



Supporting the Implementation of SDG 14 State of play on the UN Ocean Conference

SUMMARY REPORT

31 May 2017

European Parliament, Brussels

One week before the high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 was convened in New York, policy-makers, international organizations, industries, NGOs, and stakeholders gathered in the European Parliament to discuss the state of play of the Ocean Conference and highlight issues to be put forward.

Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP and Chair of the “Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” welcomed participants by highlighting the importance of the UN Ocean conference and the implementation of SDG 14. Mr. Serrão Santos mentioned that “SDG 14 is an assemblage of pathways that point to sustainable use and conservation of the oceans in the near future. It includes 10 targets that tackle issues like marine pollution, protection of marine and coastal areas, mitigation of ocean acidification processes, impacts of fisheries, namely IUU fisheries, and increase of scientific knowledge.” In Mr. Serrão Santos point of view, “it includes a realistic and pragmatic set of targets, although it is not visionary.” He then drew attention to target 14.B that states that we should “*provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets*” and target 14.7 that refers to the need to “*increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources*”. It was concluded that “sustainable development cannot be only globalization, but also positive differentiation and capacity-building of the least developed”. For Mr. Serrão Santos, “sustainable development is a combination of three pillars; economy, society, environment and one does not come before the other.” In Mr. Serrão Santos opinion, “we should defend sustainable development, not just one of the convenient pillars”. MEP Serrão Santos then informed that the EP will send a delegation to attend the UN Conference and that the EP Committee on Fisheries prepared a Resolution for the Conference, “This resolution will call the attention to overfishing, acidification of the oceans, the ecosystem-based and precautionary approach, IUU fishing, marine protected areas, sustainable fisheries management, cooperation on oceans management and protection, among other equally important issues.” Further, Mr. Serrão Santos concluded by stating “I know that the European Commission, namely through DG-MARE, has strong voluntary commitments, including budget commitments in view to support the implementation of SDG 14. A move from political commitments towards concrete actions is essential and will be the central issue in New York. The way that the EU is getting involved, together with the voluntary involvement of Member States, makes me proud to be European.”



John Brincat, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ocean Governance, Law of the Sea, Arctic Policy, European Commission outlined that the two major events on oceans taking place this year are the UN Ocean Conference on SDG 14, and Our Oceans Conference in Malta in October organised by the Commission. It was said that both focus on the importance of oceans and the challenges faced. Further, they are reinforcing and will send strong political signals of the need to achieve the SDG. It was explained that the conference will provide three outputs. Firstly, the Call for Action, which has been in negotiation for the past three months going through a round of consultations with the final document to be adopted in New York. Secondly, 7 partnership dialogues will be considered and thirdly, a list of voluntary commitments to be made by all stakeholders. Participation has been inclusive with a large number of countries and major groups also taking into account many ocean and fisheries related conventions. It was said that reaching a consensus was not a foregone conclusion. The General Assembly (GA) called a meeting on the last day of the final preparatory negotiations to convince the US and Russia not to block the text. Overall the EU and Member States were disappointed in the final draft text as it reflects a low level of ambition. It was said that it is not the game changer that the EU aspired to. In the end it was not possible to include a call for implementation. At this stage it was informed that the US has agreed to transmit it to the President of the GA, but has not yet agreed to join the consensus. In the final draft it was also not possible to include the term commitment or we commit to, which the EU feels was a weak political signal to send. It was concluded by saying that the EU must use the opportunity provided by agenda 2030 to enhance governance in order to achieve a sustainable blue economy.

Matjaž Malgaj, Head of Unit “Marine Environment and Water Industry” DG ENV, European Commission underlined the good example and importance of collaboration across the DGs on these issues in the European Commission, which could also encourage other countries to do the same. It was said that the Call for Action is not visionary but nevertheless comprehensive. It was reiterated that the Commission had wished for more ambition but the EU will continue to place itself as a leader in terms of promoting a transition to a more sustainable economy. It was informed that one of the things that will be stressed in New York is the need to work closer at regional level between the fisheries bodies and regional sea conventions and essential for delivering SDG 14. The need to collaborate by sharing data, management practices and objectives are essential, which the Commission also aims to work on beyond the UN Conference stressing the need for global governance. Reference was also made to the upcoming Our Oceans Conference, which will be a good occasion to focus on the practical commitments and provide an opportunity to further push the agenda on SDG14 forward. Reference was also made to the global dialogue between RFMOs and Regional Seas Organisations headed by the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as an important process. In conclusion it was mentioned that international conferences often bring positive energy and engagement of civil society, which also helps to inspire and encourage political ambition of the policy-makers.

Kim Friedman, Senior Fishery Resources Officer, Marine and Inland Fisheries Branch, FAO outlined the role that FAO has played in preparation for the Ocean Conference. FAO is a



member of the advisory group to co-hosts Fiji and Sweden, and have actively been working as a member of the seven preparatory working groups also leading two of them. They have also provided early inputs to the Call for Action and are a panel member for the 4th partnership dialogue on “Making Fisheries Sustainable”. Further, FAO will also organise various side events on issues such as Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated Fishing (IUU), rebuilding fisheries, and on mainstreaming biodiversity together with the CBD. In addition, FAO is working closely with small island developing states (SIDS), and will also help prepare for the thematic review on SDG 14 to be discussed at the UN high-level Political Forum in July. This document in preparation will examine the status, implementation and recommendations for SDG 14 and will provide further momentum and financial contributions needed following the UN Conference, and provide input for the Our Oceans Conference. It was said that discussions are also ongoing on whether such high-level meetings should be held every 2 or 3 years as it is important in order to be able to track progress. Targets and indicators were raised outlining that FAO is custodian of 21 indicators related to SDG 14. It was said that there is range of deliverables mentioning a few subsets of themes. Firstly, action on IUU was raised underlining that FAO monitors the global catch production of fisheries status and has a major blue growth initiative with partners to support sustainable approaches to reconcile the economic growth and food security together with the conservation of resources. Further, it was said that FAO works to improve policy and processes, promote best practices, looks at efficiency of food chains, and improve viability and more secure food systems. The Port State Measures Agreement was mentioned, which allows states to follow strict rules to allow boats to land catches into their ports. It also allows for countries to share data and information on boats that are not following international guidelines and makes IUU less attractive. The second theme is blue growth which relates to rebuilding for people and the environment. It was stated that 31% of the world’s fish stocks are fished at biologically unsustainable levels. There is globally an opportunity and responsibility to rebuild for the long term economic, social and environmental return. It was said that in some cases rebuilding will only require targets in one of the three pillars of sustainable development but in others more active interventions are needed. The need for a response was called upon stressing the importance for systemic changes. It was said that the payoff for re-allowing the engine of growth to not be impaired would result in a maximum sustainable yield of 16.5 million tons annually. Thirdly, trade and subsidies was raised outlining that Europe is a large importer of fisheries products and FAO is supporting SIDS and least developed countries to get market access. It was explained that this means supporting more traceable systems with higher quality and predictable supply. It was said that later on this year WTO will hold a Ministerial Meeting where such issues will be discussed. Finally, the FAO guidelines for small-scale fisheries were highlighted, which aims to raise awareness, strengthen the science-policy interface, support implementation, and empower stakeholders. The need to find further financial resources and partners to work together on this was raised. In conclusion it was said that the EU can assist to deliver on SDG 14 supporting the global push to rid IUU. The EU can also play an important part in trade issues and small scale fisheries. Further, mainstreaming biodiversity and co-evolution between environmental agencies and fisheries focused managing bodies is pivotal.



Ulf Björnholm, Head of the UN Environment Brussels Office stated that 2017 is indeed the year of the oceans with a lot of ongoing political momentum and commitments that must translate into concrete actions on the ground. Strong leadership is necessary calling on the EU to improve ocean governance and protect marine resources also supporting regions and third countries. The recent Commission initiatives as well as the EP Resolution were welcomed also underlining the importance on strengthening cooperation, addressing pollution, marine litter, IUU, and climate change. In addition, UN Environment is committed to ocean health adopting a roadmap on healthy oceans in December 2016 together with the Commission. UN Environment also deals with a number of projects related to oceans such as the Marine Litter MED project, which also hopes to be broadened to other regions of the world. It was outlined that UN Environment can contribute to improving ocean governance by providing knowledge and experience, address challenges through applying ecosystem-based approach and coastal zone management, marine spatial planning, and hold the secretariat for various regional seas programmes that are binding providing a necessary basis for concrete actions. In addition, UN Environment provides support to effective regional governance frameworks and an integrated implementation of SDG 14 within the regional seas programmes. UN Environment also works a lot on global awareness and is currently running a campaign on clean seas. It was concluded by stressing the importance of the 2030 agenda and the need to work collaboratively to achieve the unique, concrete, universal, and ambitious goals.

Iván López, Europêche emphasised that the fishing industry is at the heart of the exploitation of the ocean as a human industry. The industry recognizes their responsibility and is also working to play their part to ensure a sustainable healthy ocean. It was underlined that their efforts are sometimes not as visual as they should be and not always equal in all regions of the world. It was highlighted that the EU is at the forefront of sustainable fishing with great efforts taken in the past years. It was pointed out that the EU must however be careful as they continue to push the industry without also pushing other industries that are having an effect on oceans such as mining. It was also stated that it is not fair to put all fisheries in the same bowl as it is difficult to compare the fishing industry in Europe with other regions. Another important point to remember is that the fishing industry does not aim to harm oceans but to ensure food security. Praise was given to the EU for taking a multistakeholder approach through the Advisory Councils and the need to continue to work together, also setting an example for other nations. In order to also encourage states to follow the international guidelines it was said that the market should be utilized more to reward those enforcing sustainability and to punish those not adhering to the global principles.

Despina Symons, Coordinator of the IUCN/CEM Fisheries Expert Group outlined that IUCN is a permanent observer at the UN and have been actively involved in the Conference since the preparations began. The main areas of concern for IUCN are; climate change; marine protected areas and marine spatial planning; ocean shipping; invasive alien species; areas beyond national jurisdiction; international law; ocean pollution; gender and indigenous peoples. Further concrete actions to be taken within these areas can be found [here](#). With



regards to recommendations it was urged that all states consider nature-based solutions through the protection and restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems as a fundamental contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The need to recognize the inadequacy of the 10% marine target for protection versus the growing scientific and global consensus of what is actually needed for the ocean was raised. The need to accelerate action to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution was stressed. It was urged to agree to convene in 2018 for an intergovernmental conference to develop an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in ABNJ. It was called to reduce injury from ship strikes and underwater noise pollution. It was asked to join the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, and to affirm the importance of promoting proactive, effective, inclusive, gender-responsive solutions accounting for the rights and interests of indigenous peoples. Further recommendations include; referencing the Paris Agreement, acknowledge that the ocean and its biodiversity are impacted by multiple and cumulative stressors; strengthen the reference to the importance of marine biodiversity; maintain reference to land-based pollution and microplastics; support increasing threats to marine species from ships and noise; emphasise prevention; and appoint an UN Ocean Ombudsman or Special Rapporteur to review progress and commitments. In conclusion it was said that IUCN will participate actively being involved in various partnership dialogues and side events. It was said that the IUCN/CEM Fisheries Expert Group will also continue to work on the implementation of Aichi target 6 and SDG 14.4 on sustainable fisheries and the need for mainstreaming biodiversity working together with FAO and CBD and enhancing the dialogue between RFMOs and regional seas organisations.

The discussion with the audience further highlighted the importance of implementing SDG 14 and the need to continue the momentum following the UN Ocean Conference. **MEP Gesine Meissner** welcomed the recent Commission Communication on International Ocean Governance also underlining the importance of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, stressing that it should also be translated globally. It was also said that Europe can utilize fisheries trade agreements with third countries to ensure sustainability and fair development. In addition, MEP Meissner called for an EP Committee MARE, which would deal with the broader picture of oceans and their health. The discussion with participants further highlighted the need to assist developing countries achieve sustainability but also the need to learn from them. The example of tackling seabird by-catch was highlighted suggesting that the EU like Namibia tackle this through legislation. In response it was also noted that such measures also depend on the structure and size of the fleet also underlining the need to be able to track legislation in order for it to be effective. The need to tackle problems comprehensively was stressed and the role of research was reiterated. The need to work across the SDGs was raised pointing out that other goals related to food, poverty, health, and climate change are very much linked to goal 14. It was said that the EU will submit commitments ranging from ensuring an ecosystem-based approach to concrete funding on research and protecting biodiversity in EU outermost regions and other parts of the world. In addition the EU is engaged on seabed mapping and will commit to continue



with this transatlantic cooperation. Further, it was outlined that the EU has its own legal objectives and commitments that have been set out and will continue to work on. With regards to developing countries it was said that the EU supports the development of the fisheries sector and has the past years been promoting ocean management. It was said that there are EU funds available to support developing countries but that such funds are currently not being utilized to their potential by developing countries. The need for cross agency cooperation was highlighted as well as the need to recognize underwater noise as a pollutant. The need to raise awareness on the SDGs as well as tackling ocean literacy was raised.

Alain Cadec MEP and Chair of “Fisheries, Aquaculture & Integrated Maritime Policy” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development” concluded the meeting by reiterating the importance of the UN Ocean Conference underlining that it must not just be another event but provide concrete measures and outcomes. It was added that we all agree on the principles but we need to see results at the global level. The need to find a balance between the various maritime activities was raised underlining preservation of jobs and ecosystems while ensuring growth. The importance of fighting IUU fishing, the need for governance, and awareness was further reiterated. Following the UN Conference it is essential to further progress on the issues raised.