In September 2020, as the high-level week of the 75th session of the General Assembly (UNGA75) kicks off, the United Nations is hosting a series of events and side events related to the Ocean, Marine Biodiversity, and SDG 14. In addition to the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, this year also marks the 5th year into the implementation of the
2030 Agenda. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, most events will be held virtually with only limited in-person participation.

The 75th anniversary of the United Nations will be marked by a one-day high-level meeting on 21st September on the theme of “The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism” - launching the biggest-ever global conversation on the role of global cooperation in building the future we want.

Additional events that will take place during the high-level week include: the first SDG Moment organized by the Secretary-General (18 September), Biodiversity Summit (30 September), a high-level meeting to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) (1 October), and International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (2 October).

To galvanize the private sector around SDG 14 action the UN Global Compact in collaboration with UN DESA and the governments of Portugal and Kenya are hosting a session on UN Ocean Conference: Keeping the Momentum on the margins of the 2020 SDG Business Forum on 23 September.

Additionally, in connection with the UN General Assembly, the UN Global Compact will introduce a series of meetings related to the SDG 14. The UN World Maritime Day High-Level Side Event (24 September), for example, will discuss the changes reflected on maritime crews during COVID-19. Other events, such as Seaweed Manifesto: Towards implementation and Blue Bonds: Accelerating Issuance to Finance Sustainable Ocean Business, will bring together a select and diverse group of stakeholders and practitioners with top decision-makers from the UN and other leading international institutions and organizations.
Message from Ms. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Dear Friends,

The global community had pinned its hopes on 2020 to be the “Super Year for the Ocean” and the “Super Year for Biodiversity”, and a key milestone for various ocean-related processes: the UN Ocean Conference, the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and important negotiations underway under the World Trade Organization, the International Seabed Authority, and the UN General Assembly on a new instrument for marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 had other plans. And, just as we have all had to adapt to the new normal, we likewise have had to find ways to adapt and advance global processes during these challenging times.

2020 marks a major moment in the history of our Convention. Ten years ago, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD adopted 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets with a deadline of 2020. While the Aichi Targets have been successful in mobilizing political will, public attention and on-the-ground action, the majority of the targets will not be achieved by the end of 2020 and lessons have been learnt why targets may not be met. CBD Parties with the contribution of all stakeholders are now negotiating the successor to the Aichi Targets: the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Despite numerous bright spots over the last 10 years, biodiversity is unfortunately declining at rates unprecedented in human history. Recent assessments by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
(IPBES) concluded that species extinction rates are tens to hundreds of times higher now than historical averages. IPBES also found that 66 per cent of the ocean is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts and disappointingly, only 3 per cent of the ocean was described as free from human pressure.

These alarming trends illustrate the urgent need to put the world on a path to a sustainable future for the ocean, as this may very well be the last chance for us to do so. The new global biodiversity framework, expected to be adopted at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in 2021, provides a historic opportunity to change the course for the ocean and its biodiversity.

Under the CBD, Parties have long set goals and targets for biodiversity. These goals and targets are not just statements of hopes and dreams; they are reflections of a collective global vision for a better future; a future to which the survival and well-being of humanity is intimately tied.

As the Convention states, “...the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind”. Despite the diverse range of interests, challenges and priorities for the ocean, we all have a common goal; a healthy and productive ocean. This pandemic has also illustrated the intimate connection between the risk of disease spread and biodiversity loss and human disturbance of ecosystems.

Biodiversity offers solutions to today’s societal and economic challenges, including for a more resilient and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery. It provides multiple essential benefits for all people, including nutritious food, clean water, prevention and cure for diseases, and protection from extreme events. Its loss and degradation jeopardize progress towards multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

We are seeing a new spirit of collaboration on biodiversity across different sectors, which will be essential to protecting the ocean and ensuring that it can deliver what human beings need to survive and thrive. This collaboration needs to urgently be scaled up to the level of ambition needed to achieve transformational change.
Despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, we are advancing on work as best we can; convening virtual discussions and seeking out innovative and inclusive ways to continue negotiations on the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

The forthcoming UN Summit on Biodiversity, to be held on 30 September, is a critical step to provide political momentum to these negotiations and the adoption of an ambitious global framework. Convened by the President of the General Assembly at the level of Heads of State and Government under the theme of “Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development,” it will provide an opportunity for global leaders to raise ambition for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and scale-up attention and ambition on the biodiversity-climate-ocean nexus.

In closing, let us not allow COVID-19 to alter our hopes and dreams for the future. Rather, let us take this as an opportunity to re-evaluate our relationship with the natural world and learn how we can live, work and play in a more holistic, balanced and sustainable way. The ocean and our own health and well-being depend on it.

More information regarding the Convention on Biological Diversity can be found at the following website: https://www.cbd.int/  
You are also invited to follow the Convention’s Twitter, Facebook Linkedin: linkedin.com/company/unbiodiversity

Message from Ambassador Peter Thomson, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean

The UN Summit on Biodiversity will be a vital precursor to the three key global environmental conferences of 2021: the UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming, the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, and the COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Diminishment of Biodiversity,
damage to the Ocean, and the Climate Crisis itself, all have one common enemy: our mushrooming anthropogenic Greenhouse Gas emissions.

In his address to the Blue COP in Madrid last December, the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, said we were knowingly destroying the life support systems of our planet. This dire assessment was based on the conclusions of three major reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He also said in Madrid that UNEP’s latest Emissions Gap Report showed our Greenhouse Gas Emissions had risen at a rate of 1.5 per cent a year over the last decade, and at current trends we were looking at global heating of between 3.4° and 3.9° Celsius by the end of the century. So perhaps the greatest danger inherent in the coronavirus pandemic is that we lose sight of the most fundamental challenge facing us all, namely that of reducing anthropogenic Greenhouse Gas Emissions to a point whereby we can keep global warming below 1.5° Celsius. Venture above that figure, and we will be placing the well-being of future generations of humanity in great jeopardy.

Solutions abound, but do we have the political will to apply them with the honesty required? The big solution to the big problem is that of achieving carbon neutrality by the year 2050. To do so, governments of the world, particularly the big emitters, will have to substantially increase their ambition. By the time we conclude the Glasgow Climate COP next year, the urgent transformations required in human consumption and production patterns must be committed to by governments and all other relevant parties. No amount of obfuscation can remove the fact that none of us are immune from the Climate Crisis. This is a universal crisis. Thus, it is, that everyone is called upon to activate the required transformations.

You are invited to follow the Special Envoy’s Twitter account and Instagram account, where he shares messages of solutions and strategies for achieving a healthy Ocean through implementation of SDG 14 and fidelity to the Paris Climate Agreement. More information about his work can be found on his website, oceanconference.un.org/SpecialEnvoy
UN Biodiversity Summit

This year marks the end of The UN Decade on Biodiversity 2011–2020. The goal of this decade was to promote the implementation of a strategic plan on biodiversity and its overall vision of living in harmony with nature.

On 30 September 2020, the President of the General Assembly will convene the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity, under the theme of “Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development”.

The Summit will highlight the urgent need to accelerate action on biodiversity for sustainable development, with two thematic Leaders’ Dialogues on “Addressing biodiversity loss and mainstreaming biodiversity for sustainable development” and “Harnessing science, technology and innovation, capacity-building, access and benefit-sharing, financing and partnerships for biodiversity”.

Heads of State, Government, and other leaders are expected to demonstrate ambitious actions to address the causes of biodiversity loss and mainstream biodiversity action across all sectors of government, society, and the economy.

Updates from the Communities of Ocean Action (COAs)

Measuring delivery of science-based fisheries management and the delivery of broadly focused ecosystem approaches to fisheries
Within the SDGs, target 14.4 is dedicated to fisheries sustainability. However, beyond its focus on targeted fish stocks, its wording also refers to ending ‘destructive fishing practices’ and ‘restoration’ of these stocks where needed. As such, the requirements of SDG 14.4 directly overlap with components of Aichi target 6, a related global fisheries target of the Convention on Biological Diversity’s (CBD) Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. Currently, the CBD’s decadal framework is under re-negotiation among its 196 Parties with new goal(s), target(s), and indicator(s) to be announced in 2021.

In the negotiations on the post-2020 Framework, the SDGs are a significant influence as SDG targets and indicators are considered by many as setting up a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all"(UNEMG). In fisheries policy and practice, mainstreaming of biodiversity is not a new issue. However, the ongoing negotiation of settings in the new post-2020 Framework offers an opportunity to better align SDG and CBD deliverables and the burden of measuring and reporting progress is not duplicated. If greater coherence between these global frameworks can be achieved, the CBD Framework will provide a further political lever to strengthen bottom up national statistical systems in measuring the status of fish stocks, and in supporting delivery of information on related ecosystem services.

Like the Communities of Ocean Action process, all international frameworks need dedicated support from competent UN Agencies in promoting on-going engagement among their communities of practice over time. Sharing stories of what is and isn’t working, developing capacity, and compiling data to reflect our changing world is a much-needed impetus and catalyst for driving progress — keeping the work relevant and recognized over time. Sharing the method by which custodian agencies consult with the countries and assist in capacity building and in publishing global data compilations may be just as important as sharing information on outcomes of the two frameworks.
In all global initiatives, supporting a broad and diverse range of long-term actions requires the leveraging of collaborative participation of UN Agencies, Multi-Lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) including the CBD, academia, private enterprise and civil society to assist Parties/Members deliver against agreed goals over time. The goal of productive and sustainable social-environmental systems requires coordination among a range of global frameworks and communities, highlighting the need for “all hands-on deck” in achieving their delivery!

**Virtual Dialogues on the Path to the 34th Session of the Committee on Fisheries**

In July 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization was expected to lead the 34th session of the intergovernmental Committee on Fisheries (COFI34), where international fisheries and aquaculture issues are examined. Due to the novel corona virus pandemic the meeting was postponed. Instead, the FAO hosted a series of six virtual dialogues from 15-17 July 2020. In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, some questions these webinars aimed to address included:

- **What does the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework mean for Fisheries and Aquaculture?**
- **Innovative biosecurity approaches for a healthier aquaculture industry?**
- **Fisheries and aquaculture sustainability: lessons from State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2020**
- **Unlocking the potential of fisheries and aquaculture value chains in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific: A virtual tour by FISH4ACP**
- **Illuminating Hidden Harvests: The Contributions of Small-Scale Fisheries to Sustainable Development**

The virtual dialogues debated on problems and achievements under the CBD’s previous biodiversity framework (2011-2020), and challenges and opportunities within the
upcoming Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. An important outcome discussed during the webinars was the Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture drafted by the Bureau of the COFI. The declaration builds upon FAO’s International Symposium on Fisheries Sustainability held in November 2019 and The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report (SOFIA 2020). The declaration is expected to be presented for endorsement by members at COFI 34 in February 2021.

In case you missed it, below is a brief summary of the webinars, which are available as webcasts on the following website: http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofi/cofi34-virtual-dialogues/en/

**FAO launches “The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture” 2020 edition**

The 2020 edition of State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) is focused on fisheries sustainability. In addition to reviewing the status of fish stocks, SOFIA features a section on mainstreaming biodiversity in fisheries and aquaculture.

The recognition of the importance of healthy ecosystems is not new for the fisheries and aquaculture sector. However, the term biodiversity has traditionally been used mainly when referring to the detrimental impacts of fishing. The vital interlinkages between biodiversity, food production and livelihoods are often forgotten by specialists and the general public alike and need to be highlighted.

This will require more effective communication across sectors, as well as diverse partnerships. Given the increasing pressures on the oceans, there is no time to waste – mainstreaming biodiversity is an imperative.

Seagrass Conservation through Payment for Ecosystem Services Webinar (UNEP)
Seagrasses are among the most widespread coastal habitats on Earth and are critical in providing valuable ecosystem goods and services to people around the world. To highlight their importance to people and biodiversity a global seagrass report, Out of the Blue, was launched on World Oceans Day in June this year.

Unfortunately, seagrasses do not receive as much attention as other perhaps more iconic ecosystems such as coral reefs and are largely unprotected or unmanaged. Innovative approaches to financing seagrass conservation through payments for ecosystem services are an important and potentially promising approach to secure the future of seagrass ecosystems. In order to raise awareness on how community groups can use Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) to fund and facilitate seagrass conservation projects, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Reef Resilience Network hosted a webinar with expert presenters from University of Edinburgh Napier, the Association for Coastal Ecosystem Services (ACES) and Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI). The experts shared best-practice guidance on planning, funding and facilitating a community carbon-based PES project for seagrass ecosystems.
This model builds on the Mikoko Pamoja Project which is a community-led scheme that aims to conserve and restore mangrove in Gazi Bay, Kwale, southern Kenya. The Mikoko Pamoja (Swahili for Mangroves Together) model can be extended to seagrass conservation efforts as seagrasses are closely ecologically linked to mangroves. The project funds mangrove conservation through the sale of carbon credits and is a collaboration between local, national and international organizations who have come together to support the co-management of the mangroves. A “carbon plus” model, under which buyers of carbon credits have an option to pay additional donation to fund seagrass management measures has been approved for seagrasses of Gazi Bay by Plan Vivo (who will act as the third party certifier). Plans are underway to designate a voluntary seagrass management area and kick-start a seagrass project to produce and sell carbon credits. Additional ecosystem services including fisheries enhancement, coastal protection and biodiversity will be emphasized to buyers.

New Voluntary Commitments in the Spotlight

- **Project Zero, 36419**
  Project Zero works to raise global awareness and ignite behaviour change. To do so, the Project is creating events and experiences to raise awareness, inspire ocean and climate friendly behaviours and raise funds for marine protected areas and blue carbon ecosystems like mangroves, kelp forests, tidal marshes and sea grass.

- **Intertidal Watch, 36796**
  This project was initiated in 2016 and is intended as a long-term citizen science-based monitoring program for Singapore. The main objective of the project is to document and assess the status of intertidal habitats and the biodiversity they support across multiple areas in Singapore using simple quantitative survey techniques and by leveraging on trained volunteer citizen scientists.
Other New Voluntary Commitments

- Unmanned Technology For Ocean Protection, 36921 (OceanAlpha Group Ltd)

This newsletter is compiled by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development Goals