

TBC – NATIONAL STATEMENT

TIME: 5 MINS

WORD COUNT: 985 (6 mins)

Thank you. It's my pleasure to speak on behalf of Australia.

I begin by paying my respects to First Nations people as the Traditional Custodians of sea Country in Australia. And I acknowledge their enduring connection to Country, and the contribution of Indigenous peoples everywhere, in protecting the natural environment.

In Australia, First Nations peoples have sustainably used and managed coastal land and sea for more than 65,000 years. Their knowledge, stewardship of the marine environment and participation in the ocean economy are essential to Australia's ocean story.

And now, more than 6 million hectares of sea Country, our ocean, is now managed by Indigenous Rangers, to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in our ocean protection.

Australia is an island nation, and the ocean is at the heart of our national identity.

Nearly 9 in 10 Australians live near the coast.

The ocean is critical to our economic prosperity, health and social wellbeing, and it connects us with our region and the rest of the world.

Our vast ocean territory supports vibrant communities, breathtaking tourism, busy shipping routes, energy production and some of the best-managed fisheries in the world.

It's also home to spectacularly rich biodiversity, spanning ecosystems from the cold waters around Antarctica to the tropics, and from teeming inshore reefs to deepwater seamounts.

So having recognised the importance of the ocean, I'm delighted to now share that Australia is delivering on its ambitious commitments for marine conservation. And we will *continue* to take action to ensure a healthy ocean that supports a thriving ocean economy.

Since the last UNOC in 2022 we've expanded our marine parks from 37 per cent to 52 per cent, far exceeding the target.

This means we now protect more ocean than any other country on Earth. And it's clear that we can achieve 30 percent of our marine protected area estate in highly protected areas by 2030 – another great step.

But Australia's national marine protected area network is only part of the puzzle.

We are developing our Sustainable Ocean Plan, which involves extensive engagement across the Australian Government, with our state and territory governments, First Nations communities and a broad range of ocean industries, conservation organisations, and the research community.

Because it's only by working together that we achieve what our ocean needs.

Australia is very fortunate to be home to both First Nations peoples' Traditional Knowledge and world-leading marine science.

We have a community of ocean industries and users who are committed to a healthy ocean that supports a strong and fair ocean economy.

And we have a vision that connect us to our region and globally.

Our region is at the frontline of the climate emergency and the Pacific has a long and impressive record of climate leadership.

This is why we think it's time for a Climate COP in the Pacific region. COP31 would be an unprecedented opportunity to bring global attention to the unique challenges and opportunities in the Blue Pacific.

Our commitment to host an Australia-Pacific COP has never been stronger.

Like the ocean and climate systems themselves, our ocean and climate commitments are connected. Australia recognises that the ocean offers solutions to climate change.

That's why we're investing in offshore renewable energy, green shipping and blue carbon projects to restore coastal ecosystems and improve water quality.

Plastic pollution is another major challenge facing our planet and the ocean and we're committed to the global fight to solve it.

A strong global response through the plastic pollution treaty negotiations is urgently required to stem the flow of plastics into our ocean and ensure a sustainable ocean economy.

I call on all negotiators to come together in Geneva, this August, and agree the text for an effective global treaty that the planet and people are calling for.

Through regional and global partnerships, we're tackling plastics, such as ghost nets and single-use plastics, in the Pacific, and the Arafura and Timor seas.

Australia is also taking significant steps to manage plastic pollution at home and transition to a more circular economy.

We welcome the OECD Recommendation on Eliminating Government Support to illegal, unregulated and unreported Fishing and commit to implementing its provisions in support of efforts to combat these fishing practices.

Australia understands that in order to change the ocean, we must work together and take action.

Australia was proud to sign the High Seas Treaty, and we're committed to ratification.

We're among a handful of countries that require domestic implementing legislation prior to ratification. This puts us in a good position to be able to quickly implement the treaty when it comes into force. And this week at UNOC we have confirmed that Australia will introduce enabling legislation for the Treaty in Australia's Spring sitting of Parliament, with ratification as soon as possible after that.

We have also accepted Chile's invitation to join the 'BBNJ First Movers', a coalition of countries championing high seas marine protected areas. And we're proud to be co-chairing with Belize the Preparatory Commission, which is preparing for the treaty's entry into force.

We're also working with our neighbours in the Pacific, southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to plan for the implementation of the treaty in our region.

Because we recognise the important leadership of countries in our region in shaping responses to this challenge.

As a Pacific nation we cherish our relationships and shared ocean with our neighbours in the region.

Pacific Island countries are strong international ocean policy leaders and Australia is proud to work closely with them to strengthen our efforts to ensure a sustainable global ocean.

We're also proud to have co-facilitated the political declaration for UNOC with Cabo Verde.

At this ocean conference we look forward to building on the progress we have made so far to ensure a healthy ocean.

I acknowledge we don't have all the answers.

But we all agree on the destination and together we must determine how to reach it.

Thank you.