

Views on lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process Contribution from the EU and its Member States

As the second cycle of the Regular Process unfolds after being launched by the General Assembly, we believe it would be most useful to look back at the whole process in order to learn where we can improve. This discussion has already started at the last meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, and is accordingly reflected in its report (A/70/78).

The EU and its Member States hold that the Regular Process can potentially provide the institutionally accepted and scientifically authoritative foundation for other processes on seas and oceans at the United Nations, and possibly even elsewhere. It can also become a hub for receiving and feeding regional assessment processes. Furthermore, it can constitute a platform facilitating practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on but not restricted to, the goal related to oceans, and thus become a cornerstone of the global ocean governance system.

Concerning content and overall orientation, the World Ocean Assessment (WOA) can play, and should play, a decisive supporting role to other United Nations processes, including the BBNJ process, namely by providing data and factual elements to inform debate and decisions, which should therefore reflect the conclusions drawn by the first cycle of the WOA, as well as the information gathered, the knowledge and capacity-building gaps detected, and trends identified through its work. As concrete first steps, we propose that outcomes of WOA I may be presented to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in its next meeting planned for mid-2016 and to the 17th ICP meeting in June 2016.

Furthermore, we hold that the Regular Process should not be isolated from what is a clear priority for the global community including the EU and its member States over the next 15 years: the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We believe the WOA should play a supporting role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly of SDG 14, as well as in its follow-up and review, while avoiding duplication and without prejudice to the competences of relevant UN bodies on this subject.

It has been agreed by the UNGA that the first World Ocean Assessment established the baselines, while the second cycle will look at the trends. Therefore, it will be most important to build on the work done (or still being carried out) by different relevant assessment processes in different regions. Accordingly, it will be crucial that DOALOS – as requested by OP 286 of Resolution 70/235 on Oceans and the Law of the Sea – help identify those processes, so that future work could benefit from the mutual interaction with them, bearing in mind the global coverage and universal nature of the WOA, under the auspices of the UNGA.

We believe that WOA II should support policy development and decision making with regard to both marine and coastal environment aspects, as well as concerning marine and coastal economic activities including maritime spatial planning. It should also contribute to fulfilment of relevant commitments that countries have undertaken, in particular those at global level, such as those under Rio+20 and the SDGs and in the context of the CBD such as the relevant Aichi Targets. We explicitly support the use of this regular scientific assessment to enhance the basis for policy making. We believe that length, scope, objectives and guiding principles of the second cycle should be reformulated to enable the use of the outcomes of WOA II to support policy development at national, regional and global level.

Concerning practical arrangements, there are simple but useful adjustments that have to be made on the process of nominating experts for the Group of

Experts and pool of experts. With regard to the Group of Experts, whose appointment process has already started, member states should bear in mind the need to constitute a diverse group of experts in terms of covering all the relevant fields of expertise, in particular economic and social aspects, which were admittedly lacking in the first cycle. This is also relevant for the composition of the pool of experts. Moreover, the process to nominate those experts to the pool of experts should be streamlined in order to promote a more swift communication through the regional groups.

It is also important that throughout the drafting process, the experts may find opportunities to hold meetings of the drafting teams. We believe that this will contribute not only to improving the final product, but also to encourage the substantive participation of experts from the pool of experts in the whole process. We also feel that questions related to the acquisition of information which is not freely-available, but which is essential for the Assessment, should also be addressed for the sake of the quality of the end result.

As demonstrated during the first cycle, workshops play an important role in the whole process. Since they rely on the initiative of countries in the regions, efforts should be made to encourage the interest of countries or international organizations in different regions to organize workshops, ensuring the widest participation possible of experts in the region and encouraging their involvement in the process until the WOA II is concluded. At the same time, possible delays in establishing the outcomes of workshops should not prevent appropriate and timely decisions on the orientation and content of WOA II.

We believe it is not reasonable to undertake a second cycle of less than five years. This is necessary in view of all the practical work that needs to be carried out, namely the appointment of the Group of Experts; the introduction of any adjustments necessary to the outline of the assessment, particularly in order to fill gaps detected in the overall WOA coverage; the establishment of the pool of experts and the beginning of the drafting process; and the review by States, a

crucial stage where States should be given sufficient time to interact with the Group of Experts on the comments they put forward under the review process.

In conclusion, the EU and its Member States intend to contribute as much as possible to the development and implementation of the second cycle of the Regular Process and expect this cycle to be more closely linked to UN and regional assessments and to contribute to policy achieving conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity and sustainable use of oceans' resources.