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## **Input by DESA/DSD to the**

### **SG report on ocean affairs and the law of sea to be considered at considered at the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly**

Oceans, seas and their related ecosystems are facing numerous local and global threats caused by human activity and climate change. Due to their important economic, social and environmental benefits, ensuring healthy and productive oceans is crucial for achieving sustainable development.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012 reaffirmed the global commitment to pursue a sustainable development agenda and the comprehensive chapter on oceans and seas in the Rio+20 outcome document (with a total of twenty paragraphs) illustrated the importance placed on oceans and seas.

As a follow up to Rio+20 and in order to inform Member States and other stakeholders, DESA/DSD organized a two day Expert Group Meeting on “Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development: Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20” in New York (18-19 April 2013) to provide an opportunity for information exchange and dialogue among different stakeholders. The presentations and summary of the Expert Group Meeting cover all aspects of oceans and seas in the context of sustainable development and are available in electronic format on the DESA administered United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.

An important outcome of the Rio+20 Conference was the launch of an intergovernmental process to develop universal sustainable development goals (SDGs) which are to address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages and be applicable to all countries. The SDGs are expected to be at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda.

At the recent 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP), which focused on “the impacts of ocean acidification on the marine environment”, one delegation suggested that the topic of ocean acidification should be included in the future SDGs. This is in line with the “Initial input of the Secretary-General to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals” (A/67/634), where several Member States noted that oceans should be among the priority areas to be taken into consideration while developing the new SDGs.

The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda entitled “A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development” emphasized that the poor are deeply affected by deteriorating oceans and highlighted that in order to ensure food security and good nutrition, the adoption of sustainable agricultural, ocean and freshwater fishery practices and measures to rebuild

designated fish stocks to sustainable levels were crucial. It explained that poor management of the oceans can have particularly adverse impacts for Small Island Developing States. According to the report, oceans and seas should not be forgotten in the development of a post-2015 development agenda.

It is crucial that oceans and seas receive ample recognition in the post-Rio+20 processes. Oceans cover more than 70 % of the Earth's surface and hold 97% of the planet's water. As an integral part of hydrosphere, which constitutes a major component of the climate system, oceans and seas play a critical role in regulating our climate by absorbing about 30 per cent of carbon dioxide produced by humans. Marine phytoplankton produce half of the oxygen in the earth's atmosphere. Oceans are critical for global food security, for sustainable economic prosperity, and the well-being of many national economies, particularly in developing countries. Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods.

Healthy oceans and seas are crucial to the survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The topic of oceans is therefore expected to figure prominently at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2014. DESA serves as Secretariat of the Conference and continues to work closely with all relevant parts of the UN system and other entities in the preparations under the guidance of USG Wu as Secretary-General of the Conference.

In preparation of the Conference, national preparatory meetings were led by SIDS countries which built on previous reviews of the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, national consultations for the Rio+20 Conference, ongoing post-2015 national consultations and other relevant ongoing national and regional sustainable development processes of relevance to SIDS. Three regional meetings are planned in July 2013<sup>1</sup> which will all feed into an interregional meeting to be held from 26- 28 Aug 2013 in Barbados.

At ICP14 a proposal was made by one delegation that the 15th meeting of ICP should focus on “potential and new uses of the oceans” to allow delegations, in particular small island developing States, to be updated on the current and new sustainable uses of the oceans and gain relevant knowledge. The discussions on this topic could, together with the outcomes of the before mentioned national, regional and interregional meetings, feed into the discussions at the Third International Conference on small island developing States in 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Caribbean regional meeting: Kingston, Jamaica, 2-4 July 2013; Pacific regional meeting: Nadi, Fiji, 10-12 July 2013; AIMS regional meeting: Victoria, Seychelles, 17-19 July 2013