

Concept note - Side event on Sustainable Oceans and the Blue Economy UNGA 2016

*Thursday, 22 September 2016
09:00-10:30 in Conference Room 11, UN Headquarters
High-level Panel Discussion*

Healthy and productive oceans are essential to the prosperity and well-being of mankind. The world's oceans produce half of the oxygen we breathe. They absorb about one third of CO₂ emissions from human activities. They are a source of food and they provide jobs and income, energy and transport routes. More than 50 % of the world's population live on or near the coast.

Healthy and productive oceans must be made a global priority, and the key to achieving this is to ensure their sustainable use.

Last year, the countries of the world signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals, making a commitment to conserve and sustainably use the world's oceans, seas and marine resources (SDG 14). This was an important first step. If we succeed in this, we will advance the entire 2030 Agenda, especially the goals on food security and improved nutrition, job creation, decent employment and sustainable economic growth.

For too long, we have assumed that we could take unlimited amounts of resources out of our oceans and pour unlimited amounts of waste back into them. The effects of this pollution are felt in areas far away from its sources.

Plastic waste is of particular concern, as products made of plastic break down very slowly. The amounts of plastics in the oceans have already reached alarming levels. There are also serious concerns relating to the smallest plastic particles, microplastics. Microplastics pose a direct threat to the marine environment, ecosystems and ecosystem services.

Mismanagement of ocean resources is undoubtedly a problem, but the oceans are also under-utilised. Even though the oceans cover more than two thirds of our planet, they currently only provide about 17 % of all animal protein consumed globally. Given that the world's population is expected to grow by two billion people over the next 30 years, the share of food that comes from the oceans will have to increase substantially.

There is great potential in the future blue economy. The OECD has predicted that 'looking to 2030, many ocean-based industries have the potential to outperform the growth of the global economy as a whole, both in terms of value added and employment. Sustainable aquaculture has the potential to greatly increase seafood production. Improved fisheries management and better control and enforcement of

regulations will give increased long-term yield. As world trade grows, the need for maritime transport will continue to increase.

The sustainable use of marine resources is also an important prerequisite for the future of global tourism. The oceans are already a major source of energy, and this potential must be developed further to meet the growing demands for clean and renewable energy. In the next few decades, our planet's vast and mostly unexplored oceans are likely to provide us with new sources of minerals and a range of other resources, many of which may be yet to be discovered.

The Law of the Sea provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, and is a carefully crafted package that seeks to strike a delicate balance between competing interests and needs. Its effective implementation, combined with implementation of other relevant legal instruments, is crucial for reaping the benefits offered by marine resources, protecting marine biodiversity and preventing conflicts in the maritime domain.

The side event, which will take place during the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly, will be hosted by Ms Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway and Co-Chair for UN's Sustainable Development Goals Advocacy Group. High-level participants will share their perspectives on the future blue economy and on how the goal of sustainable use of oceans and ocean resources can be attained.