



UNODC inputs to the concept papers of the 'Ocean Action Panels' *2025 UN Oceans Conference*

Fostering sustainable fisheries management including supporting small-scale fishers.

While significant progress has been made to achieve Target 14.4, the fisheries sector remains highly vulnerable to unsustainable exploitation and multiple crimes, including corruption, document fraud, illegal fishing, and human trafficking. Criminality and unlawful activities linked to the fisheries sector not only threaten the health of the ocean but also, increasingly, have a negative impact on the economies of coastal countries, fuel corruption and create conditions in which further crime - including serious and organized crime - can be perpetrated. To succeed in the fight against these crimes, and in addressing IUU fishing, the traditional fisheries management approach needs to be complemented by a criminal justice approach.

In addition, the fisheries sector is particularly vulnerable to corruption due to the global nature of the fishing industry, the quick depletion of the fisheries resources and the lack of transparency in the sector. Addressing corruption in the sector not only strengthens regulatory and legal frameworks but also contributes to the achievement of SDG 14 and SDG 16. As with other crimes in the fisheries sector, corruption happens on land and often in a single jurisdiction, providing therefore less jurisdictional challenges. Additionally, corruption leaves a documentary and money trail which can provide concrete proof of criminal activity, and also enable higher penalties since corruption has usually higher penalties than those for other fisheries offences.

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

Current efforts to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources are undermined by crime and illegality. Organized criminal groups exploits gaps in national compliance and enforcement regimes including criminal justice systems and take advantage of vulnerable value supply chains in the natural resources sectors by engaging, for instance, in crimes in the fisheries sector and the trafficking and illegal dumping of waste in the ocean. These crimes can have far-reaching and cross-sectoral and transnational impacts on economies, security, human health, and can directly contribute to marine pollution, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in the oceans.

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

With the effects of maritime security threats being felt globally and the transnational nature of maritime environmental crimes, there is an urgent need for cross-regional international cooperation in which best practices are shared and capacities are built to support developing and less resourceful countries. This includes promoting innovative partnerships to link maritime security and ocean resilience objectives.

International cooperation goes beyond improving the operational capacity of States. International initiatives to improve the capacity and effectiveness of domestic judicial systems, through the entire criminal justice chain and prevention measures, are fundamental to addressing maritime security challenges, including those posed by environmental crimes in the ocean, and strengthening current ocean conservation approaches.

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



The increasing convergence between certain organized crime activities and marine pollution, with illicit operations ranging from local activities to large-scale intercontinental trafficking worth millions of USD, is a growing concern. While significant efforts have been made to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution, ocean dumping and illegal waste run-off from land persist as a looming threat. Pollution crimes in the marine environment include activities that cause harm to the marine environment through the dumping or releasing of toxic material or other pollutants into the ocean, including the intentional or direct dumping of waste and polluting substances, such as hydrocarbons. Addressing these crimes requires enhanced international cooperation, stronger regulations, and more robust enforcement to hold polluters accountable.

Leveraging ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages.

Pollution at sea, marine environmental degradation and climate change are intrinsically interlinked and exacerbating each other, as highlighted in the [June 2023 EU joint communication](#) on threats of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security and defense, with an increased risk of instability, insecurity and even conflict.

Despite significant progress in designating Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and accelerating ocean biodiversity conservation efforts, the effectiveness of Area-based Management Tools (ABMTs) and other protection regimes remains compromised without effective monitoring and robust enforcement by law enforcement agencies, especially against crimes in the maritime environment including organized crime in the fisheries sector. While there has been an increase in marine conservation efforts, most coastal States still lack the basic resources and capabilities needed to adequately govern and monitor their maritime domains and regulate the activities taking place in protected areas. MPAs represent maritime spaces where, by definition, biodiversity is richer than elsewhere, which often incurs stricter penalties for violations of regulations pertaining to biodiversity protection. Therefore, criminal justice instruments need to be calibrated to the special considerations required for protection biodiversity in MPAs, in particular from the perspective of personal active criminal jurisdiction, flag and port state criminal jurisdictions, in relation to serious regulatory violations pertaining to marine pollution and illegal fishing.

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

While State actors are at the forefront of ensuring maritime security and promoting ocean conservation efforts, it is increasingly important to engage with coastal communities which are the most vulnerable to organized crime, in developing coherent and comprehensive approaches to maritime security and ocean conservation challenges. Reduced fish stocks, stricter fisheries regulations, climate change and inability to derive decent livelihoods from fishing activities have pushed fishers to engage in criminal activities, mostly drug trafficking. There is a critical need to collaborate closely with coastal communities, who are most vulnerable to the degradation of marine resources, environmental crimes at sea, and other forms of maritime crime.

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

It is important to recognize that the ocean governance agenda will not be achieved by focused on SDG 14 alone. The role of SDG 16 is directly relevant to a sustainable ocean future, because it underpins the need to consider the rule of law given the vulnerabilities that the ocean is exposed to through illegal exploitation and other crimes that affect the marine environment.