

Remarks of the Natural Resources Defense Council
June 9, 2017

Excellencies, colleagues, friends of the ocean:

The Natural Resources Defense Council would like to extend our deepest thanks to the governments of Sweden and Fiji for their leadership, and to the Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly, along with DOALOS, DESA and the many UN agencies that worked tirelessly to organize this conference.

As we have heard many times over the last four days, the oceans face a litany of threats, from noise pollution to huge gyres of plastic waste, to the lack of appropriate governance mechanisms desperately needed to make progress. It is clearer than ever that we have much work to do.

At the same time, we have been tremendously heartened by the willingness of different sectors and players to join forces to tackle these problems, and to seize opportunities to propel change. One example is the release yesterday by the organization ProtectedSeas of the first ever map of the high seas that combines all MPAs, treaty areas, and other areas in need of protection along with applicable restrictions and legal resources.

One of the most important of opportunities to help the ocean will present itself in just four weeks, when nations will gather back here at the UN to decide on the convening and on the starting date of a new international agreement to strengthen conservation and management of the high seas, which constitute nearly 2/3rds of our ocean and cover nearly half the surface of the planet. Like the climate, protecting this international resource is the responsibility of all of us.

Many of the countries participating in the UN Oceans Conference – indeed many of the people in this room -- will return to the UN next month for the final round of high seas discussions. We urge nations to return here next month prepared to agree on the convening of an Intergovernmental Conference in 2018 to develop the new agreement.

The high seas negotiations present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance protection of nearly half the planet. Just as the 2015 climate agreement began to bend the curve away from disaster, we can bend the curve of the oceans toward a more sustainable future. Let's not let this chance go by.