

Norway. Opening statement at the Intergovernmental Conference on an internationally 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 (BBNJ)

Ms President,

We are all acutely aware of the threats posed by climate change and misuse of the marine environment and resources, such as pollution, acidification and overfishing. There is no doubt that we need more effective measures to protect the oceans.

This collective understanding led to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 72/249 of 24 December 2017 and the decision to establish an Intergovernmental Conference on an internationally 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. At the start of this Intergovernmental Conference, we therefore have the momentum to ensure better management of the oceans and we have the responsibility to do so.

The Sustainable Development Goals, and particularly SDG 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, are our common roadmap. It will only be possible to meet the SDG targets if we use the oceans in a sustainable way.

Ms President, colleagues,

By 2050, there will be close to 10 billion people on the planet. These people will need more food, more energy, more minerals and more means of transport and travel. We will be more dependent on the oceans than ever. In order to meet our basic needs and ensure clean, healthy and productive oceans in the future, we need sustainable ocean management today. It is our responsibility to pass on healthy oceans to future generations. This concept is also enshrined in the Convention on the Law of the Sea: States have the right to utilise the marine resources, but also a duty to protect and preserve the marine environment.

There are abundant resources we can harvest from the sea, if we manage to combine sustainable production and protection. Responsible ocean management has the potential to ensure sustainable harvesting and food production, as well as employment, growth and welfare for generations to come. We need to take a scientific approach to ocean management, and maintain a long-term view of value creation. Technological and scientific advances provide hope for smarter solutions and better use of the available resources, which will benefit developing countries as well.

Ms President, colleagues

We need a more integrated approach to managing areas beyond national jurisdiction. The main ongoing and potential activities in these areas are shipping, seabed mining and fishing. These activities are governed by well established instruments and managed by existing mechanisms in accordance with their mandates. Specifically I am referring to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Seabed Authority, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the regional fisheries management organisations or arrangements (RFMO/As). In addition, under the UN Environment Regional Seas Programme and relevant regional instruments, the Regional Seas mechanisms are involved in

management of marine biodiversity and the environment. The point is that we already have management mechanisms with the necessary legal powers – what we need is a more integrated approach to managing areas beyond national jurisdiction, where conservation and use are assessed together, with a view to improving conservation outcomes and promoting more sustainable use of resources. We need to connect the dots and make better use of the institutions we have already established. The new agreement that we are about to make can perform an important function by establishing clearer obligations regarding cross-sectoral cooperation, such as the sharing of information and experience, unified procedures for environmental impact assessments and area-based management tools and mechanisms that can help countries exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations under the Law of the Sea. The challenge is to find the formula that can make sure that the competence, capacity and expertise of regional and sectorial ocean governance mechanisms will be used to contribute to the objectives and functions of the new agreement.

OSPAR - the Regional Seas Convention in the North-East Atlantic is a good example of cross-sectoral cooperation. The OSPAR Commission already has a cooperation agreement with the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), the regional fisheries management organisation for the North-East Atlantic, and also has links to the IMO and the International Seabed Authority. Currently, the OSPAR Commission is developing a new high seas Marine Protected Area for the protection of seabirds. In that connection, OSPAR is working on procedures to ensure that IMO, the RFMOs, the International Seabed Authority and relevant coastal states are involved in the process. OSPAR has already established seven high seas marine protected areas.

For Norway, it is of vital importance that all States are able to exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the new agreement. Capacity-building is therefore a clear priority for my delegation. For decades, Norway has cooperated with developing states on ocean management. Examples are extensive cooperation on fisheries management, a cooperation with seven West African countries on the establishment of the outer limits of their continental shelf, and our recent decision to contribute USD 500 000 to an International Seabed Authority programme to promote the sustainable development of Africa's deep seabed resources, in support of Africa's blue economy. Furthermore, as part of our support for the current negotiations, we are cooperating with Jamaica, Nauru and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on organising workshops both here in New York and in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

With regard to capacity-building, I would like to underline the importance of a benefit-sharing mechanism related to marine genetic resources. We need to ensure broader participation in research programmes and facilitate the sharing of information on collected material. The current negotiations provide an opportunity to establish a regime that can improve also developing countries' access to technology, knowledge and research opportunities, something that could be important also for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in their own national waters. This could also enhance the collective implementation of commitments under the Convention on the Law of the Sea and the new agreement.

Ms President,

Norway depends on the oceans for its development. In recognition of this, the Government presented a white paper to the Storting (Norwegian parliament) last year on the importance of the oceans in Norwegian foreign policy. In addition, Prime Minister Erna Solberg has established a High-level Panel titled Building a Sustainable Ocean Economy, which will have its first meeting later this month here in New York. In line with this, Norway will work to secure a new agreement under which all parties assume increased responsibility for integrated oceans management and cooperation in this area with a view to implementing effective measures to protect the oceans.

We would like to thank you for your 'Aid to Discussions' paper, which provides us with a very good basis for our discussions in this meeting. I can assure you of my delegation's support during the Intergovernmental Conference.