



Policy Brief #8 Recommendations on the Ocean and Seas

for the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG on SDGs)

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The following recommendations on oceans and seas have been compiled from two civil society consultations conducted by UN-NGLS in 2013-2014: a teleconference-based consultation that resulted in the report [Advancing Regional Recommendations on the Post-2015 Agenda](#), and an [online consultation](#) on four post-2015 reports to the Secretary-General. A list of organizations that participated in these consultations is available [here](#). This policy brief also draws on position papers developed for the OWG on SDGs by the Women's Major Group, the High Seas Alliance and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition,¹ WWF International,² and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).³ While presenting a wide range of views, this brief does not intend to represent the complete breadth of perspectives and recommendations emerging from civil society regarding the health of the ocean and seas for the post-2015 development agenda.

As WWF International identified, the ocean and seas are a vital life support system. They cover more than 70% of the planet's surface, produce more than half of the world's oxygen supply, distribute heat, and drive weather. They are home to the majority of Earth's plant and animal life, providing food for people in every country, and supporting livelihoods. However, destructive human activities have severely degraded marine environments and the ecosystems they support. Consultation contributors highlighted that the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food reported that "the productivity of global fisheries as a source of food is declining, caused primarily by unsustainable and destructive fishing practices and distorting subsidies, and aggravated by climate change."⁴ According to IUCN and the International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO), the pace and extent of marine damage have been significantly underestimated, and, "Unless action is taken now, the consequences of our activities are at a high risk of causing, through the combined effects of climate change, overexploitation, pollution and habitat loss, the next globally significant extinction event."⁵

Accordingly, civil society networks emphasized that Member States must include a strong focus on the ocean and seas in the SDGs, in line with the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) agreement "to protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present

¹ High Seas Alliance and Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, [Input to the report to the September 2013 General Assembly Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#).

² WWF International, [Targeting a Sustainable Future: Input to the SDG OWG](#), January 2014.

³ International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), [Sustainable Development Goals Policy Briefs Series: The Global Ocean and Sustainable Development](#), January 2014.

⁴ Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food ([A/67/268](#)), August 2012.

⁵ Rogers, A. D. & Laffoley, D.d'A, IPSO, [International Earth system expert workshop on ocean stresses and impacts: Summary report](#), 2011, p. 7.

and future generations....”⁶ Contributors echoed the call by the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting, and many individual States for both a standalone SDG for the ocean and seas, and inclusion of targets and indicators for the ocean and seas across the SDG framework. As IUCN identified, “the health, resilience and productivity of the global ocean are a matter of common concern and shared responsibility,” and effective international mechanisms and adequate funding are needed to build ecosystem and community resilience, respond to loss and damage, and “drive a coherent response from local communities, governments and institutions to the multiple threats and challenges.”⁷ Civil society contributors called on Member States to ensure that the SDGs galvanize such a response.

Detailed recommendations are presented below, organized according to the following six objectives:

1. Establish Holistic Policies to Protect, Assess and Support the Health of the Ocean and Seas
2. Ensure Sustainable and Just Fisheries
3. Improve Global Governance of the Ocean and Seas
4. Establish Safeguards for Marine Bioprospecting and Ensure Equitable Use of Marine Genetic Resources
5. Ensure Strong Regulation of Seabed Mining
6. Ensure Support for SIDS to Deal with Consequences of Climate Change, including Sea Level Rise

1. Establish Holistic Policies to Protect, Assess and Support the Health of the Ocean and Seas

- a) Recognize the interdependence and interlinkage of marine, atmospheric, and terrestrial ecosystems and take a biosphere-wide approach to formulating the SDGs.
- b) Achieve urgent reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to a global average temperature increase below 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and long-term stabilization of atmospheric GHG concentrations below 350 parts per million (ppm) carbon dioxide equivalent levels.
- c) Implement integrated, transparent, and participatory community- and ecosystem-based management for all activities impacting on the marine environment, and ensure application of the precautionary principle.
- d) Significantly increase the number and size of effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative, and well-connected networks of marine protected areas (MPAs), prioritizing vulnerable areas and those of particular importance for biodiversity, ecosystem services, food sovereignty and food security. Ensure the participation of women, especially fisherwomen, in all relevant fora to discuss global and national actions concerning the conservation of marine ecosystems.
- e) Monitor and minimize levels of invasive species; prevent their introduction from ships and aquaculture.
- f) Regulate and monitor sources of ocean and seas acidification, including carbon dioxide emissions, fertilizer runoff, ship exhausts, and sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions from coal-fired power plants.
- g) In accordance with UN General Assembly resolution [A/RES/64/71](#) on oceans and the law of the sea, “improve efforts to address coral bleaching by, *inter alia*, improving monitoring to predict and identify bleaching events, supporting and strengthening action taken during such events and improving strategies to manage reefs to support their natural resilience and enhance their ability to withstand other pressures, including ocean acidification.”
- h) Re-affirm the need for more ocean-focused scientific research, at sub-regional, regional and global levels, on the linkages between the ocean and human health, implemented in transparent partnership with State and non-state stakeholders. Increase resources for research to examine human levels of

⁶ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, [The Future We Want - Outcome Document](#), June 2012, paragraph 158.

⁷ International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), [Sustainable Development Goals Policy Briefs Series: The Global Ocean and Sustainable Development](#), January 2014.

body uptake of mercury and other chemical pollutants such as arsenic, cadmium, and organohalogen compounds, among others, especially within coastal and fisheries-dependent communities; disaggregate the data at minimum by gender, age, income, and location. This research, carried out on a wide, global basis would provide missing baseline data about the reach and extent of pollutants of the ocean and seas, with the aim of identifying and eliminating point and diffuse sources.

- i) Commit to ratify, accept, approve or accede to the [Minamata Convention for Mercury](#) expeditiously to secure its entry into force by no later than 20[16] (after the date of deposit of the 50th instrument), and to give priority to minimizing or eliminating emissions from coal-fired power plants in its work programme.
- j) Ensure that those responsible for land-based sources of marine pollution are fully aware of, and liable for the impacts of such pollution, especially for and from coastal development, from plastic wastes, and from acidification. Develop effective minimization strategies to achieve significant reductions in marine debris to prevent harm to the coastal and marine environment. States may promote a “reverse listing” approach for land-based sources of marine pollution, replicating the [London Convention](#), [OSPAR Convention](#), [Barcelona Convention](#) and [Helsinki Convention](#) approaches to dumping at sea.
- k) Clean up and upgrade coastal refineries, shipping yards, railroads, manufacturing facilities, chemical waste and sewage infrastructure from the coast within three metres above sea-level or the mean high water mark, whichever is the higher.
- l) Phase out nuclear power, which uses significant amounts of water and routinely releases radioactive and thermal pollution into waterways.
- m) End reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel (primarily used to extract plutonium for nuclear weapons), as this process uses and contaminates considerable amounts of water, and reprocessing facilities routinely discharge resulting radioactive liquid waste into waterways, including the ocean and seas.
- n) Ensure international cooperation and access to information in cases of catastrophic pollution in the global ocean. Adopt protocols for independent assessment and public information in cases of accidents liable to cause transboundary marine pollution and to affect fish traded as international commodities. Accordingly, act upon a number of [urgent recommendations regarding the ongoing Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster](#) to ensure the protection of public health and safety both in Japan and globally, including that Japan must share information and work transparently with international organizations to put a worldwide engineering group in charge of resolving the situation. As 400 tons per day of highly radioactive water have been pouring into the Pacific Ocean from this devastated site for nearly three years unabated, this situation requires immediate international prioritization.

2. Ensure Sustainable and Just Fisheries

- a) Develop, adopt and implement science-based fisheries management plans that: i) limit by 20[16] fishing catch to sustainable levels commensurate with the status of the stocks and their ecological role and social value; ii) rebuild by 20[20] depleted stocks; iii) eliminate by 20[20] bycatch, discards, and other adverse and wasteful ecosystem impacts from fisheries to sustainable levels; iv) eliminate by 20[20] destructive fishing practices; and v) protect and conserve vulnerable marine ecosystems.
- b) Significantly reduce the number of fish stocks for which there are currently no assessments.
- c) Significantly reduce the use of large-scale fishing vessels, and favour small-scale artisanal fisheries. Follow up on the implementation process of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries](#).
- d) Recognize women’s contribution to small-scale fisheries, including in pre- and post capture activities. Provide access to credit for women in fisheries, and funding for women-led projects related to sustainable use of marine resources.
- e) Establish an effective vessel control regime to ensure compliance with management measures and that all vessels are safe working platforms for all seafarers, including fishers, and that the impacts of all maritime uses are transparently assessed and effectively minimized.

- f) In order to end illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, by 20[16] ensure that all industrial fishing vessels are uniquely tagged with mandatory International Maritime Organization numbers and permanently tracked in real time via satellite systems, and that States adopt effective rules to regulate their own flagged vessels, including through the adoption by 20[20] of domestic laws to require fishing vessels wishing to use State ports to prove that they have not been fishing illegally.
- g) Institute a biennial review conference of the [UN Fish Stocks Agreement](#), including standing agenda items covering performance reviews of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and the state of related scientific knowledge, based on independent and transparent assessment and objective criteria.
- h) Agree along with RFMOs to, by 20[16], only authorize fishing on the high seas in areas where, and of species for which, a prior impact assessment has determined that the fisheries can be managed to prevent adverse impacts on the marine environment, ensure the sustainability of the target species, and have minimal impact on other species in the ecosystem. Conduct assessments on a regular basis, including when new scientific information becomes available and before new technology is deployed in the fisheries.
- i) Conduct a UN-led, multilateral and transparent process to protect from fishing all high seas areas that are not covered and regulated by an RFMO.
- j) Develop by 20[20] an international agreement on the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies in the fisheries sector, starting with high seas subsidies by 20[16], and agree to establish by 20[16] a mandatory fisheries subsidies notification system within the World Trade Organization (WTO) whereby WTO members would disclose to the organization and to each other, in full transparency, the type and scope of subsidies that they provide to the fisheries sector, with a view to improving transparency and accountability in subsidies reporting.

3. Improve Global Governance of the Ocean and Seas

- a) Enhance and strengthen the global framework and infrastructure for high seas governance.
- b) Establish an adequately resourced and global “high seas” enforcement agency to provide integrated and coordinated monitoring and enforcement for the full range of threats to ocean sustainability.
- c) Measure levels of net income earned by small island developing States (SIDS) from fisheries as compared to distant fishing nations.
- d) Ensure that major global governance institutions, especially those dealing with economic, financial and trade affairs such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and WTO, seek to reform economic sectors that overuse oceans for short-term goals without concern for long-term sustainability and equity, and ensure compliance with human and labour rights obligations.
- e) Implement regional initiatives to promote sustainable conservation and management of coastal and marine resources, including building capacity for the achievement of [Aichi Target 11](#) under the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#).
- f) In accordance with the [Nadi Outcome Document](#) of the July 2013 Pacific SIDS Regional Preparatory Meeting, develop approaches to ensure that the burden of conservation and management of ocean resources “falls fairly upon those that harvest and take greatest economic benefit from the resource.”
- g) Call for international cooperation to clean up the ocean “[garbage gyres](#)” and to prevent further dumping of wastes into the ocean through transparent and strong ocean governance provisions, including in UNCLOS.
- h) Adopt rapid response and recovery plans, and ensure that effective and equitable liability provisions are in place prior to any oil or gas drilling, mining or other extractive industry schemes in areas within and beyond national jurisdiction, and on lands of Indigenous peoples, in compliance with international human rights agreements.
- i) Adopt by 20[20] through international and regional agreements safety and liability standards for the offshore oil and gas industry that can effectively protect the livelihoods of local communities liable to

be affected by environmental impacts due to routine and accidental discharges and emissions of hydrocarbons and hazardous substances.

4. Establish Safeguards for Marine Bioprospecting and Ensure Equitable Use of Marine Genetic Resources

- a) To protect vulnerable ecosystems, adopt by 20[20] an international code of conduct for bioprospecting in the marine environment, with full participation of all stakeholders.
- b) Respect, protect and fulfil the rights of Indigenous peoples, including to their land, territories and resources, to self-determination, and to free, prior and informed consent.
- c) To ensure equitable use of marine genetic resources (MGRs), establish an international representative biorepository of MGRs from areas beyond national jurisdiction hosted by an existing international organization, with samples and codes available to all, standardized metadata to attribute sources of samples, and curated repositories of genetic information.
- d) Ban the patenting of living products or processes.

5. Ensure Strong Regulation of Seabed Mining

- a) Strictly apply the precautionary approach to seabed mining, as well as the requirements of due diligence emphasized by the [International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea](#). Include independent study and analysis of pioneer operations in order to build a scientific and operational baseline.
- b) Close seabed mining gaps in the international marine pollution regime, including by:
 - i. Expediently amending the 1972 London Convention and its 1996 Protocol (LC-LP) to include the dumping of wastes from offshore oil and gas installations and seabed mining operations;
 - ii. Preventing pollution arising from seabed mining in the global ocean;
 - iii. Ensuring that seabed miners are aware of and take seriously their responsibilities with regard to the dumping of wastes at sea; and
 - iv. Ensuring that measures adopted by the International Seabed Authority are compatible with the LC-LP ban on ocean dumping.
- c) Implement strategic environmental planning, including by:
 - i. Developing rational resource allocation strategies for the deep seabed, including spatial and temporal allocation strategies to ensure renewable living resources beyond national jurisdiction are sustained, and that non-living, non-renewable resources are apportioned in a manner consistent with their status as the common heritage of mankind and with regard for the protection and preservation of associated living resources.
 - ii. Conducting rigorous cost-benefit analysis to ensure that unpriced (external) costs, such as seafloor damage and ecosystem degradation, and other direct and indirect social, cultural, economic and environmental effects on local communities and settlements are quantified and included when calculating the net benefits of resource use, using a human rights framework.
 - iii. Enhancing the use of tools and strategies that preserve biodiversity and ecosystem structure and function and mitigate harm, and may facilitate recovery from deep-sea disturbances, including by systematically planning deep-water marine protected areas to prevent significant adverse impacts to vulnerable marine ecosystems and to manage areas identified by the Convention on Biological Diversity as being ecologically or biologically significant.
 - iv. Ensuring accountability, transparency and wide stakeholder participation (including civil society, Indigenous and other social movements, and women-led groups) in ecosystem-based management of the deep ocean.
 - v. Ensuring the participation of academic scientists, including local experts, in all aspects of exploration, especially in environmental baseline studies, and publishing plain language results to facilitate transparency.

- vi. Involving local civil society in associated education and information campaigns, in line with the human rights principle of subsidiarity, and in accordance with the rights to information and to free, prior and informed consent.
- d) Establish a liability fund for environmental damage from deep seabed mining, as suggested by the Seabed Disputes Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

6. Ensure Support for SIDS to Deal with Consequences of Climate Change, including Sea Level Rise

- a) Call for strongest recognition of the existential threat of climate change and sea level rise to all people from small island developing States through loss of homeland.
- b) Support SIDS and other coastal communities to negotiate and implement agreements for peaceful transitions to other land where needed, allowing autonomous government to continue in the case of lands inundated with water.
- c) Call for urgent means of implementation, non-loan finances and resources for all communities that must plan relocation, and remind developed States to deliver on their official development assistance commitments, as well as payments of loss and damage consistent with the agreement reached at the 19th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

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