- Access to funding and markets empowers fishers to maintain sustainable practices.
- As an important form of international collaboration, RFMOs play a key role in protecting marine biodiversity. Their effective management helps provide jobs and food security.
- The specific nature of small-scale fisheries needs to be recognised to ensure their sustainable future. They play a critical role in the global economy, providing livelihoods and nourishment for millions around the world. Small-scale fishers are vital in the social and cultural fabric of sustainable coastal communities.
- Small-scale fisheries are often poorly regulated. They are particularly sensitive to challenges, including climate change, conflicts, or other disruptions such as those experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Small-scale fishers suffer the most accidents and fatalities.
- Women play a critical role in every link of the value chain in small-scale fisheries and should therefore fully participate in resource management and decision-making. Assistance programmes should be gender inclusive.

(3) Expected deliverables/outcomes of the discussion

- To promote continued global efforts to combat IUU fishing, by, inter alia, encouraging non-Parties to the FAO-Port State Measures Agreement to join for further global acceptance and calling for the effective implementation of the Agreement.
- To promote the universalisation of the Cape Town Agreement and the 188 Convention of the International Labour Organization.
- Promote OECD recommendations on IUU fishing.
- Promote the entry into force of phase I of the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement as soon as possible and the conclusion of negotiations on additional provisions to fully deliver on UN SDG 14.6.
- To raise global awareness that without a level-playing field the efforts to protect marine biodiversity will continue to be fragmented and to advocate for national fleets that are in balance with fishing resources.
- To better understand the needs in terms of necessary reforms and possible support of the national small-scale fisheries fleets and to increase knowledge on the participants' positions on the issue of sustainability of fishing fleets.
- To draw attention to the role of RFMOs, exchange on best practices, common challenges, and areas to foster more coherent and aligned regulatory frameworks. To identify actions that take into consideration the specific nature of small-scale fishers and their vulnerability to climate change, conflicts and disruptive events. Calling for a gender perspective in policies and approaches regarding small-scale fishers.
- To raise awareness that bycatch reduction helps in preserving non-target species and maintaining biodiversity.

Panel b. Conserving, sustainably managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems including deep-sea ecosystems.

(1) Concrete topics to be discussed within the specific Ocean Action Panel

- How to provide communities and stakeholders involved in the protection and restoration of the ocean, with science-based recommendations and tested solutions for the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, including in light of the impacts of climate change.
- How to strengthen the coordination, coherence and efficiency of multilateral, regional and sectoral international frameworks that deal with the protection and conservation of marine species, as well as those frameworks addressing marine living resources, and how to ensure consistency and efficiency of the different mandates and measures.
- How to adequately implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework on marine and coastal ecosystems, including its goal to protect at least 30% of the Ocean, with a specific focus on the designation of additional Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
- How the designation of additional Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Antarctic and the Arctic can contribute to achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which agreed on the effective conservation and management of at least 30% of the ocean by 2030.
- How to promote the adoption of proper management plans as a way to achieve 30x30 target of MPAs that are truly representative.
- How can the management of MPAs be improved so that there is a better balance between protection and sustainable use?
- Protection of deep-sea ecosystems with special reference to deep-sea mining.
- Exchange of best practices, lessons learnt and models with respect to the establishment and management of ABMTs.

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- The protection, conservation, restoration and sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems are largely dependent on research and innovation aimed for instance at identifying suitable areas for protection/conservation, designing a network of effectively managed MPAs and implementing innovative and nature-based solutions for the restoration of degraded ecosystems and habitats. We suggest that the panel contributes to improving the science-policy interface and supports the deployment at scale of innovative solutions for the protection, conservation, restoration and sustainable management of ecosystems and thereby accelerate the reaching of the targets of the Kunming-Montreal-Global Biodiversity Framework and the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement.
- MPAs have a direct impact on local communities who depend on local marine resources for their livelihoods. Conservation measures need to be attuned to local needs and incorporate the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and local communities, including small-scale fisheries. MPAs can also contribute to the conservation and restoration of fish stocks. This can lead to positive spill-over effects and ensure long-term fisheries yields.

- Despite the existence of several legal multilateral, regional and sectoral international frameworks that deal with the protection and conservation of marine species, the status of marine species is deteriorating globally, as witnessed by the increasing number of them (sharks, raised, mammals, turtles) being put on lists of endangered species. The set-up is characterised by their different scope and purposes: multilateral and species-specific c (International Whaling Commission), whether due to their migratory status (CMS) or economic value (trade in endangered species – CITES); regional and activity-specific (regional fisheries organisations); multilateral and activity specific (deep-sea mining/ISA); regional and area based (regional seas conventions), multilateral and area based, within national waters (CBD/Kunming-Montreal) and in the high seas (the BBNJ Agreement). These differences lead to different approaches when it comes to scientific assessment, levels of protection and types of measures for conservation and restoration. Yet, most of the concerned animals are straddling or highly migratory species.
- Most agreements are confronted with limited resources for carrying out adequate scientific assessments and advice, as are their Parties. In addition, the implementation of decisions is weakened by lack of capacities in many countries, and the multiplicity of frameworks and their discrepancies makes implementation burdensome and complex for participating countries. Yet, mutualising efforts and knowledge is barely developed. Where capacities are more advanced, or tools more effective, this tends to focus attention on these agreements and concerned species (e.g. CITES and RFMOs), leaving many other issues and species in the background.
- The forthcoming implementation of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the BBNJ Agreement raises the bar in terms of ecosystems protection. It will depend on efficient coordination and cooperation with the other frameworks. As such, give special attention to the challenges in implementing and enforcing high seas MPAs to ensure effective monitoring, control and surveillance of human activities.
- In 2009, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) committed to creating a representative system of MPAs in the Southern Ocean by 2012. If implemented, such a system would play an important role in protecting the Southern Ocean and would contribute to the broader effort to ensure a healthy, productive, and resilient ocean ecosystem. It is therefore crucial for CCAMLR members to use every opportunity to strengthen their efforts towards achieving this goal and raise public awareness, for example under the international ocean agenda including through the UN Ocean Conference, bearing in mind that CCAMLR, which forms part of the Antarctic Treaty System, is competent for the designation of MPAs in the Southern Ocean.

(3) Expected outcome/deliverable of the discussion

- A global repository and community of practice to advise communities and stakeholders involved in the protection, conservation, restoration and sustainable management of the ocean, with science-based recommendations and tested solutions. The EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters and the EU Blue Parks Community could serve as contribution to this global endeavour.
- Concrete suggestions on how the international and regional marine species-related instruments could mutualise scientific work and foster coherence in protection measures,

and a commitment to strengthen exchange of best practices and enhanced capacity-building of developing countries to implement these instruments.

- To ensure concrete commitments to extend the network of well-connected and ecologically representative marine protected areas.
- To show international support for the work of CCAMLR and its members present at the UN Ocean Conference towards their efforts for designating new MPAs in the Southern Ocean.
- Guidance on interventions that use inclusive, participatory, ecosystem-based and comprehensive approaches, to implement inter alia the 30x30 goal.

Panel d. Preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities.

(1) Concrete topics to be discussed within the specific Ocean Action Panel

- Global harmonised system for marine litter monitoring, focused on plastic litter and microplastics.
- The source-to-sea approach.
- Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG).
- Underwater noise pollution: solutions to reduce the noise in an increasingly busy ocean.

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- It is urgent, especially with the adoption and in view of the implementation of the new global Plastic Treaty, to agree on and use a global system for marine and coastal litter monitoring, with emphasis on plastic litter and microplastics. There is already a solid basis to start from (including the updated EU marine litter monitoring guidelines and UN (GESAMP) litter monitoring guidelines). Such a system would facilitate shaping measures at national, regional and global level, in accordance with the Treaty. It would enable assessment of their effectiveness in reducing litter and micro litter in the marine environment.
- The interconnectedness of fresh and marine waters means that it is important to consider the 'source-to-sea' approach because degradation and pollution of freshwater ecosystems have major impacts on marine ecosystems and conversely lead to significant changes to seas and the ocean. Regarding plastic pollution, this translates into a need to address the entire life cycle of plastics, including by implementing measures at the upstream stages, early in the value chain, such as measures that help to drive down primary plastic production, that phase-out problematic plastic products and hazardous chemicals in plastic, that prevent plastic waste from reaching the environment (for example through reuse, recycling and sustainable product design). In order to reduce eutrophication from excess nutrients and pollution from chemical pesticides, a transformation of agricultural systems is needed towards more circular nutrient flows, fertilizer use efficiency and integrated soil fertility and pest management. This is as well a particularly relevant topic in the context of climate change, as it also influences the entire water cycle.
- Ghost nets or ALDFG comprise a significant amount of global marine plastic pollution. ALDFG represent economic losses for the fishing industry, pose hazards to navigation at sea, and can entangle marine and terrestrial wildlife. ALDGF may have many different causes, such as bad weather, gear conflicts, excessive gear for the vessel/crew, snagging on living and inert structures, operator error, abandonment, among others.
- Underwater noise is an understudied but very harmful form of marine pollution which affects all life forms in the ocean. The sources of underwater noise are however well identified and not so numerous. Win-win measures are available to reduce noise levels while supporting decarbonisation and a sustainable transition of the blue economy.

(3) Expected outcome/deliverable of the discussion

- UNOC3 is a unique opportunity to truly drive forward the implementation of the global treaty on plastic pollution throughout its life cycle. Therefore, the discussion should aim to propose/deliver a strategy, including a roadmap for a global system to prevent and monitor, by sectors of marine litter and plastics in a cost-efficient way as well as a data management methodology.
- A sectoral approach would help to apply measures throughout the life cycle of marine litter, adapted to the specificities of each sector; UNOC and the discussions within the panel could help to identify and develop solutions and voluntary commitments in: fishing (prevention linked to waste including fishing nets, identification, marking, monitoring, recovery and recycling measures, etc.), aquaculture and shipping (commercial and cruise shipping).
- Knowledge sharing, identification of priority pressures from land to sea at a regional and global level (e.g. plastic litter, nutrients, chemical pesticides, brine from desalination) and innovative solutions to tackle them with upstream measures in the context of a source-to-sea approach. Knowledge exchange and development of best practices with emphasis on less investigated and emerging issues (such as impulsive noise from offshore wind development, hydrocarbons extraction in the Arctic).

Panel f. Advancing sustainable ocean-based economies, sustainable maritime transport and coastal community resilience leaving no one behind

(1) Concrete topics to be discussed within the specific Ocean Action Panel

- Socio-economic and environmental data to support the blue economy and coastal resilience, as well as data needed to support investments towards sustainable technologies, environmental protection and climate resilience.
- Sustainable maritime transport contributes to advancements in sustainable ocean-based economies, together with sustainable port activities from which coastal communities can benefit. Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of maritime transport deserves attention as the sector accounts for almost 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and as it is almost exclusively dependent on fossil fuels. After the adoption of the 2023 International Maritime Organization (IMO) GHG Strategy, IMO now needs to agree and adopt GHG reduction measures by 2025 that can ensure realisation of the ambition in the Strategy and which should comprise a technical element (a goal-based GHG fuel standard) and an economic element (on the basis of a maritime GHG emissions pricing mechanism). The negotiations on these elements are ongoing at IMO.
- Plastic pellets in the maritime transport sector. The issue is examined in the IMO which has already adopted "Recommendations for the carriage of plastic pellets by sea in freight containers" (MEPC. 1/CIRC.909/19.04.2024) and is working on the development of relevant international standards with a view to their adoption and mandatory implementation at international level.
- As coastal communities are facing increasing environmental threats, urgent actions are needed to protect coastal communities and vital ecosystems. We propose the panel to focus on equipping coastal communities with scientific research, innovative solutions and infrastructure to adapt to climate change and mitigate its impacts. The importance of local knowledge into decision-making for a sustainable ocean-based economy should also be highlighted.
- Maritime Spatial Planning, which can result in plans, permits and other administrative decisions that set the spatial and temporal distribution of relevant existing and future activities and uses in marine waters, as well as visions, strategies, planning concepts, guidelines and governance principles related to the use of sea space.
- Exchange of views on the Advisory Opinion of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea on climate change and international law and on the pending request for an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- Acquisition of data is expensive and complicated, nevertheless there is a well identified link with sustainable development in a blue economy and safety and insurance regarding coastal resilience. Global perspectives allow for the exchange of good practices, capacity building and common approaches that increase interoperability and reusability of data
- To highlight the importance of discussions at IMO to advance sustainable maritime transport.

- To highlight research and innovation solutions for resilient coastal communities, as well as the importance of local knowledge in developing these solutions.

(3) Expected outcome/deliverable of the discussion

- Collaboration frameworks to develop standardised indicators and common approaches; identification of frameworks under which this can take place; identification of areas that can be used as case studies.
- To inform and obtain support of stakeholders for ongoing IMO work on sustainable maritime transport, including for the ongoing negotiations on decarbonization of maritime transportation
- To connect scientific outputs with practical applications. The All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA) with its latest policy outcomes of the AAORIA Annual Forum held Canada (October 2024), the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters and the Sustainable Blue Partnership could serve as EU contributions.
- To advance understanding and knowledge of innovative approaches to an inclusive and sustainable ocean-based economy.
- Guidelines on sustainable blue tourism in order to mitigate its impact on marine and coastal ecosystems and coastal communities.

Panel h. Increasing ocean-related scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity building, marine technology and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health.

(1) Concrete topics to be discussed within the specific Ocean Action Panel

- Improving the science-policy interface vis-a-vis the ocean
- Digital Ocean Systems and Information Services (DOSIS)
- Ocean literacy and involvement of youth in ocean processes
- Science diplomacy

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- Building up international ocean knowledge is crucial for evidence-based decision-making to result in action and protect and sustainably manage the ocean. To engage governments, we need a common, inclusive and dynamic platform that allows two-way dialogue between scientists and policymakers and delivers independent, timely, contextually relevant and actionable support. Therefore, discussing the topic of how to strengthen existing regional and global organisations and assessments working on Ocean science policy interface, including exploring the feasibility of an 'international panel/platform for ocean sustainability' (IPOS), and considering other options such as IPCC and IPBES while acknowledging the overarching work developed under the UN Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment would be beneficial.
- Enabling evidence-based decision-making and sustainable ocean management, Digital Ocean systems and Information Services are key to support global ocean governance and international commitments, such as SDG 14, the UN Ocean Decade, the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, the future international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, and the "30x30 ambition" aiming to protect 30% of the world's ocean by 2030.
- To share knowledge on the EU Digital Twin of the Ocean (EU DTO), leveraging primarily on the Copernicus Marine Service and EMODnet[1] data programmes, representing the latest on-going evolution in operational oceanography. By integrating artificial intelligence, machine learning, and real-time ocean observations and models, policymakers and stakeholders will be enabled to simulate future ocean scenarios, predict changes, and assess risks. Digital Twins are not designed to operate isolated from other systems. For example, the EU DTO will be interoperable, connected with national and international systems for integrated support to sustainable ocean management, policymaking, and climate resilience.
- Fostering awareness of how human activities impact the environment - improving public awareness, understanding and engagement vis-à-vis the ocean is an essential component of the urgent action that needs to be undertaken, in particular with respect to the youth. Ocean literacy enhances our understanding of the ocean's role and leads to more informed decision-making and conservation efforts.
- Science diplomacy is important in view of its role in facilitating international collaboration on the global challenges facing us, promoting peace and sustainability. Ocean diplomacy

[1]The European Marine Observation and Data Network

plays a key role in the development and enforcement of international law, including UNCLOS and the BBNJ Agreement.

(3) Expected outcomes/deliverables of the discussion

- Deliberations on how to better translate science into policy when it comes to the ocean, exchange of ideas on how to improve the science-policy interface in view of evidence-based decision making.
- Promoting the use of digital ocean systems and information services to provide accessible, open data, tools and services to help States, and particularly Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries meet their priorities and international commitments, support their sustainable blue economy and the sustainable management of marine resources.
- Sharing information on digital twins of the ocean as a unique opportunity to engage in global co-design, thus ensuring equity, capacity building, and answering real needs. In turn, this will feed into international data and ocean prediction efforts, showing the added value, identifying priorities and guiding the work with a user demand approach.
- Calling focus to the importance of science diplomacy in addressing the scale and complexity of ocean challenges requires. Strengthening partnerships among governments, international organisations, and the scientific community is critical for developing digital ocean tools. Supporting initiatives like the EU Copernicus Marine Service and the UN Ocean Decade will continue to foster innovation, promote knowledge-sharing, and build global capacity.

Panel i. Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the UNCLOS.

(1) Concrete topics to be discussed within the specific Ocean Action Panel

- The entry into force and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement
- The role of international law in facilitating capacity-building
- The interlinkages between the BBNJ Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, for achieving the collective commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, as well as other relevant frameworks.

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- UNCLOS sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. The entry into force and the successful implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, the 3rd implementing agreement under UNCLOS, are critical for safeguarding marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and achieving the ocean-related targets of the 2030 Agenda. Sixty ratifications are required for the BBNJ Agreement to enter into force. Many of the signatories are considering ratifying the Agreement as well as the necessary steps to prepare implementation, but they are sometimes encountering legal, technical and financial obstacles.
- The provisions of the BBNJ Agreement will foster and strengthen UNCLOS provisions on capacity-building, particularly for developing countries that lack the resources, the scientific knowledge and the technical know-how to implement complex marine governance frameworks, to sustainably use ocean resources and conserve marine ecosystems, to conduct scientific research, and enforce maritime laws. The BBNJ Agreement has the potential to facilitate stronger partnerships between developed and developing countries, to enhance the sharing of expertise, to increase capacity levels, and foster technology transfers.
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the BBNJ Agreement complement each other. The former sets ambitious global goals and targets for halting biodiversity loss, while the latter focuses on the conservation of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Serving the goals of one will necessarily promote the achievement of the goals of the other. For instance, capacity building on marine protected areas in areas within national jurisdiction will facilitate international cooperation in the establishment of marine protected areas on the high seas. The establishment of marine protected areas on the high seas will contribute to achieving the 30/30 target of the KMGBF. Working on the complementarities between the KMGBF and the BBNJ Agreement will thus strengthen global efforts to protect biodiversity, mitigate the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems, and ensure that conservation measures are consistent across different legal regimes.

(3) Expected outcome/deliverable of the discussion

- A roadmap to the ratification and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement: it is suggested that, based on an exchange between States that will have already ratified the Treaty and are

preparing for its implementation and those that are willing to engage in this process, the panel develops general guidance on the ratification and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. This could include identifying key areas for cooperation, highlighting potential challenges, identifying possible solutions and exploring the types of support that might be needed for overcoming difficulties. Creating a clear and actionable roadmap for ratification and implementation will help ensure that the Treaty's provisions lead to tangible outcomes.

- Recommendations for achieving the UNCLOS and BBNJ provisions on capacity-building. The discussion could touch on ways to assist developing countries in strengthening their capacities, possible new relevant cooperation initiatives and flagship experiences.
- Recommendations for collaborative conservation efforts between the KMGBF and the BBNJ Agreement, through, for instance, identifying areas of common interest and joint capacity-building initiatives. The recommendations could also serve as a basis for holding an expert workshop on scientific and technical work, including cross-sectoral areas of work conducted under the Convention on Biological Diversity to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, as envisaged in Decision CBD/COP/16/L.17. Reference to the role of EBSAs (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas) in the implementation of the BBNJ and the potential synergies between the two processes.

Panel j. Mobilizing finance for ocean actions in the support of SDG14

(1) Concrete topics to be discussed within the specific Ocean Action Panel

- How to scale up ocean impact investing and how to advance the understanding, impact and challenges of current public and private finance initiatives for scaling up a sustainable ocean-based economy approaches and enable sustainable livelihoods.
- Highlighting tools such as innovative financing instruments, blue bonds, sustainably themed bonds, natural capital accounting and carbon credits.

(2) Why these topics should be discussed

- Currently, there is significant underinvestment in initiatives aimed at protecting and restoring ocean health. At the same time, the urgency of discussing this topic, particularly in relation to the implementation of SDG14, is underscored by the critical state of the ocean. Asset owners are increasingly recognising the potential for sustainable blue investment adding even more relevance to the conversation.

(3) Expected deliverables/outcomes of the discussion

- More clarity on necessary actions for scaling up public and private investment into ocean ecosystems and biodiversity by regulatory authorities and asset owners. On the one hand, in terms of metrics and data needs, and on the other hand, in terms of innovative financing instruments (e.g. blended finance, blue bonds) including grants and concessional loans form public and innovative sources.
- Publication of the sustainable guidelines by OECD regarding sustainable ocean economy.
- Call for multilateral development banks and vertical funds to enhance their share of sustainable blue projects funded.
- Invite specific multilateral development banks and relevant stakeholders to present blue finance projects.