



**UN-Oceans' statement to the twentieth meeting of the  
United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process  
on Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

**Statement by Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares  
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs  
and United Nations Legal Counsel  
UN-Oceans Focal Point  
New York, 13 June 2019  
Conference Room 1**

**(Check against delivery)**

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and  
Gentlemen,**

In my capacity as UN-Oceans Focal Point, I am pleased to provide you with a brief statement on the work of UN-Oceans on behalf of its 29 members, under this agenda item 4 entitled "Inter-agency cooperation and coordination".

In line with the terms of reference of UN-Oceans, which provide for reporting to ensure transparency and accountability, this statement aims at presenting information on UN-Oceans' activities since the nineteenth meeting of the Informal Consultative Process, held in 2018.

**Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the outset, I would like to express the support of UN-Oceans for the topic of focus for this year's meeting, namely "Ocean Science and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development". You may recall that in resolution 72/73, which proclaimed the United Nations Decade, as well as in resolution 73/124, the General Assembly invited UN-Oceans and its participants to collaborate on the Decade with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, the Decade's lead coordinator. Indeed, the United Nations Decade was the first substantive item to be discussed during the most recent face-to-face meeting of UN-Oceans. This meeting, the nineteenth of its kind, was hosted by the World Meteorological Organization and chaired by its Secretary-General, Mr. Petteri Taalas.

It took place on 7 and 8 February 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland. At the meeting, UN-Oceans received a briefing by the IOC of UNESCO on the planning of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, including on its objectives and the establishment of an Executive Planning Group. UN-Oceans members identified that UN-Oceans could add value to the Decade's work. To that end, UN-Oceans agreed to establish a contact group, coordinated by the IOC of UNESCO, to act as a think tank and to facilitate the provision of inputs and guidance to the preparatory phase of the Decade. A number of intergovernmental meetings were identified as providing opportunities to contribute information and provide guidance for the implementation plan of the Decade, such as this meeting of the Informal Consultative Process, as well as the Secretary-General's High-Level Summit on Climate Action, to be held in September of this year. The IOC will also be organizing regional workshops to raise awareness on the Decade. Ocean science plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development and UN-Oceans remains committed to playing its part in enhancing science to achieve this objective. I look forward to updating you on the contributions of UN-Oceans to the Decade in due course.

## **Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As part of the UN-Oceans work programme on activities relating to Sustainable Development Goal 14, UN-Oceans members continued to implement their voluntary commitment, made at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, also known as the “2017 Ocean Conference”. In line with this commitment, which focuses on “Raising awareness of relevant regulatory and policy frameworks and its members activities in support of their implementation, as a foundation for conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and their resources”, UN-Oceans members organized several side events in the past year in the margins of the following intergovernmental meetings: 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, on 12 September 2018 and 4 April 2019 in New York; the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, on 22 November 2018, in Sharm-el Sheikh, Egypt; the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference, held on 26 November 2018, in Nairobi, Kenya; and the twenty-fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change, on 7 December 2018, in Katowice, Poland.

In addition, UN-Oceans members participated in two joint meetings of the Communities of Ocean Action, convened by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) on 25 November 2018, in Nairobi, Kenya, and on 30 and 31 May 2019, in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The first meeting in 2018 was chaired by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Mr. Peter Thomson who also, together with DESA Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Liu Zhenmin, presided over the second joint meeting in 2019. I would note that UN-Oceans members co-lead several of the nine Communities of Ocean Action, which were established in the aftermath of the 2017 Ocean Conference to monitor and galvanize action on the various voluntary commitments made at the Conference. The joint meetings provided an opportunity to exchange information on progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of those commitments.

To contribute to the efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 14, the ocean goal, in particular, UN-Oceans members also continued their work on the development of a methodology for the indicator of target 14.c of Goal 14.

I will revert to this issue in detail later during this meeting, with the view to seeking delegations' views.

## **Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Last year I reported that UN-Oceans had prepared an informal paper to assist Member States in their review of the terms of reference of UN-Oceans during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. This document was distributed to all Member States by the Coordinator of the informal consultations on the draft General Assembly resolution on oceans and the law of the sea in November last year. It highlights the current achievements of UN-Oceans and what more the mechanism could deliver if sufficiently empowered and supported, including through financial resources. While the review was ultimately deferred until the General Assembly's seventy-fifth session, UN-Oceans stands ready to provide any additional information as the Member States may require.

In light of the deferment of the review of the UN-Oceans terms of reference, UN-Oceans adopted a biennial Work Programme for 2019 and 2020 at its 19<sup>th</sup> meeting in Geneva. The Work Programme reflects traditional elements of the mandate of UN-Oceans, such as the continued development of the inventory of mandates and activities by UN-Oceans members.

With the view to assessing the usefulness of the inventory and how it could be further improved, I wish to reiterate my invitation to you to actively utilize the inventory. As you may recall, it was

developed with the view to assisting Member States and relevant stakeholders in identifying opportunities for synergies and greater coherence, as well as the support available from UN-Oceans members to assist States in their implementation of relevant instruments. It is anticipated that the inventory may become a useful tool in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14, and the other ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals, by fostering coordination and cooperation among relevant sectoral organizations. The inventory is available on the UN-Oceans website at [www.unoceans.org](http://www.unoceans.org).

Speaking of UN-Oceans' online presence, the Work Programme also calls for an update of the website to enhance the visibility of activities by UN-Oceans and its members. Efforts in this regard are currently underway, taking into account that since my last statement to you two (2) new members were added to UN-Oceans, namely the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

Revitalizing the UN-Oceans website will also be crucial in anticipation of the activities of UN-Oceans members leading up to the 2020 United Nations High-level Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources", to be

convened pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/292, in Lisbon, Portugal from 2 – 6 June 2020.

Contributing to this Conference is one of the new elements in the UN-Oceans Work Programme for 2019 and 2020. Following the successful engagement of UN-Oceans and its members in the 2017 Oceans Conference, I am confident that UN-Oceans will once again make a meaningful contribution, including through side events and a possible statement in the plenary. I note that the overarching theme of the 2020 Conference, “Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions”, is closely linked to the theme of this meeting and that of the UN Decade, thus offering plenty of opportunities for engagement by UN-Oceans and its members.

Also, of note, UN-Oceans members agreed to contribute to the celebration of the fiftieth (50<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP), which will take place in New York, on 10 September 2019.

You may recall that GESAMP is an inter-agency mechanism that provides authoritative and independent assessments and advice to the United Nations system of organizations on marine environmental protection. Some of its best-known reports include “A sea of troubles” and more recently its “Guidelines for the monitoring and assessment of plastic litter in the ocean”. I wish to

take this opportunity to invite you all to the celebration in September. A “save the date” flyer for the fiftieth (50<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of GESAMP is available in this room for your information.

Finally, I would like to highlight the work of UN-Oceans members on the preparations for the high-level review of the SAMOA Pathway, which will be held on 27 September 2019 as part of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly and will result in a concise action oriented and intergovernmentally agreed political declaration. The UN-Oceans Biennial Work Programme for 2019-2020, and the report of its 19<sup>th</sup> meeting are available on the UN-Oceans website.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of UN-Oceans for their continued cooperation in providing informative inputs to the annual reports of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea, including with regard to the topic of focus of this meeting of the Informal Consultative Process. Furthermore, I express my thanks to the many UN-Oceans members that carried out activities in celebration of World Oceans Day and contributed to the successful celebration of World Oceans Day 2019 hosted by my Office last Friday, 7 June, here at United Nations Headquarters.

Thank you.