

**Expert Group Meeting on  
Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development:  
Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20**

**Organized by:  
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**

**Venue: Teachers Building,  
730 Third avenue, New York  
18-19 April 2013**

**Aide-Mémoire**

**A. Background**

Oceans, comprising 72 per cent of the Earth's surface, constitute a major part of the planet that supports life, drives the climate and hydrological cycles and provides vital resources. As noted in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and more recently in the Rio+20 outcome document, oceans, seas, islands and coastal areas form an integrated and essential component of the Earth's ecosystem and are critical for global food security and for sustainable economic prosperity and the well-being of many national economies, particularly in developing countries.

Oceans also play an important role in the global climate system by generating oxygen and absorbing about 30 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In 2008, fish provided 3 billion people with at least 15 per cent of their animal protein. The same year, fish and aquatic plant sales amounted to \$106 billion, and the fisheries industry provided livelihoods for about 540 million people, or 8 per cent of the world's population. Apart from food and livelihood provision, oceans represent a natural resource with respect to the travel and tourism, mining, telecommunication and transportation industries. In addition, some marine species have been analysed and tested for pharmaceutical use, among others in the area of cancer, HIV and malaria treatment.

Despite their economic, social and environmental benefits, oceans, seas and their related ecosystems are facing numerous local and global threats caused by human activity and climate change. Ensuring healthy and productive oceans is therefore a vital component for achieving sustainable development.

The importance of oceans for sustainable development was widely recognized by the international community and among others embodied in Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and various decisions taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development. More recently, the crucial role of oceans and seas for sustainable development was reaffirmed in the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference. The Secretary-General has also highlighted the importance of oceans and seas in the Five-Year Action Agenda for his second term in office (2012-2016).

## B. Objectives of the Expert Group Meeting

The *Expert Group Meeting on Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development: Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20* is not an intergovernmental meeting, but represents a two-day meeting for information exchange and dialogue among different stakeholders in order to identify perspectives for cooperation to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and their resources. The Expert Group Meeting aims to provide an opportunity to engage in discussions on how to implement and follow-up Rio+20 decisions with regard to oceans and seas.

Specifically, the Expert Group Meeting aims to:

- elaborate on the importance of oceans and seas for sustainable development;
- present and discuss main oceans-related issues and challenges;
- identify possible new measures and/or highlight existing proven measures with regard to the implementation of Rio+20 decisions and other oceans-related topics;
- present “best practices” supporting the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and their resources;
- elaborate on how to enhance multi-stakeholder and international cooperation.

The outcome of the Expert Group Meeting is envisaged to provide valuable background information to:

- Ongoing discussions conducted by Member States and other stakeholders with regard to oceans and seas;
- Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, which will be held in 2014 and where the topic of oceans and seas is expected to figure prominently.

The presentations and summary of the Expert Group Meeting will be published in electronic format on the DESA administered United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.

## C. Provisional programme and main topics for discussion

The provisional programme is under preparation and will be circulated separately. It is expected to cover, inter alia, the following topics for discussion:

### **Day 1:**

#### **Opening**

- DESA: Rio+20 and beyond
- Keynote address

#### **Session 1: Introductory overview: Oceans and sustainable development**

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects

- Ad-hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction
- Small island developing States (SIDS) and oceans
- Small island developing States (SIDS) and climate change
- Preparatory process for SIDS Conference 2014
- Challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Rio+20 ocean outcome

### **Session 2: Oceans-related issues and challenges**

- Climate change impacts on oceans and related ecosystems
- Marine pollution
- Alien invasive species
- Ocean acidification
- State of the world's marine fisheries
- Coral reefs and other vulnerable ecosystems
- Regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs)
- Sustainable maritime transport
- Sustainable marine tourism
- Jobs in the maritime sector

### **Day 2:**

### **Session 3: Protection and conservation of oceans, seas and marine resources**

- Conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity
- Environmental conservation in polar regions
- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and their contributions to economic, social and environmental objectives
- Sustainable fisheries

### **Session 4: Implementation**

- Marine scientific research and oceans observations
- Addressing climate change and disaster risk reduction
- Capacity-building and technology transfer
- Catalysing ocean finance
- Global Partnership for Oceans
- Secretary General's Oceans Compact

### **Conclusions**

## **D. Organization**

The *Expert Group Meeting on Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development: Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20* is organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

## E. Participants

Participation in this meeting is by invitation only. It is expected that some 30-40 experts from around the world will attend this event, including:

- Distinguished oceans, development and environment experts;
- Representatives and experts of civil society and academia;
- Representatives of national and international professional associations;
- Experts and representatives of relevant UN and international organizations, including international financial institutions.

Participation in the meeting is free of charge, but participants are expected to cover their own travel costs. A limited number of travel cost sponsorships will be available for invited guest speakers from developing countries.

## F. Submission of Papers and Presentations

All presentations should be limited to 15 minutes presentation time. Speakers are kindly requested to submit advance copies of their presentations in electronic format (together with related reports) to the e-mail address: [ritz@un.org](mailto:ritz@un.org) - **if possible not later than Friday, 12 April 2013.**

## G. Languages

The Expert Group Meeting will be conducted in English only.

## H. Venue and registration

The meeting will take place in New York in the Teachers Building, 730 Third avenue (btw.45th and 46th street) in Meeting room TB-10102 (10th floor).

All visitors without a UN-badge are required to bring a valid ID and register at the front desk of the building. DESA/DSD staff will be available at the entrance to guide visitors to the conference room.

We recommend the use of public transportation: By subway: Numbers 4, 5, 6, or 7 trains to Grand Central Station.

## Contact Persons for Further Information:

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