

**Input by DESA/DSD to:**

Part I of the Secretary-General report on ocean affairs and the law of sea  
on the topic of the sixteenth meeting of the Informal Consultative Process:  
“Oceans and sustainable development: integration of the three dimensions of sustainable  
development, namely, environmental, social and economic”

The importance of oceans for sustainable development is embodied in Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and various decisions taken by the former Commission on Sustainable Development. As noted in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, “oceans, seas islands and coastal areas form an integrated and essential component of the Earth’s ecosystem and are critical for global food security and for sustaining economic prosperity and the well-being of many national economies, particularly in developing countries”. The oceans cover more than two-thirds of the earth’s surface while being the primary regulator of the global climate and an important sink for greenhouse gases, capturing and storing about 30% of carbon dioxide produced by humans. Oceans provide us with water and the oxygen we breathe. They enable humans to live on earth by absorbing a majority of the sun’s radiation and redistributing heat around the world through their surface currents. The global oceans-based economy is estimated at between USD 3-6 trillion/year.<sup>1</sup>

In the Rio+20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*<sup>2</sup>, Member States stressed the importance of “the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas and of their resources for sustainable development, including through their contributions to poverty eradication, sustained economic growth, food security and creation of sustainable livelihoods and decent work, while at the same time protecting biodiversity and the marine environment and addressing the impacts of climate change”. Preserving and maintaining healthy, resilient and productive oceans for the prosperity of present and future generations is nevertheless challenging due to numerous stressors such as unsustainable extraction of marine resources, marine pollution, alien invasive species, ocean acidification and climate change impacts, and physical alteration and destruction of marine habitat.

As the oceans play a central role in their culture and are at the same time tightly linked to their economies, coastal regions and SIDS are particularly vulnerable to above-mentioned challenges. Accordingly, the topic of oceans and seas figured prominently at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States held in Samoa in September 2014<sup>3</sup>. In the outcome document, *Samoa Pathway*, Member States acknowledged that “oceans and seas, along with coastal areas, form an essential component of the Earth’s ecosystem and are intrinsically linked to sustainable development, including that of small island developing States”. They emphasized that “healthy, productive and resilient oceans and coasts are critical for, inter alia, poverty eradication, access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, livelihoods, economic development and essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, and represent an important element of identity and culture for the people of small island developing States.” Member States also recognized that “sea-level rise and other adverse impacts of climate change continue to pose a significant risk to small island developing States and their efforts to achieve sustainable development and, for many, represent the gravest of threats to their survival and viability, including, for some, through the loss of territory.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See “TST Issues Brief: Oceans and Seas” (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html> under UN System inputs)

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/66/288 (2012): The Future We Want – Outcome Document of the Rio+20 Conference.

<sup>3</sup> Website: [www.sids2014.org](http://www.sids2014.org)

<sup>4</sup> See: A/RES/69/15

As a follow up to Rio+20, DESA/DSD organized two technical expert group meetings to provide an opportunity for information exchange and dialogue among different stakeholders. The first expert group meeting covered all aspects of oceans and seas in the context of sustainable development and was entitled “Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development: Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20” (New York, 18-19 April 2013). The second expert group meeting, organized in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and its Regional Secretariat for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions Sub-Commission (IOCARIBE), was entitled “Implementing Rio+20: Integrated Planning for Sustainable Coastal Area Management in the Caribbean Region” (Trinidad and Tobago, 17-18 March 2014). It was organized to further enhance the awareness and capacity of national experts and decision makers in the Caribbean region to effectively integrate sustainable development priorities related to oceans and coastal areas into national planning and implementation processes that involve all stakeholders. Special invitees from the Pacific and AIMS regions also attended to facilitate inter-regional information exchange and peer learning.<sup>5</sup>

The application of an integrated and cross-sectoral approach is required when implementing oceans-related measures to effectively address above-mentioned stressors while at the same time achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions. In this context, DESA/DSD lead the drafting of an interagency e-publication entitled “How oceans- and seas-related measures contribute to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Local and regional experiences” which aimed to illustrate how national and regional oceans-related measures from around the world were able to contribute to all three dimensions of sustainable development with benefits not only for the environment, but also for local communities and national economies.<sup>6</sup>

The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda emphasized that without environmental sustainability, poverty cannot be ended and that the oceans and seas should not be forgotten in the development of the post-2015 development agenda.<sup>7</sup> The final proposal of the Open Working Group on sustainable development goals contains Goal 14 to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” with targets making reference to several of above-mentioned stressors such as marine pollution and ocean acidification.<sup>8</sup> The General Assembly decided that “the proposal of the Open Working Group shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while it is recognized that other inputs will also be considered”<sup>9</sup>.

The importance of oceans and seas has long been recognized by the international community. Oceans, seas and their marine resources contribute to all aspects of our life on this planet and ensuring healthy and productive oceans will be crucial on our path to sustainable development.

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<sup>5</sup> The presentations and summaries of the expert group meetings are available on the DESA administered United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/> under the topic “Oceans and Seas”.

<sup>6</sup> The e-publication is available on the DESA administered United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/> under the topic “Oceans and Seas”.

<sup>7</sup> High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013): A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.

<sup>8</sup> See: A/68/970

<sup>9</sup> See: A/69/L.46