



TUVALU STATEMENT
to the
OCEANS CONFERENCE PLENARY

Honorable Enele Sosene Sopoaga
Prime Minister

June 5th - 9th, 2017

New York

Please check against delivery

Mr. President of the General Assembly

Secretary General of the United Nations

Heads of States, Prince, Prime Ministers and Ministers

Co-Presidents of the Oceans Conference

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentleman

Co-Presidents let me take this opportunity to thank you for your commitment and dedication in preparing the Call for Action and Voluntary Commitments, working with the UN Secretariat and membership and all stakeholders who are committed to collaborate in finding solutions to care for our Oceans and its biodiversity, and to energize a holistic implementation of the SDGs through the inherent nexus with the SDG 14.

At the outset - Tuvalu associates itself with the statements made by the distinguished leaders of PSIDS, AOSIS, LDCs, and the Secretary General and President of the General Assembly.

Tuvalu would like to make the following contributions, to add value to that which has been premised by our Call for Action and as noted by other Delegations.

There are two aspects of the Call for Action I would like to note. The first relates to pollution from ships. It is our understanding¹¹ that this includes pollution for shipwrecks as this is an ongoing source of pollution within our region. The other relates to the terminology around maximum sustainable yield. The language around this term is confusing in the Call for Action. We understand that we should aim to be more conservative with fisheries catch and that we should aim to set catch limits below maximum sustainable yield.

It is important that the Call for Action and other outcomes of this conference are formalised under a coordination process at the UN level.

Mr. President - like many of us from the Pacific Ocean, and Coastal States, the sea is the basis of our peoples' livelihoods. Tuvalu can probably be characterized as the most fisher-dependent nation on earth. Tuvalu's 24 square kilometers of land is juxtaposed against the 27 million sq.km of the Pacific Ocean. Our economic development, culture, traditions and spiritual values are intrinsically attached to the Ocean and our society depends on the effective management of our marine resources.

Tuvalu reaffirm its full support to the call to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources as reaffirmed in Goal 14 of the SDGs.” Healthy, productive and resilient oceans are critical for sustainable economic development, poverty eradication, livelihoods, food security and nutrition, employment, government revenue, biodiversity and recreation.

For Tuvalu, forty percent of our annual National Budget revenue is sourced from the Oceans (fishing licences) especially tuna; tuna which is sourced from the Pacific Ocean that serves two thirds of the world demand.

Mr. President we congregate here to call for the prevention and reduction of human induced marine pollution. The ongoing commitments under UNCLOS and SDG 14 and our new voluntary commitments on the online registry underscores the urgency for action and concrete solutions.

We are fully aware that ocean acidification and coral bleaching, marine debris particularly from plastics, nutrients, fertilizer and industrial runoff, ghost fishing-nets are decimating reefs and marine life. These environmental hazards are increasing the vulnerability of coastal and small island developing states. Plastic pollution is particularly abundant and toxic to the Oceans biodiversity. Eighty percent of all litter in the oceans are made of plastics and more than eight million metric tonnes of plastic end up in our oceans annually. We must reduce the single use of plastics.

We are reminded by nature that the bounties of the Ocean are not limitless; more than 80 percent of global fish stocks are now fully or over-exploited. We must reverse the decline of populations of threatened and endangered species.

For us in the Pacific, the fourteen Pacific Island Countries have improved monitoring, reporting and enforcement by putting in place a regional fishing register, and a vessel monitoring system that tracks fishing vessels around the clock. We have worked with the World Bank led Global Partnerships for Oceans, through our Pacific Regional Oceanscape architecture, focusing on sustainable management of Oceanic and Coastal Fisheries, conserving critical habitats and regional coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

In addition, Pacific Island Countries have already put in place a diverse range of important sustainable development, management and conservation mechanisms.

The Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) who control about 25 percent of the world's supply of tuna have implemented a successful scheme that sell limited number of fishing days (Vessel Day Scheme) to contracted Foreign Fishing nations and interests. The integrated system allows the eight nations to know how much fish is being caught and where it is being caught as provided by both vessels and independent fisheries observers on board purse seine vessels.

Mr. President Tuvalu strongly support a timely conclusion for a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

Illegal unreported and unregulated fishing steals an estimated 26 million tonnes of fish from the oceans annually, damaging marine ecosystem and sabotaging efforts to sustainably manage fisheries. We strongly support activities on eliminating illegal and unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing through certified catch documentation schemes.

In our view, a serious threat to sustainable management of marine resources in the Pacific Islands region is the continued exploitation of international waters by fishing fleets.

Harmful fishing subsidies contribute to overfishing and are estimated to be as high as \$35 billion as confirmed by the UNCTAD. These subsidies must be addressed expeditiously by the UN and its relevant Oceans bodies. Countries must provide transparent information on what subsidies they provide in order to curb incentives to overfish and giving differential treatment to developing countries.

Mr. President our Oceans are warming up. The Ocean plays a central role in Earth's climate, absorbing over 90% of the heat added to the global climate system through the greenhouse effect.

Ocean warming leads to coral bleaching and sea level rise. Both of these effects threaten the livelihoods of all Tuvaluans. We must accelerate efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. No country should walk away from the Paris Agreement.

Mr. President we fully support the conservation of coastal and marine areas by establishing more Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Tuvalu has committed to establishing 10% of its Economic Exclusion Zone as marine protected areas. Conserving and restoring marine biodiversity through MPAs will assist in

regenerating endangered fisheries and ecosystems, thus regularizing long term dividends. MPAs can act as an insurance policy if other types of fisheries management do not work. They can attract tourists and provide alternative livelihoods for communities and can be educational sites.

The Means of Implementation of all SDGs including SDG 14 should be spelt out in our activities, including the financing, capacity building and technology transfer. Partnerships should pay close attention to ongoing programs; successes stories must be shared to ensure the diversity and specific needs of individual countries on protecting the Oceans are amicably addressed. Capacity development at the national level in marine scientific research is a precondition for understanding and preserving the ocean, its environment and the many resources and benefits it renders with interest.

A healthy ocean is a healthy planet, and a healthy planet is absolutely vital for the well-being of successive generations. Whether in eradicating poverty or regulating the climate, the bottom line is that the ocean matters. Addressing the health of the oceans, and all its relevant objectives and targets, must be based on ways that are inclusive and grounded on an integrated scientific and human rights framework that addresses inequalities, amongst individuals and amongst nations.

If we have created these problems to our Oceans, we must have human solution to reverse the woes humanity has put upon the oceans. We are all accountable as co-owners and co-inhabitants on this planet of whose blood is blue.

I thank you Mr. President.

Tuvalu mo te Atua.