

## **5th Symposium on Global Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance – keynote speech by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG’s Special Envoy for the Ocean**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

All courtesies observed and thank you for the privilege of addressing you all  
this morning, here in the beautiful coastal setting of Sanya. On behalf of all  
those visitors present at the symposium, I give heartfelt thanks for the  
wonderful hospitality we have received here in Hainan.

When we consider Global Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance, we  
must consider that there is only one ocean on this planet and that our  
relationship with it should be one of respect for its well-being, couched firmly  
within the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (known as  
UNCLOS), and other relevant international agreements such as the London  
Convention on Marine Pollution. Notably, within UNCLOS we find the  
provisions for Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, and the mandate  
for 38% of the ocean being designated as the Exclusive Economic Zones of  
coastal States.

It is now well-acknowledged that the *Sustainable* Blue Economy is key to  
humankind’s future on this planet. Note my emphasis on the word sustainable,  
for what we are talking about is movement towards circular economic models  
operating with planetary ecological boundaries – moving, in fact, in the  
direction of the ecological civilization proposed by President Xi Jinping. As such  
we are talking about the greening of shipping, offshore renewable energy,  
truly sustainable aquaculture, and the development of nutraceuticals and  
pharmaceuticals derived from the ocean; we are in fact talking about the green  
transition, moving away from humanity’s addiction to fossil fuels to an  
equitably electrified world powered by renewable energy. In that vein, thank  
you China, for what you have done to drive down the cost of solar panels in  
the just cause of the green transition.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I believe we can take great heart from the fact that there has been of late, a wave of international consensus in support of correcting the course of our relationship with Nature. It is fair to say that the world is now awake to the scale of our predicament, and that international attention has moved to questions of required action, with science and finance at the core of this discourse.

Starting with the UN Environment Assembly's 2022 decision to begin negotiations for an internationally binding treaty to control plastic pollution, we've witnessed since then a remarkable run of hard-won multilateral environmental agreements, all of which have positive impacts on the SDGs' prospects for realization. The Plastics Treaty is currently under multilateral negotiation, and with its Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee currently meeting in Busan, we have the chance, a once in a generation chance, to deal with the scourge of marine plastic pollution and robustly address the full life-cycle of plastic.

It was in December 2022 that the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity came to the remarkable international consensus of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Chinese presidency of the CBD process led us to this massive step forward in our relationship with Mother Nature, with SDG14 benefitting hugely through the framework's target of protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030.

The global ocean community looks to China's good offices for positive action on this legacy, particularly in relation to the achievement of the framework's 30x30 target. The establishment of large Antarctic marine protected areas totaling 4.5 million square kilometres of the ocean under the control of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) will be essential to achieving 30x30; thus, in tandem with agreement on an improved krill management plan, we hope China will be in the vanguard of making this a reality.

And then, along with its other welcome provisions in favour of good governance of the High Seas, the BBNJ Treaty adopted at the UN last year also gave a major boost to the Biodiversity Framework's 30% target, through its

introduction of Area Based Management Tools that will enable the establishment of large marine protected areas in the High Seas. With its provisions for cooperation in the governance the High Seas, this treaty represents the greatest step forward in good stewardship of the ocean since the inception of UNCLOS. The ratification process of BBNJ is now underway and to help it to come into force as soon as possible, we dearly hope that China will ratify the treaty before the UN Ocean Conference next June.

Meanwhile SDG14 still labours under the 34% over-fishing statistic reported by FAO for assessed global fish-stocks. One in five fish are estimated to be caught illegally. But with every new signature of FAO's Port State Measures Agreement, we come one step closer to eliminating illegal fishing and we trust that China will soon be one of its signatories.

And at the same time, work on the elimination of harmful fisheries subsidies continues to make steady advances at the World Trade Organisation and it has been very encouraging to observe the prominent role China has played in resolving these issues in Geneva. Anything more China can do to bring these negotiations to a successful close, will be gratefully acknowledged by the global ocean community.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, I should say that following on from the huge support SDG14 received from the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in 2023, we are now building towards the third UN Ocean Conference to be held in Nice, in the south of France, 9 to 13 June 2025. I bring your attention to the fact that the conference will be preceded by three special events, the first being the One Ocean Science Congress in Nice; the second being the Blue Economy and Finance Forum in Monaco; with the third being in Nice on the implications of rising sea levels for cities and coastal communities. These special events will be held during the week directly preceding the Ocean Conference itself. I hope to meet many of you at the conference and these special events.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You may have heard my daily mantra, "there can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean's health is currently, measurably in decline." As parents and grandparents, we are summoned by the principle of intergenerational justice, to halt and reverse that decline.

It is a tough demand, especially when at a time that solutions are so desperately needed, we find our scientific knowledge of ocean is insufficient. And so, in the face of the massive challenges and responsibilities confronting us, the question becomes one of “what are we going to do about it?” Many of the answers to that question will be discussed here at the symposium in Sanya and I look forward to hearing from you all.

Thank you for your attention.

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