

**Twenty-fourth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended
Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the
Law of the Sea
UN-Oceans statement**

**Statement by Mr. Stephen Mathias
Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs
Friday, 21 June 2024, 10 a.m.
Conference Room 4**

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Agenda item 4: Inter-agency cooperation and coordination

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you under this important agenda item on behalf of Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, who could not be here this morning to address you in his capacity as UN-Oceans Focal Point.

UN-Oceans is the inter-agency mechanism that seeks to enhance the coordination, coherence and effectiveness of

United Nations system entities and the International Seabed Authority in ocean and coastal matters. Its membership is 30 members strong with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime joining recently.

Since the last meeting of the Informal Consultative Process, UN-Oceans has continued to strengthen its coordinated engagement in ocean and coastal affairs by contributing to an increasing number of ocean related processes. This commitment is reflective of the ongoing momentum for the ocean.

At the outset, I would like to note that UN-Oceans continued its newly adopted regular pattern of meetings which, I am pleased to note, has enabled the development of substantive documents. UN-Oceans has thus expanded the realm of its realizations or achievement raising its visibility as a cooperation and coordination mechanism.

In this regard, I wish to highlight the *Statement of commitments* to strengthen cooperation and coordination towards promoting a better understanding of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (the BBNJ Agreement) and support its future implementation. This statement was agreed upon by UN-Oceans members at a meeting of Principals the Legal Counsel convened at the beginning of this year to discuss cooperation and coordination in relation to the Agreement and to foster and encourage joining forces to identify synergies and build

capacity where needed. I am pleased to note that UN-Oceans members, well understanding that the BBNJ Agreement itself represents a milestone for international cooperation and coordination, readily committed to working together towards promoting a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement and preparing for its entry into force and, once in force, its implementation. In addition, Members committed to regularly sharing information on their relevant activities, within the framework of their mandates, and undertook to further inter-agency information exchange in relation to the Agreement.

But this is not the only example where UN-Oceans came together to agree on a common message. For example, UN-Oceans made a well-received submission on the elements for consideration of the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement. As UN-Oceans emphasized in its submission, the ocean is the epitome of a shared and interconnected resource, where cooperation and coordination are essential.

In addition, I would note that UN-Oceans members' continued contributions to processes such as the yearly Climate Change and Ocean Dialogues under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement as well as to the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development signal the growing recognition of the benefit of having a forum such as UN-Oceans to coordinate and expand joint messages, in favour of ensuring the health and productivity of our ocean for people and planet.

To showcase UN-Oceans as a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary partnership and the importance of collective ocean action towards achieving shared goals, UN-Oceans has continued to convene a number of side events in the margins of relevant intergovernmental meetings. In December 2023, a high-level side event was held in the margins of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties under the theme: “*Coordinating for greater ocean-based climate change ambition: A UN-Oceans perspective*”. At this event, members presented how UN-Oceans is building synergies at the national and international levels for ocean-based mitigation and adaptation through coordinating for climate-smart, ecosystem focused and sustainable ocean management and planning.

Members shared examples of how their work programmes build synergies for ocean-climate action, with a focus on solutions and projects involving multi-stakeholder collaboration, and a series of conversations with stakeholders highlighted how UN-Oceans members have been responding to their various needs and challenges in this respect. While drawing attention to challenges, the conversations highlighted how inter-agency cooperation and coordination is crucial to leveraging resources and expertise to address various ocean issues in respect of climate change.

Additionally, at the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), held in May of this year in

Antigua and Barbuda, UN-Oceans held a side event on the theme “Ocean action to support resilient prosperity in SIDS.” SIDS face unique challenges due to their vulnerability, in particular to climate change, but also stand to benefit from the opportunities of ocean-based economies. The UN-Oceans side event explored the role that members play and could play in supporting SIDS to chart a course towards resilience, prosperity and sustainable development. Panellists also shared concrete examples of working across UN-Oceans members’ mandates to promote collective ocean action to enhance prosperity in SIDS through climate-smart, ecosystem-focused, science-based and sustainable ocean management, as well as cooperation for planning and implementation of on-the-ground action.

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The common goal of these activities highlights that UN-Oceans, as a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary partnership, is well placed, through cooperation and coordination, and if sufficiently empowered and supported, to enhance ocean-related assistance to States and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the promotion of the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean’s resources.

This year, as reflected in its Work Programme for 2024, UN-Oceans will continue to focus on sharing of information on ongoing and planned meetings, on strengthening and promoting

the coordination of system activities relating to the ocean and coastal areas, including in respect of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, supporting preparations towards the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference, implementing the Statement of Commitments on the BBNJ Agreement, and contributing to the work of the UNFCCC ocean and climate change dialogue. It will continue its work in relation to strengthening linkages across UN mandates and processes and contributing to the efforts of the Secretary-General to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

UN-Oceans has continued to keep an up-to-date extensive calendar of ocean-related meetings to maximize opportunities for in-person events and meetings to share experiences, best practices, tools and lessons learned. The regular schedule of virtual meetings every six weeks has continued to provide an opportunity for brainstorming how and in which areas inter-agency coordination can be enhanced.

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Turning to the theme of this twenty-fourth meeting of the Informal Consultative Process, you will by now have heard many informative presentations and had fruitful discussions on the important topic of "*The ocean as a source of sustainable food*". The ocean has long served as a source of food for human beings. Food from the ocean contributes to global food security, nutrition

and sustainable development. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' outlook for fisheries and aquaculture foresees an increase in world production, consumption and trade for the period up to 2032, thus increasing reliance on the ocean's resources. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, the ocean has significant potential to be a more sustainable, equitable and less environmentally impactful source of food for generations to come. In order to preserve and strengthen this role, coordinated action is necessary. The mandates and processes of several UN-Oceans members are of key relevance to such action, as is evident from their contributions to the report of the Secretary-General on the topic of focus. The report notes that increased international cooperation and coordination is crucial to ensure truly holistic management of the ocean and its resources.

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Despite numerous challenges, it is gratifying to see the rising attention accorded to the oceans and their health. The continued efforts of UN-Oceans members, within the remit of their respective mandates, are essential to assist and support Member States and coordinate their respective activities in this regard. UN-Oceans is well-placed to assist in the improvement of

cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system both now and into the future.

When it comes to contributing to global efforts under the Paris Agreement, organizing side-events on ocean and climate issues and the sustainable development of Small-Island Developing States, or pledging action on the BBNJ Agreement, UN-Oceans members have continued to demonstrate their strong engagement to concerted ocean action.

In conclusion, I would like to thank once again the members of UN-Oceans for their contribution to our joint activities as well as their valuable contributions to the annual Secretary-General's Reports on oceans and the law of the sea, including on the topic of focus of this meeting.

I thank you for your attention.