

Meeting of the Communities of Ocean Action
From Commitments to Action: Implementing SDG14
Incheon, Republic of Korea
30-31 May 2019

Background

The ocean and its resources give great support to human well-being and livelihoods. They underpin poverty eradication, food security, employment, tourism and protection from natural disasters. They provide humans with water and oxygen while also acting as the primary regulator of the global climate and a giant sink for greenhouse gases. Marine and coastal ecosystems provide a vital basis for the livelihoods of coastal communities.

However, human activities continue to threaten the well-being of the ocean and its resources. These threats include unsustainable fishing practices and harmful fisheries subsidies, and ineffective waste management that results in various kinds of marine pollution, such as plastic pollution and nutrient pollution. For example, the fraction of world marine fish stocks that are within biologically sustainable levels has declined from 90% in 1974 to 66.9% in 2015. In addition, these threats are exacerbated by the adverse impacts of climate change and ocean acidification, the long-term observations of which over the past 30 years have shown an average increase of acidity of 26% since pre-industrial times. Their cumulative impacts adversely affect marine and coastal ecosystems, as well as important habitats, such as mangroves and coral reefs.

Conservation and the sustainable use of the ocean and marine resources continue to require effective strategies and management to combat the adverse effects of human activities, including through enhanced protection using area-based management tools, such as marine protected areas. In this regard, actions aimed to increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, through sustained funding, as well as the full implementation of international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, for sustainable development, remain critically important to the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and marine resources. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 and its ten targets (including those on means of implementation), inter alia, aim to address the above-mentioned challenges facing our ocean. The sustainable blue economy would benefit from and contribute to these various types of ocean actions aimed to conserve and sustainably use the ocean and its resources.

The Ocean Conference in 2017 aimed to raise awareness about the deteriorating health of the world's ocean. The first ever UN Conference on this issue, the Ocean Conference, discussed and promoted the implementation of SDG 14 – to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources – generating new dialogues and partnerships aimed at implementing

solutions. It raised the profile of the multiple and diverse threats to the world's ocean that affect people's lives ranging from land-based pollution to coral bleaching, overfishing, marine habitat degradation, ocean acidification and the impacts of climate change as well as the importance of healthy oceans to sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs.

In resolution 71/312 adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017 entitled "Our ocean, our future: call for action", Member States acknowledged that the wellbeing of present and future generations is linked to the health and productivity of our ocean and reiterated their commitment to achieve the targets of Goal 14 within the timelines, and more importantly, the vital need to sustain action over the long term.

Recognizing that halting and reversing the declining health of the world's ocean will require action on all levels, governments, UN system, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic and research institutions, the scientific community, and the private sector, among others, made nearly 1,400 voluntary commitments. Commitments include various local, regional, national, and global projects that drive the implementation of SDG 14, ranging from awareness campaigns on marine mammals to developing innovative means of financing for marine and ocean-based projects.

To follow-up on the implementation of the voluntary commitments, the UN has launched nine thematic multi-stakeholder Communities of Ocean Action (COAs) which are closely aligned with the targets of SDG14. Each Community is coordinated by designated Co-focal points who are representatives from UN system entities and other stakeholders who work together with UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson, and UN DESA in carrying out the activities. The nine COAs are:

1. Coral reefs,
2. Implementation of international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,
3. Mangroves,
4. Marine and coastal ecosystems management,
5. Marine pollution,
6. Ocean acidification,
7. Scientific knowledge, research capacity development and transfer of marine technology,
8. Sustainable blue economy and
9. Sustainable fisheries.

On 9 May 2019, the General Assembly adopted resolution 73/292 on the 2020 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 by consensus. In the resolution, the Assembly decided to convene the Conference in Lisbon from 2 to 6 June 2020, to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and decided on the modalities of the Conference. The Governments of Kenya and Portugal will co-host the Conference. The overarching theme of the Conference will be "Scaling up Ocean Action based on science and innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions".

Objectives for the meeting

In concert with the Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, UN DESA convened a meeting of Co-focal points and Sherpas of the Communities of Ocean Action (COAs) in November 2018 to discuss elements of a strategic preparatory process in the lead up to the proposed UN Ocean Conference in 2020. The meeting had three sessions: Session I:

Identification of gaps, good practices and lessons learned in the delivery of the voluntary commitments (VCs); Session II: Updates and progress in the preparation of the COAs mid-term evaluations, including preliminary analysis; Session III: Envisaged activities for the COAs in 2019, to maximize their contributions to the proposed UN Ocean Conference in 2020. A fourth interactive session was held to facilitate an exchange of ideas and highlight common concerns among the Sherpas.

A recent surge in pledges to conserve and sustainably use our ocean pushed the number of concrete actions registered on the United Nations' global platform for voluntary commitments to over 1,500, signaling that health of our ocean remains a priority for many governments, businesses and civil society organizations around the world. That over 100 commitments have been made in the year since the Conference shows that progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 is moving ahead. The new commitments, like the others, have joined the nine COAs.

With a growing list of more than 1,500 voluntary commitments, the [online register](#) remains open for additional commitments. The meeting of the Communities of Ocean Action in Incheon aims to share best practices and experiences amongst the members of different COAs and any interested stakeholders. The meeting will bring together Co-focal points and Sherpas of COAs and representatives of entities that have registered commitments with the platform provided by UNDESA. It is aimed towards the delivery of VCs, providing partnership opportunities and engaging with relevant VC holders. The meeting will catalyze and generate new voluntary commitments and facilitate collaboration among different actors in support of SDG 14. Stakeholders, in particular those who have made commitments will share good practices and lessons learned in the delivery of the voluntary commitments and identify gaps and obstacles to their implementation.

The meeting is aimed to contribute to the preparatory process in the lead-up to the UN Ocean Conference in 2020. Moving from commitment to action will be an important aspect of long-term work towards implementing SDG14. The Incheon meeting through the building of partnerships and the exchange of ideas, will mark a step towards accomplishing our common objectives in ocean conservation and sustainability.

Also, this year, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will complete its first cycle of review of the SDGs. The progress and implementation towards all the 17 goals will be reviewed in detail and by July this year 143 Member States will have presented their unique perspectives on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through their Voluntary National Reviews. The wealth of information from these Voluntary National Reviews gives us new impetus to forge ahead with the task on hand: namely implementation of our common objectives in sustainable development including SDG14 and especially its four targets that are maturing in 2020. Key messages from the Incheon meeting will inform the deliberations of the High-Level Political Forum in July.

Finally, in the lead up towards the United Nations Ocean Conference in 2020, UN DESA will launch a renewed website for SDG14. This website will broaden its focus to cover not only the Ocean Conference, the voluntary commitments registry and the COAs, but also all ocean action being undertaken by UN system entities towards SDG 14 implementation. As part of the rebranding exercise, elements from the work done by entities within the UN system relevant to SDG14 implementation could be highlighted as well as experiences from the field. In addition,

participants will begin developing ideas to maximize their contribution to the 2020 Ocean Conference, as well as for a communications plan to promote it.

Outcomes of the Meeting of the Communities of Ocean Action

The following will be the main outcomes that are intended to launch the preparatory process towards the 2020 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:

- Provide partnership opportunities and engage with relevant VC holders.
- Catalyze and generate additional voluntary commitments in the lead up to the UN Ocean Conference in 2020.
- Key messages/input to the HLPF in 2019 under the auspices of ECOSOC in July and the HLPF Summit in September.
- Launch a renewed website for ocean action, which will showcase activities that support the implementation of SDG14.
- Develop ideas for a communications action plan for the UN Ocean Conference in 2020.

Participants

Participants include Co-focal points of the Communities of Ocean Action (COAs) and their Sherpas, and representatives of stakeholders working towards the implementation of SDG14, particularly those that have made Ocean Conference voluntary commitments.