



*Photo: Ethan Daniels, UN World Oceans Day photo contest winner*



# OCEAN ACTION

## Ocean Action Newsletter: Vol. 13

**April 2020: UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon postponed  
as world grapples with COVID-19 pandemic**

[un.org/oceanconference](https://un.org/oceanconference)

Mother Earth is sending the world a message, says United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in his [message for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Earth Day](#), celebrated on 22 April. He says more action is needed to protect nature in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change as well as worldwide health pandemics like COVID-19, which is linked to the health of our ecosystem.

While the coronavirus outbreak has postponed or canceled meetings around the world, including those related to the ocean, the UN’s work to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14 continues. Events are being planned with an eye towards “building back better,” when the health crisis subsides, respecting the close relationships between human, animal and environmental health.

“Let’s remind more than ever in this International Mother Earth Day that we need a shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet,” the Secretary-General says. “Let’s promote harmony with nature and the Earth.”

## 2020 UN Ocean Conference postponed

In light of the global coronavirus pandemic and growing public health concerns, the 2020 UN Ocean Conference, which was scheduled to take place from 2 to 6 June in Lisbon, Portugal, has been postponed per decision [74/548](#) adopted by the General Assembly on 13 April.



The Conference co-hosts, Portugal and Kenya, in consultation with the President of the General Assembly, will identify new dates for the Conference and timelines for its preparatory process, subject to the development of the pandemic.

Despite the postponement, efforts will continue to scale up ocean action based on science and innovation to mobilize, create and drive solutions to protect the ocean and marine resources and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14, Life Below Water.

The [registry of voluntary commitments](#) for ocean action remains open for everyone—from governments to civil society to businesses and individuals—to register their action in support of the ocean. Additionally, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing a series of webinars for key stakeholder groups to connect, mobilize and bring forward new ideas for keeping the momentum for ocean action. The details for those will be posted on the UN Ocean Conference website, [www.un.org/oceanconference](http://www.un.org/oceanconference).

The United Nations and its system of UN agencies continue to closely monitor the evolving situation and will provide updates, including a new date for the Ocean Conference, as soon as they become available.

The Governments of Kenya and Portugal issued a joint statement on the postponement: “Despite the obvious need to postpone the UN Ocean Conference as a result of unescapable public health concerns, we want to stress, as co-hosts, that our commitment to organize the UN Ocean Conference remains as strong and unwavering as always. We look forward to resuming the preparations as soon as possible in order to bring about ambitious, transformative, and effective action to save our ocean.”

## Preparatory meeting participants agree to themes for Ocean Conference Interactive Dialogues

Government ministers and representatives from civil society organizations, the business community, intergovernmental and UN agencies gathered in New York in early February to kick-off preparations for the UN Ocean Conference.

The Preparatory Meeting of the Ocean Conference, co-chaired by Palau and Denmark, defined key areas of ocean action, and emphasized the need for governments and other key decision-makers to deliver on their commitments. It was decided that the themes of the eight Interactive Dialogues at the Conference would be 1.) addressing marine pollution; 2.) managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems; 3.) minimizing and addressing ocean acidification, deoxygenation and ocean warming; 4.) making fisheries sustainable and providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets; 5.) promoting and strengthening sustainable ocean-based economies, in particular for small island developing States and least developed countries; 6.) increasing scientific knowledge, and developing research capacity and the transfer of marine technology; 7.) enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and; 8.) leveraging interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other goals towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **UN World Oceans Day 2020: Innovation for a Sustainable Ocean**

Since its inception in 2008, UN World Oceans Day (8 June) has celebrated the ocean and its importance to the planet and our lives, while raising awareness about the many threats it faces. As the challenges to the ocean continue to grow, so does the need for novel solutions and the people driving them.

To that end, the theme of UN World Oceans Day 2020 is “Innovation for a Sustainable Ocean.” Innovation—relating to the introduction of new methods, ideas, or products—is a dynamic term, and one that is fundamentally filled with hope. The UN World Oceans Day celebration will this year take place as a virtual event produced in partnership with Oceanic Global. The event will shed light on innovations from around the globe in areas of need that are both promising and proven, ones that instill optimism, and ones that have demonstrated the ability to scale effectively. It will also provide a platform to thought leaders of varied backgrounds, who are paving new paths forward for the health of our ocean and our planet as a whole. The programming of the day and subsequent events taking place throughout World Ocean Week (8 to 14 June 2020) will explore innovations across categories including technology, systems infrastructure, resource management, consumer products, finance and scientific exploration — and will outline how these innovations can be applied, their potential impact, and the resources needed to transform them into long-lasting solutions.

Visit [www.unworldoceansday.org](http://www.unworldoceansday.org) to find out how you can get involved and participate in events throughout World Ocean Week. Please contact [doalos@un.org](mailto:doalos@un.org) if you wish to join the network of some 200 organizations collaborating with the UN through the informal Friends of UN World Oceans Day platform. Follow [@unworldoceansday](https://www.instagram.com/unworldoceansday) on Instagram and use #unworldoceansday on social media.

## Message from Ambassador Peter Thomson, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean

Dear Friends,

I am writing this message in the middle of April 2020. This was meant to be the Super Year, the year in which a succession of conferences and meetings would lead us to control anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and protect the Ocean's well-being. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and a wave of postponements in compliance with lockdowns and social distancing.

The Super Year may have been disrupted, but no more than that. The planned conferences and meetings will be held when conditions allow, and in the meantime, we have a responsibility to maintain the momentum and meet the targets set by international agreement. I give as examples the targets of SDG 14.5 and SDG 14.6, both maturing in 2020, and both tantalizingly within reach. It is on our watch that they and other agreed targets must be met.

Action in support of SDG 14's implementation was well underway in January and February with positive momentum very evident at the World Economic Forum's Davos conference and at meetings I attended at the OECD in Paris, the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) Preparatory Meeting in New York, and at the organizing committee meeting in Lisbon for the Sustainable Blue Economy Investment Forum.

I was also impressed with the positive outcomes of the UNOC advisory committee in Mombasa, IOC-UNESCO's meeting in Copenhagen on preparations for the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and the Convention on Biological Diversity's working group meeting on the Post-2020 Framework that was held in Rome. After attending the Sherpa meeting of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy meeting in Oslo, it was clear we would henceforth have to go "virtual" until the pandemic is over.

Through the fog of sadness, trauma and sacrifice the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon us, we catch glimpses of better times ahead. The prospect of a more equitable world lies out there, governed by principles of sustainability and resilience. Our challenge is to choose the best direction to take us there, the way that will ensure we are not inadvertently, or even knowingly, returning to more misery in the future. Surely, with all that we now know, the right way to go must be the blue-green recovery road, a key component of which is SDG 14.

And so, when this pandemic retreats, and we enter into the inevitably tough times of the recovery phase, the self-interest of our species demands that central to building back better must be unprecedented reductions in anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions around the world. Only then will we reverse the decline of the ocean's health and best protect our own.

The blue-green recovery road expects everyone, from governments down to us individuals, to look beyond the short-term hills and take the long view of the journey ahead. We must put in place equitable



policies and investment decisions that are in harmony with a sustainable future. Friends, we have far to go. Let's strengthen our resolve and meet the challenge.

Stay safe and positive, and Happy Earth Day!

**Peter Thomson**

**UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean**

You are invited to follow the Special Envoy's [Twitter account](#) and [Instagram account](#), where he shares messages of solutions and strategies for achieving a healthy Ocean through implementation of SDG 14 and fidelity to the Paris Climate Agreement. More information about his work can be found on his website, [oceanconference.un.org/SpecialEnvoy](http://oceanconference.un.org/SpecialEnvoy).



## Updates from the Communities of Ocean Action (COAs)



### Ocean Acidification

**Ocean acidification highlighted at several events at UNFCCC COP25 in Madrid**

The UNFCCC Conference of the Parties ([COP25](#)), referred to as the “Blue COP,” held from 2 to 13 December 2019 in Madrid, Spain, served as a platform for policymakers and scientists to outline solutions and priorities to address climate- and ocean-change impacts. Throughout the conference, ocean acidification was highlighted as one of the



*Participants at the ocean acidification side event at COP25.*

slow onset threats to the world's ocean. In collaboration with host partners, efforts to advance monitoring, increase capacity, and raise awareness on ocean acidification were showcased in several events, including:

- “From knowledge to OA action: Mobilizing global leadership to protect coastal communities and livelihoods from a changing ocean—perspectives from the NE Atlantic” (5 December 2019, French Pavilion)
- “Managing and adapting to the challenge of ocean acidification: Strategies from around the world” (5 December 2019, UK Pavilion)
- “Pacific leadership and international cooperation to advance regional science and mainstream OA into national policies” (6 December 2019, Moana Blue Pacific Pavilion)
- “Understanding changing ocean conditions and impacts to marine species and ecosystems: Global networks that are advancing regional science, monitoring and response strategies” (7 December 2019, Chilean Pavilion)
- “Polar ocean acidification—highlighting issues and raising ambition” (9 December 2019, Cryosphere Pavilion)

#### **COA on OA holds its fifth webinar in February**

The COA on ocean acidification held its fifth webinar on 11 February 2020. The webinar included presentations from The Ocean Foundation on their Ocean Acidification Initiative, including an overview of their capacity-building activities, lessons learned, and future plans (Voluntary Commitment #[15877](#)), and from Kim Currie on New Zealand efforts to address ocean acidification through building partnerships and advancing research efforts (Voluntary Commitments #[18232](#) and #[18286](#)). The full webinar recording can be found on the [COA on OA website here](#).

#### **Upcoming: Fifth International Symposium on the Ocean in a High CO<sub>2</sub> World**

The Fifth International Symposium on the Ocean in a High-CO<sub>2</sub> World is intended to be held from 7 to 10 September 2020 in Lima, Peru. The symposium will highlight new advances in global OA science, promote international collaborations and partnerships, and facilitate discussions on future ocean acidification research and related ocean stressors. The symposium themes will include coverage of progress and opportunities for SDG reporting, enhancing capacity-building and policy-science links, and will facilitate awareness and the coordination of international contributions to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Abstracts for oral and poster presentations will be accepted until 24 April. The symposium themes, abstract submission, and meeting details are available at the Symposium website: <http://highco2-lima.org/index.htm>



## **Sustainable Fisheries**

### **FAO Symposium strengthens the science-policy nexus**

The Food and Agriculture Organization, as co-focal point of the Community of Ocean Action for Sustainable Fisheries, organized the International Symposium on Fisheries Sustainability: Strengthening the Science-Policy Nexus, from 18 to 21 November 2019, in Rome.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, this symposium aimed to clarify:

- a) What is the status of global and regional fisheries sustainability?
- b) What are the challenges to improve the sustainability of fish resources?
- c) What constitutes evidence, and how do we ensure an evidence basis for decision-making?
- d) What does society expect from marine and inland fisheries in the 21st century?

The symposium aimed to identify pathways to strengthen the science and policy interplay in fisheries production, management and trade, based on solid sustainability principles for improved global outcomes on the ground, and to prepare the way for the development of a new vision for the way we perceive and use capture fisheries, outlining how the sector can respond to the complex and rapidly changing challenges facing society, and support the UN Decade of Ocean Science planning process.

The main output of the Symposium will be a technical document that synthesizes the information and debate in each of the Symposium's sessions, to be tabled at the 34th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in July 2020. It will include quantitative information on the status of fisheries' sustainability globally and regionally, examples of best management and partnership practices, and recommendations on how to better connect evidence and policy to secure fisheries' sustainability in the 21st century.

This technical document will form the basis of a high-level policy statement on the role, value and sustainability status of global and regional fisheries. This statement will be drafted by FAO and shared for input and feedback with FAO members after the Symposium, to be endorsed during the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, to take place during the 34th session of the COFI.

# Update from a Voluntary Commitment

## **Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH): The contribution of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development ([28237](#))**

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization, WorldFish and Duke University committed to working in partnership with global experts to assess and quantify the contributions of small-scale fisheries (SSF) to the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental). This effort is critical to supporting the growing momentum in implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SSFs) in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, and action on the Sustainable Development Goals. The final results of the IHH study are anticipated in late 2020.

Small-scale fisheries are a vital source of livelihoods for millions, particularly in developing countries, and provide food and nutrition for billions. Despite this, SSFs continue to be underreported and undervalued, causing them to receive little policy attention and investment at the national, regional and international levels.

The research and data collection effort carried out within IHH encompasses the pre-harvesting, harvesting and post-harvesting sectors of inland and marine SSFs, and builds on the initial 2012 Hidden Harvest study by FAO, the World Bank and WorldFish, which highlighted the diverse and misreported livelihood and economic contributions of capture fisheries globally, which found that small-scale fisheries in developing countries produce almost as much fish for direct domestic consumption as large-scale fisheries, and most of this is consumed locally in rural settings where poverty rates are high and quality nutrition is sorely needed. Importantly, the study highlighted that almost 50 percent of workers in the sector are women.

The IHH study team has developed a methodology for the collection and collation of SSF data from different existing data sources at national and international level to compile a global database to produce estimates of the benefits and impacts of SSF around the world. A series of thematic studies will also highlight important aspects of SSF that cannot be quantified at the global level. The results will be published in a final report and will be communicated to key target audiences.

To date, more than 50 country case studies have been contracted for the IHH data collection. These countries represent around 70 percent of the total marine catch and 80 percent of the global inland fish catch. In-country teams of experts are now in the final phases of the data gathering from a range of secondary sources, and a team of five screeners are cleaning the data as it comes in. The case study results, expected in the first months of 2020, will be used to project global estimates.

In addition, an ad-hoc questionnaire on SSF data was sent to 228 FAO member countries. The team has already received 109 responses (48% response rate), which will also feed into the global estimates of IHH. A data team is in place to design a data management system that will store and assist with analysis of the data and information being collected in the study.



Finally, 11 global experts have been engaged so far to produce a series of thematic studies covering key themes for which global synthesis is not yet possible. These include, for example, gender, food and nutrition security, climate change impacts, and contributions to conservation and governance.

## **New Voluntary Commitment in the spotlight**

### **Creating a vision to guide development of a sustainable ocean future: The Future Seas 2030 initiative**

The Future Seas project ([35402](#)) is an alliance of 100 researchers from the University of Tasmania, led by the Centre for Marine Socioecology, aimed at developing evidence-informed scenarios on the world's oceans in relation to the key challenges they will face over the course of the next decade. This project roots its work in multidisciplinary collaboration among scientists across departments and generations to provide projections on the ocean that can be used to make effective plans of action to achieve the 2030 vision of an equitable and sustainable future. This project, in addition to the researcher group, also incorporates the voices of 12 indigenous leaders and traditional knowledge holders from around the world to contribute their unique perspectives on ocean issues.

To provide a comprehensive assessment of issues the world oceans face, Future Seas has identified 12 key challenges to be quantitatively assessed. The scientists will use strategic techniques with data related to these challenges to model several resulting future scenarios, including ones where business is carried on as usual and others where the SDGs are pushed as far as possible. These are the challenges Future Seas has prioritized:

1. Warming world, changing ocean: Adaptation and mitigation for resilient marine systems
2. Safeguarding marine life: Conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems
3. Food for all: Designing a sustainable and secure future for seafood systems
4. Connected to the oceans: Supporting ocean literacy and public engagement
5. Cleaner seas: Reducing marine pollution
6. Oceans and society: Feedbacks between human and ocean health
7. Ocean resource use: Building the coastal blue economy
8. Deep aspirations: Towards a sustainable offshore blue economy
9. Poleward bound: Adapting to climate-driven species redistribution
10. Governing the oceans: Governance of sovereign and common pool resources
11. Sharing our oceans fairly: Improving international relations around ocean issues
12. Indigenous perspective: A fair ocean future for Earth's First People

In follow-up to the development of scenarios, analysis, and action plan for these twelve key challenges, Future Seas will be publishing three summary papers to synthesize their findings. These papers are titled: "Impact for the Oceans: Making Science More Meaningful for Industry Society and Government;" "How do We Ensure Equity in the Future Use of Our Oceans?" and "Driving Desirable Change: How do We Achieve 'The Ocean We Need for the Future We Want'?"

## Other new Voluntary Commitments

- **Policy strategies to declare 30% of the Uruguayan EEZ a Marine Protected Area MPA-EBSA,** [36282](#) (Oceanosanos/Healthy Oceans)
- **Fate of single-use plastic (SUP) on inland water transport and its catastrophic effect on rivers: An awareness and participatory program to achieve SDG 14,** [36144](#) (Youth Foundation of Bangladesh)
- **Plastic litter and marine fish,** [36048](#) (Thuenen Institute of Fisheries Ecology)
- **Clean Beaches Operation,** [35925](#) (The Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection)
- **Clean Coasts,** [35934](#) (India Youth for Society)
- **Restoration of mangrove ecosystem in Tanzania for enhancement of local communities,** [3517](#) (Tanzania Forest Services Agency)
- **Pescarte Project,** [35459](#) (Geraldo Marcio Timoteo)
- **Nouveau point de vue,** [35441](#) (Nouveau point de vue)
- **Clean Sea LIFE,** [35408](#) (Parco Nazionale dell'Asinara)
- **Upcycle Ocean,** [35321](#) (Tide Ocean SA)
- **Marine protection,** [35294](#) (Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center)
- **Commitment for implementation of Goal 14,** [35258](#) (Gabidezin House Of Fashion-Boadi)
- **Project Ocean Friendly Businesses,** [35225](#) (Nicoya Peninsula Waterkeeper)
- **SSF in Brazil,** [35192](#) (Fernando Esposito)
- **Pour Une Mer Propre,** [35183](#) (Association Aide aux Femmes et Enfants)
- **Coastal Cleanup and Community Outreach Education for Single-use Plastics,** [35024](#) (UAE APOCEA, APOISFS, Yas Marina and Emirates Institute for Health and Safety)
- **Prioritizing Ocean Conservation in the Public and Private Sector,** [34957](#) (Korean Association for Supporting the SDGs for the UN)



**United  
Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

*This newsletter is compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,  
Division for Sustainable Development Goals*