



UN Ocean Conference: Plenary of June 9, 2017

Intervention submitted by:
Wildlife Conservation Society

Excellencies, Delegates, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, colleagues
Thank you for this opportunity to address you today.

I am speaking on behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), an international, science-based wildlife conservation organization headquartered here in New York City, with terrestrial and marine programs in more than 60 countries. Our marine program operates in 23 countries, with particular focus on: small-scale, coastal fisheries; marine and coastal habitat protection, including the establishment and management of marine protected areas; and the conservation of marine species, including marine mammals, sharks, and rays.

This has been a truly inspiring week. We commend the tremendous leadership of Portugal, Singapore, Sweden and Fiji, as well that of the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, in convening this landmark event. WCS is pleased to have engaged in all aspects of the Conference, in particular registering more than 20 voluntary commitments on which we have either led or partnered.

WCS works around the globe in partnership with national and local governments, and with indigenous and local communities, to achieving sustainable, legal, and equitable fisheries, and in establishing and managing science-based marine protected areas. Our work builds on and is informed by input from and respect for the needs of these communities dependent on ocean resources for their livelihoods, food security, and cultural values.

The 2030 Agenda called for a world in which “humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected” We applaud the many nations that have moved this agenda massively forward this past week through the Call for Action and multiple voluntary commitments including on establishing, expanding and strengthening marine protected areas. Many of these announcements have been years in the making. With this momentum, WCS is confident that the world will meet the target of protecting 10 percent of ocean and coastal waters by 2020. The \$15 million WCS MPA Fund will play its role towards this goal. While the attention is on the creation of MPAs, governments and stakeholders must be prepared for the harder, more challenging work of implementing, managing and enforcing MPAs once they are created.

WCS is also heartened by the attention that is being given to coastal, small-scale fisheries. Coastal communities worldwide depend on these fisheries for their food supply and livelihoods. To combat pressures on these fisheries, WCS prioritizes improved data, conservation based on community engagement, legal reform, and monitoring. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) guidelines offer a strong foundation, and we encourage those to be adopted and implemented.

We also wish to highlight the critical work needed to end illegal fishing, and illegal trade in marine species. Strong targets were included on the illegal wildlife trade in SDG15 and the UNGA has adopted two historic resolutions on this issue, with a possible third one to be reviewed shortly. Illegal fishing and illegal trade in marine species threaten marine biodiversity, and rob coastal developing communities and States of livelihoods, threaten local security, and are linked to other crimes such as money laundering, human and drug trafficking, and corruption. We strongly recommend that the issue of the illegal wildlife trade in marine species be integrated into all international and national efforts to combat wildlife trafficking.

Another high priority is the conservation of marine mammals, particularly whales and dolphins (cetaceans). WCS notes the increasing threats to whales and other marine mammals, both within and beyond national jurisdiction, particularly from ship strikes and ocean noise. We commend governments for including the issues of ship strikes and ocean noise in the Call for Action. As part of the implementation of that call, we recommend that countries work together to: implement the recommendations of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on shipping routes to protect whales from ship strikes and ocean noise, and, when necessary, re-route vessels; implement speed restrictions within their jurisdictions to minimize risks; generate and utilize the best available science to mitigate impacts of ships and ocean noise on marine species; and recognize ocean noise as a harmful marine pollutant that threatens many species and must be addressed.

In conclusion, throughout human history, humanity has seen the ocean as endless—we looked out across the horizon at a sea of plenty, thinking it could never be exhausted or ruined. But today, our species has a choice: either to continue on the path of indifference and greed and destroying the very source of life, or to heed this Call for Action and take the necessary steps for a better future for the ocean and its precious biodiversity.

When the world reconvenes at the second UN Ocean Conference in 2020, let us look back on today as the time humanity turned the tide, to full implementation of the commitments made here today. To preserve our blue planet, we have no other choice.

Thank you very much.

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