

REPUBLIC OF MALTA



**Statement by
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Ambassador and Permanent Representative of
the Republic of Malta to the United Nations**

**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**

**8th June 2017
United Nations, New York**

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We would like to begin by expressing appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your leadership in convening this important High-Level Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda.

We would also like to thank the Governments of Sweden and Fiji as Co-hosts of this Conference. Our gratitude also goes to the two Co-Facilitators from Portugal and Singapore, as well as the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations as the Secretary-General of the Conference for their crucial role in bringing together all Member States and stakeholders which has led to agreement on our 'Call for Action'.

Malta fully supports the 'Call for Action' for the SDG14, which also takes into account the different national realities, capacities and levels of development. [In particular, Malta is in agreement with the importance given to enhance further marine scientific research to enable policy makers to adopt effective and efficient measures. We also welcome that knowledge hubs and networks to enhance the sharing of scientific data and best practices are encouraged and promoted.]

Mr. President,

The Ocean Conference comes at a timely moment for the international community. Malta has always been at the forefront on maritime and marine related issues. As a maritime nation, strategically located in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta has made its own contribution to international efforts towards the conservation and sustainable use of our seas and oceans. It was in this room in November of 1967 when Malta's first Permanent Representative to the UN, the late Arvid Pardo, known also as

"the Father of the Law of the Sea Conference", contributed to the birth of the modern law of the sea enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). His quest to protect the oceans from arbitrary appropriation and his call for a regime to efficiently administer their resources created the necessary momentum ~~at that time~~ for promulgating this crucial concept which would pave the way for a 'Law of the Sea', consequently materialising in 1982. The unsustainable scramble for resources and minerals had inspired the Maltese Initiative that defined the seabed, ocean floor and sub-soil thereof as the 'Common Heritage of Mankind.' Determined to act decisively and urgently, leaders and governments have since then acted upon their obligations under international law, to continue to fulfil their commitments on maritime and marine related issues.

Mr. President,

The Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union succeeded in ensuring political endorsement by means of Council Conclusions for a more coherent, comprehensive and effective EU policy to improve the international ocean governance framework and the sustainability of the oceans. In addition, on 20th April 2017, Malta organised an Informal Ministerial Conference on Blue Growth and Ocean Governance. During this Meeting, the Valletta Declaration was endorsed by all EU Ministers responsible for the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy, which *inter alia* focused on the importance the EU should give to Blue Growth, Ocean Governance and Nautical Tourism.

Malta would also like to recall that SDG 14 target C, which calls for implementation of international law as reflected in UNCLOS, is pivotal to the achievement of all SDG14 targets. One way towards achieving target 14(c) is to irrevocably bring legal protection to high seas biodiversity. The High Seas are a global issue and hence their conservation and sustainable use require a global solution.

We take this opportunity to urge the Preparatory Committee on the development of an international legally-binding instrument under the UN Convention on Law of the Sea for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, to conclude its discussions within the timeline established by UNGA resolution 69/92. We hope that the Preparatory Committee will complete its work successfully next month and that a decision will be taken during the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly to launch an Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. President,

Allow me to briefly highlight action taken by Malta towards the conservation and sustainable use of the sea under its jurisdiction. Malta recognises the importance of identifying and designating Marine Protected Areas in order to ensure good governance, management, conservation and protection of our seas and therefore has been giving this sector specific attention. Given Malta's geographical position, in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, its MPAs contain a diversity of important species and habitats. Malta has so far designated a total of fourteen marine protected areas with nine MPAs declared in 2016.

Marine Protected Areas

~~With the designation of the nine MPAs established~~ ^{with} in 2016, Malta has further contributed to cover important areas for marine turtles, dolphins and a number of protected seabirds. These sites will help restore and strengthen ecosystem resilience which will help protect ecosystem services and may mitigate adverse effects from global warming and other stressors on the marine environment. Collectively these fourteen MPAs exceed 3,450 square kilometres which essentially covers a significant protected area especially when considering that the land size of Malta's archipelago is 316 square kilometres.

With these designations, and its future commitments, Malta has contributed towards the achievement of the Aichi Target 11, set out by the Convention on Biological Diversity, which aims at achieving the conservation and equitable management of 10% of global coastal and marine areas, by 2020. In its national capacity, Malta is thus currently protecting close to 30% of all the waters under its jurisdiction, exceeding by far the 10% target set for SDG 14.5.

Aichi

Malta continues to work within the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, under which *inter alia* pollution levels are also monitored. The EU Maritime Transport Ministers, who met in Malta in March 2017, welcomed in the Valletta Declaration, the progress made at IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) 70 with, the setting of 1st of January 2020 as entry-into-force date of the 0,5% global sulphur cap for marine fuel, which should significantly reduce the global amount of sulphur which gets into the ocean and seas from 2020 onwards.

Mr. President,

The recognition that our ocean is a shared resource has resulted in multiple national, international and regional obligations which aim at safeguarding our ocean's sustainability, for future generations. Such protection has to be a holistic one, which addresses the challenges presented from various sectors, by all relevant stakeholders. We strongly believe that it is through structured collaboration with our regional and international partners that issues such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, marine pollution and the negative effects that climate change have on marine environment, will continue to be successfully addressed.

Our global commitments can only be achieved through global efforts. In this regard, Malta is pleased to host the next 'Our Oceans Conference', which will be held in Malta in October 2017. We have to maximise on the momentum that has been created through this annual ocean conference and focus our energies to coordinate our efforts towards safeguarding our ocean. In this light, Malta together with the European Union will continue providing its support towards such collaborative efforts. Malta looks forward to hosting a successful Oceans Conference in October, which will build on commitments made in order to ensure a more sustainable use of the oceans and their resources.