



UNITED NATIONS

## OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

**Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument 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**

**Second Session**

**Remarks**

**by Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares**

**Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and**

**United Nations Legal Counsel,**

**Secretary-General of the Conference**

**25 March 2019**

**(Conference Room 4)**

Distinguished President of the Conference,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I would like to warmly welcome you to the second session of the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument 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 Conference) convened pursuant to resolutions 72/249 and 73/124.

I believe the first session of the Conference provided a good foundation for the work ahead. Under the skilful guidance of Madam President, Mrs. Rena



Lee, including her aid to discussions, that session allowed detailed discussions on the various issues of the package agreed in 2011 and the identification of the major options on the table in respect of those issues. The President's aid to negotiations prepared for this session of the Conference reflects the breadth, intricacy and quality of the discussions that have taken place so far.

Being conscious of the critical work that lies ahead of you over the next two weeks, I shall keep my remarks brief and highlight some of the developments of relevance to the work of the Conference.

I am aware of, and encouraged by, the numerous regional and technical workshops that have been held on various issues currently discussed by the Conference to raise awareness of those issues and advance the discussions. These workshops are undoubtedly of great importance in progressing the work of the Conference.

Other events have continued to build on the momentum for ocean conservation and sustainable use. For example, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which held its fourteenth meeting in November 2018, has now endorsed the description of 321 ecologically or biologically significant marine areas, some of which are in areas beyond national jurisdiction or straddle such areas. The theme for this year's annual celebration of World Wildlife Day focused for the first time on marine species.

Efforts have also continued to advance scientific knowledge of our oceans. For example, the 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), covers not only land-based ecosystems, but also the open oceans. It is expected to provide a new global synthesis of the state of nature, ecosystems and nature's contributions to people. The report will be considered for approval at the seventh session of the IPBES



Plenary, to be held from 29 April to 4 May 2019. It has been prepared by 150 leading experts from 50 countries, with additional contributions from a further 250 experts.

Another important report to be finalized this year is a Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. The IPCC is expected to consider the report in September 2019. For that report, more than 100 scientists from more than 80 countries are assessing the latest scientific knowledge about the physical science base and impacts of climate change on ocean, coastal, polar and mountain ecosystems, and the human communities that depend on them.

The aforementioned reports are also expected to inform the preparation of the second world ocean assessment, the major output of the second cycle of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects. That assessment which is to be considered by the General Assembly in 2020 aims to give a picture of the state of the world's marine environment, including socioeconomic aspects, based on developments since the baseline set out in the first world ocean assessment. It will contain several chapters of relevance to marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Writing teams are currently being formed. However, many more individuals are needed with expertise in a range of subjects. States are therefore encouraged to appoint additional experts to the Pool of Experts, including through their designated National Focal Points. Relevant intergovernmental organizations are also invited to identify experts for recommendation to the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.

Activities to be undertaken within the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development will also undoubtedly contribute to



advancing our knowledge of the oceans, including of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. In this respect, I note that the topic of focus for the upcoming twentieth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea will be “Ocean Science and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development”. That meeting will take place here at United Nations Headquarters from 10 to 14 June 2019.

The importance of advancing ocean science cannot be overstated. For example, of relevance to the work of this Conference, last month, a team of researchers announced that they had successfully sequenced the entire genome of the great white shark. Through their genome-mapping project, these researchers identified certain genetic changes that appear to have helped this species persist for approximately 500 million years longer than almost any vertebrate on Earth. In particular, the researchers found certain genes that could accelerate healing in great white sharks: some genes helped blood to clot and flesh to regrow, others assisted in suppressing tumours. These genes could have potential clinical applications, including in improving wound treatment, and fighting cancer and age-related diseases in humans.

Distinguished delegates,

As this forum commences its second substantive session, I am confident that our common interest in providing future generations with healthy and productive oceans will guide delegations in their negotiations.

While your work over the next two weeks may not be easy, I wish to encourage delegations to carry forward the inclusive, open, constructive and cooperative spirit that I observed in the discussions at the first session of this Conference.



Madam President, distinguished delegates, I wish you every success in your discussions over the coming days and assure you of the continued full support of my Office of Legal Affairs, and in particular of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, as you fulfil your important mandate.

Thank you.