OHRLLS Inputs to concept papers of the Ocean Action Panels – 2025 UN Ocean Conference

OHRLLS supports the proposed themes for the ocean action panels. The themes address priorities for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, as articulated in their respective programmes of action.

OHRLLS urges the inclusion of the three groups of vulnerable nations, where appropriate, on the panels in terms of discussion and participation of representatives from the three groups of countries.

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

- Fisheries, including inland fisheries, are vital for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS; providing food security, employment, and economic benefits and accounting for about 70% of SIDS exports (FAO, 2022). However, these nations often face challenges such as overfishing and limited resources for effective management.
- Among SIDS, there has been limited improvement since 2011 for sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP (SDG target 14.7), with only a minimal increase from 0.49 to 0.51 over the 10-year period (FAO, 2024).
- Given the critical role of fisheries for livelihoods, food security, and economic growth, participation by these nations in this panel is essential.
- The Doha Programme of Action for LDCs (DPoA) underscores the eradication of poverty and the promotion of food security to support economic empowerment in LDCs.
- The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) recognizes the need to increase sustainable fisheries aligned with sustainable fisheries management to support local livelihoods.
- Initiatives like FAO's Sustainable Fish Value Chains for Small Island Developing States (SVC4SIDS) which aims to enhance fisheries' sustainability by improving value chains and supporting small-scale fishers can be featured in this panel.
- LDCs and SIDS can offer insights into best practices and addressing challenges in sustainable fisheries management, particularly for small-scale fishers in coastal and island communities.

LDCs

- Fishing, both coastal and inland, holds significant potential for socioeconomic development for a number of LDCs. Many have comparative advantages in fishery

resources due to a combination of low-cost labour and waters rich in highly-prized varieties of fish.

- However, LDCs LLDCs and SIDS are not well positioned to take advantage of their endowed resources and face a number of challenges from meeting safety and quality requirements of importing countries, trade barriers and investing in sustainable fisheries.
- As a result, while fisheries and aquaculture have acquired significant globalization over the past three decades, LDCs for instance only contribute a small percentage (around 3.5%) to the total global fish export market (UNCTAD).
- For LDCs as a group, fish and seafood make up the seventh largest export overall, and the largest food item exported. However, and despite its importance, the sector is often underdeveloped, and the bulk of fish exports frequently consists of few products sold to a limited number of importing markets (UNCTAD, 2018). Sustainable fisheries management and expanding fish exports hold untapped potential for economic diversification towards achieving the SDGs in the LDCs.
- Both public and private investments have a role to play in fostering sustainable ocean-based fisheries management in LDCs and SIDS.
- International community must step up their financial and technical assistance to help these countries build their institutional and human resources capacities to meet international safety and quality standards.
- SIDS and LDCs require support for monitoring fish stocks and surveillance of fishing require resources and capacities that most of these countries lack, undermining efforts to prevent illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

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

- For this panel, SIDS, with their rich biodiversity and ecosystems that are highly vulnerable to climate change, are well placed to share successful initiatives and partnerships focused on ecosystem restoration, including coral reefs and mangroves. Blue carbon ecosystems (e.g., mangroves, seagrasses, salt marshes) play an important role as carbon sinks that are maintained by SIDS.

- While accounting for less than 0.5% of the world's surface area, SIDS are home to more than 20% of the world's biodiversity and 40% of the world's coral reefs. However, it is estimated that 75% of the coral reefs in SIDS are currently threatened by climate change (UN, accessed 2024).The ABAS prioritizes ecosystem restoration as a resilience measure, particularly in coral reefs, mangroves, and coastal areas essential to the survival of SIDS communities.
- LDCs often lack the necessary technology and funding to conduct deep-sea research, hindering their understanding of the ecosystems within their exclusive economic zones and limiting their ability to manage them sustainably.
  Refer to the UN-OHRLLD/ISA joint project on empowering women from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in deep-sea research.

https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/files/widsr_executive_summary.pdf.
The majority of the participating countries (73%) highlight engaging and investing in deep-sea research as very important for their countries. This is notably the case for SIDS, 92 per cent of which reported investing in deep-sea research as very important, followed by 60 per cent of LDCs and 40per cent of LLDCs.

c. Promoting and supporting all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional and subregional levels

- LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS all play key roles in this area. LLDCs can underscore the importance of regional cooperation to gain access to maritime resources and build resilience, while LDCs and SIDS can highlight regional agreements and cooperation frameworks (such as the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent) critical for addressing shared challenges, such as climate resilience and sustainable fisheries management.
- The average distance to a seaport for LLDCs is 1,370 km. LLDCs depend on transit routes through neighbouring countries to get to global markets, and face significantly higher trading costs, often double that of countries with coastlines.
- The ABAS advocates for integrated and participatory governance frameworks, ensuring inclusivity in decision-making processes for regional and subregional cooperation.
- The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) exemplifies regional collaboration, assisting member countries in managing and conserving tuna stocks through agreements such as the Nauru Agreement.

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

- SIDS and LDCs, given their heightened vulnerability to external pollution sources, bring valuable perspectives. SIDS can share experiences with marine litter and pollution prevention, while LDCs can discuss the impacts of land-based pollution on coastal areas.
- SIDS are vulnerable to the negative effects of plastic pollution due to their limited land and water resources, as well as their reliance on tourism as a source of income. SIDS account for 1.56% of the global contribution to mismanaged waste and have an average waste generation per capita of 2.3 kg/day (SIDS Global Data Hub, 2024).
- The ABAS supports investment in modern, integrated waste management systems to combat marine pollution effectively.

e. Leveraging ocean, climate, and biodiversity interlinkages

- SIDS control 19.1% of the world's EEZs and are well placed to provide insights into the interconnected impacts of ocean, climate, and biodiversity in the SIDS regions.
- The ABAS specifically highlights the need for strategies to address ocean acidification, which has severe implications for biodiversity and fisheries.
- Initiatives like the SIDS Coalition for Nature aim to integrate nature-based solutions into climate action, enhancing resilience and promoting sustainable development.
- Investments in ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions more broadly can return significant economic benefits. For example, between 10 and 40 jobs are supported per $1 million invested in nature-based approaches (UNEP, 2021).

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

- For this panel, contributions from SIDS and LDCs are vital, as they can underscore the economic significance of sustainable blue economies in supporting local resilience and growth. SIDS may focus on sustainable tourism and fisheries, while LDCs could address aspects of coastal community resilience and economic diversification.
- Globally the ocean economy amounts to approximately $3.6 trillion a year and contributes 150 million jobs. SIDS are pioneering blue-economy frameworks and nature-based solutions (UNDP, 2024).
- The ABAS highlights ocean-based renewable energy, such as offshore wind, tidal, and wave energy, as a priority for sustainable blue economy development.
- SIDS are exploring sustainable ocean-based economies, including eco-friendly tourism, renewable energy, and sustainable fisheries, to boost economic growth and resilience. The concept of the blue economy offers opportunities for SIDS to utilize ocean resources sustainably while ensuring the well-being of coastal communities.

g. Promoting the role of sustainable food from the ocean for poverty eradication and food security

- LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS all hold a stake in this topic. For this panel, SIDS and LDCs can highlight the role of ocean-derived food in ensuring nutrition and economic security, while LLDCs can speak to regional food security initiatives that link them to marine resources.

- The ABAS emphasizes equity in access to marine resources for vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples and small-scale fishers, ensuring social justice in ocean-based food systems.
- In the case of Pacific SIDS, fish and seafood provides 50-90% of the protein consumed by people of the Pacific with the majority of this catch coming from coastal stocks. However, challenges such as overfishing, habitat degradation, and climate change pose threats to these vital resources.
- According to the FAO, fish accounted for around 26 percent of animal protein intake in LDCs. In coastal LDCs, this figure is as high as 50% (Cambodia, the Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Togo).
- Beyond their importance to food security and exports, fisheries are also deeply embedded in the social, economic and cultural fabric of many coastal LDCs. Limiting the overexploitation of resources is essential to maintaining fishing as an income-generating activity and means of food security for millions of people living in SIDS and coastal communities in LDCs where alternative opportunities for livelihood and food resources are sparse and limited.

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

- For this panel, LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS each offer unique perspectives. LLDCs can address the need for shared access to scientific data and technology. SIDS and LDCs may discuss capacity-building efforts for sustainable ocean resource management and the integration of traditional knowledge systems.
- SIDS face well-documented capacity constraints in undertaking marine scientific research and accessing the technology and resources necessary (AOSIS, 2022).
- Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is emphasized in the ABAS as a critical tool for balancing competing ocean uses and achieving sustainable outcomes.

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

- SIDS and LDCs are highly relevant here, as they face distinct challenges in the enforcement and realization of benefits under UNCLOS provisions.
- The ABAS emphasizes the need to build SIDS' capacity in understanding their rights, obligations, and responsibilities under UNCLOS, including enabling their effective participation in activities under UNCLOS.
- SIDS are also leading in the ratification of the BBNJ Agreement.
- In the Pacific, the Pacific Islands Forum aims to fully secure and establish maritime zones under UNCLOS and maximize and protect jurisdictional rights and entitlements that flow from maritime zones and on the high seas and airspace.

j. Mobilizing finance for ocean actions in support of SDG14

- LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS have critical needs for financial support to advance sustainable ocean goals. SIDS like the Seychelles, Barbados, and Belize could share experience with blue finance initiatives. LDCs could discuss broader development financing requirements, and LLDCs could focus on facilitating access to finance for regional initiatives.
- Between 2018 and 2021, no more than 1.55% of total global ODA flows accrued to SIDS (SIDS4 Fact Sheet, 2024).
- Despite being highly vulnerable to climate change, SIDS also have little access to climate finance, with only USD 1.5 billion out of USD $100 billion in climate finance pledged to developing countries in 2019) (SIDS4 Fact Sheet, 2024).
- The ABAS seeks support in developing and promoting innovative financing solutions to drive the transformation to sustainable ocean-based economies in SIDS.
- A 2020 analysis by the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy estimated that every dollar invested in effective ocean management generates an average return of five dollars in economic, environmental, and human health benefits. Restoring and protecting vulnerable marine and coastal ecosystems can greatly enhance and diversify the economies of SIDS.

Suggested Speakers

- Dr. Filimon Manoni, Pacific Ocean Commissioner
- Sefanaia Nawadra, Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
- Dr. Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen, Director General, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
- Dr. Stacy Jupiter, Executive Director, Wildlife Conservation Society
- Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Marshallese poet and climate activist (Known for her speeches and advocacy for climate resilience in SIDS)
- Brianna Fruean (Samoan climate activist and Pacific Youth Council member, deeply engaged in ocean and climate issues from a youth perspective.)
- Kristal Ambrose, Executive Director, Bahamas Plastic Movement
- Ms. Karolin Rudetsky, Executive Director of Marketing and Operations, Anse Chastanet and Jade Mountain Resorts
- Ms. Legena Henry, CEO & Founder of Rum & Sargassum Inc.
- Ms. Nicky Myers, General Manager, Alligator Head Foundation, Jamaica

- Selina Neirok Leem, Youth Climate Change activist (Marshall Islands)
- Dr M. Shiham Adam (Director for Science and the Maldives at International Pole & Line Foundation).
- Dr. Hussain Sinan, Director General, Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources, Maldives (focused on equitable governance in transboundary species, particularly tuna and tuna-like species in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs).
- Aminath Shazly, Senior Lecturer at The Maldives National University/Environment Manager/Conservationist/ Mangrove Researcher/Climate Change Advocate