



**Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States**

***At the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on  
Oceans and the Law of the Sea***

***Twenty-First Meeting***

**United Nations**

**New York**

**14-18 June 2021**

Co-Chairs,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

At the outset, we would like to reiterate our support for the *Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea*, which we consider as a useful forum to discuss key issues related to the Oceans and the Law of the Sea. We would like to express our gratitude to you and to the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, for their continued support and efforts in organizing this year's session in such challenging conditions.

We would also like to congratulate Vladimir Jares for his appointment as Director of DOALOS, wishing him success in the new role.

This year's topic, "Sea-level rise" will provide a timely opportunity to enhance our knowledge on an increasingly important threat to many coastal communities and States.

This debate is also very important for our region, and we are keen on having a fruitful and productive exchange of expertise and best practices, also with a view to understand better the different solutions being developed and used in different regions of the world to tackle the impacts of sea level rise.

Co-chairs,

We would like to recall some of the main, and concerning, findings of the Secretary General's report on Oceans and Law of the Sea, which has once more provided us with comprehensive information on this year's theme, as well as the written submission we already provided last year.

Global mean sea level is now at its highest since high-precision altimetry records began. With increasing rates of continental ice mass loss and ocean thermal expansion, sea-level rise is expected to continue at an accelerated rate. In consequence, coastal ecosystems are threatened to varying degrees by sea-level rise in addition to other impacts of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change on oceans and seas, particularly ocean warming, acidification, deoxygenation, and extreme weather events, as well as human pressures.

All this is having significant negative effects across the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Sea-level rise is not the only negative effect of climate change in the Ocean: changes in the frequency and intensity of storms, including storm surges, increases in precipitation, warmer sea and ocean temperatures and increasing acidification negatively impact coastal and marine ecosystems and the people who rely on them.

Rising sea levels can have diverse impacts on coasts and coastal habitats through flooding, erosion, aquifer and agricultural soil contamination with salt, and destruction of important ecosystems and habitats for coastal flora and fauna. This could result in significant impacts on ecosystem services, including the production of food, as well economic and social impacts associated with this.

Furthermore, coastal flood risk also threatens many cities that have developed along coastlines and deltas all over the world, many of which can now be considered megacities and home to millions of people. It has been estimated that, by 2050, 800 million people will live in cities potentially affected by sea-level rise with consequent socio-economic implications due to impacts on and destruction of real estate and infrastructure.

Co- chairs,

It has been estimated that around 200 million people live within the coastal zone in Europe.

All coastal regions in Europe have experienced an increase in absolute sea level. Most coastal regions have also experienced an increase in sea level relative to land, which is projected to be similar to the global average. This has increased the risk of coastal flooding, including from storm surges, in many regions of Europe. All available studies project that damage from coastal floods in Europe would increase significantly in the absence of adequate adaptation measures. For this purpose, we consider that the protection and restoration of ecosystems such as seagrasses and wetlands can be useful climate change adaptation and mitigation tools.

As sea level rise is a major climate adaptation concern, also for the EU, a number of EU funded research projects, such as COACCH, SOCLIMPACT, have been undertaken in this respect:

- COACCH, “CO-designing the Assessment of Climate Change Costs”, aims to advance knowledge regarding climate change impacts and policy that can be used directly by stakeholder communities;
- SOCLIMPACT aims at modelling downscaled climate change effects and their socioeconomic impacts in European islands for 2030–2100, in the context of the EU Blue Economy sectors, and assessing corresponding decarbonisation and adaptation pathways;
- Furthermore, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism has so far funded five prevention and preparedness projects related to impacts of sea-level rise and other coastal hazards.

We have already provided some information on these projects in our written submission and during this meeting we will try to share with our experience on these projects.

A number of EU Member States have identified coastal erosion/coastal flooding/sea-level rise as a disaster risk in their latest national risk assessments. Coastal flooding is one of the most economically damaging impacts of climate change with important consequences for people and nature, especially in zones of transition. It is also one of the most researched aspects in our region (e.g. in the Netherlands) including with respect to cultural heritage protection (e.g. Venice), infrastructure, urban development in coastal areas, biodiversity and marine spatial planning. More sustainable, nature-based solutions are already being used by cities and regions to lessen the impact of such flooding. As naturebased solutions provide additional benefits, such as with regard to biodiversity, we look forward to hearing examples of the research on and the use of such solutions in different contexts in our discussions at this meeting. In addition, we also think it is important to consider how such nature-based solutions can be financed, such as through innovative blue finance and private public partnerships.

Co-Chairs,

I would like to conclude by stressing the importance of one element highlighted in the Secretary General's report, namely the overarching role played by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, as we continue to recognise every year in the Omnibus Resolution. The EU and its Member States remain staunch supporters of the integrity and universality of this ever-relevant UN Convention as the 'Constitution of the Oceans'.

We look forward to a fruitful and constructive meeting under your leadership, which should help us comprehend better the different aspects of this complex issue, while inspiring us to respond appropriately to its many challenges.