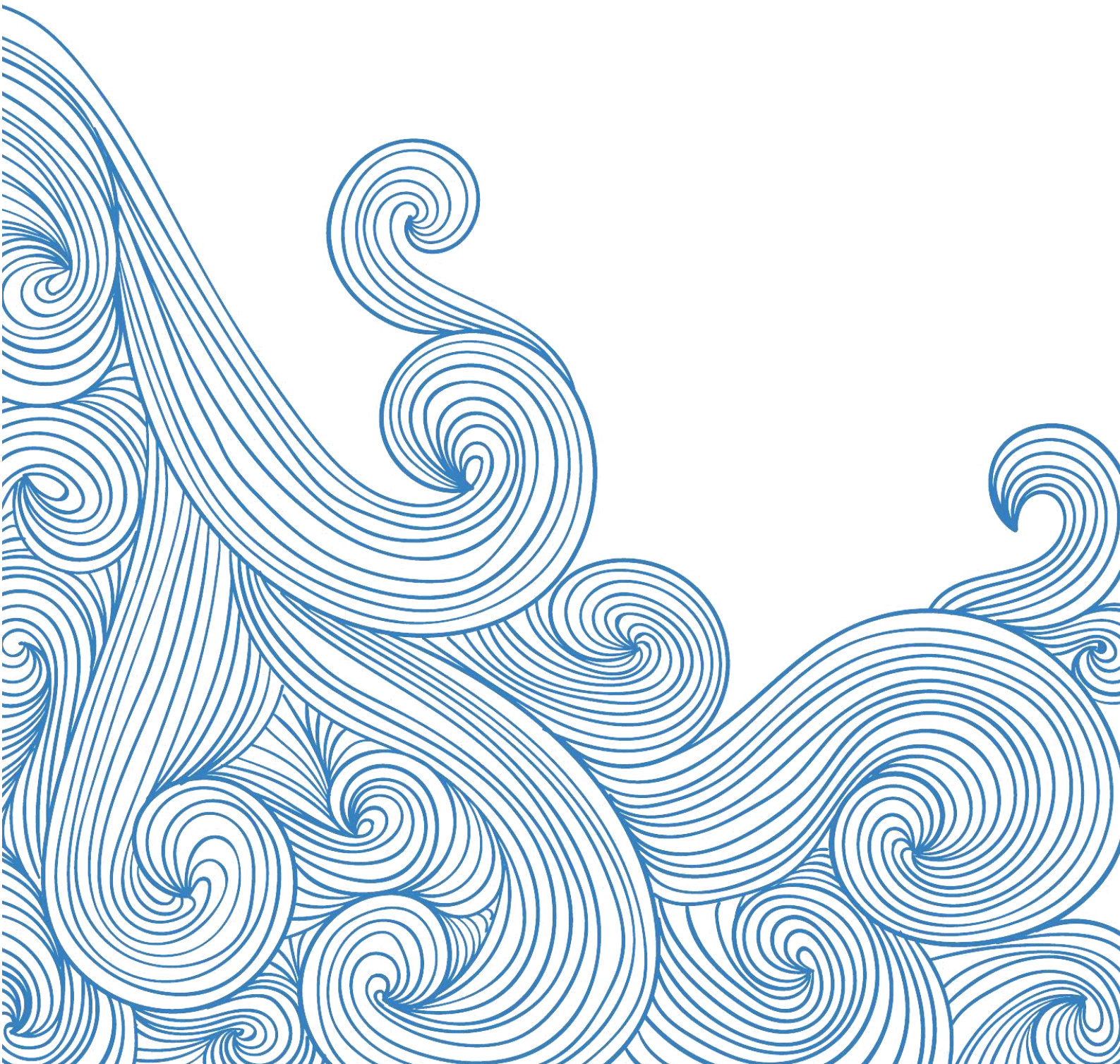
# ASIA PACIFIC

# day for the OCEAN

20 November 18

## Meeting Report



# Asia Pacific Day for the Ocean

## Meeting Report

20 November 2018 | United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok

## Background – An Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean

In 2017, the United Nations Ocean Conference in New York called for collective and urgent action[1] to halt and reverse the decline in the health of our ocean and its ecosystems and to protect and restore its resilience and ecological integrity. Recognizing the urgency to act, more than 800 Voluntary Commitments towards SDG 14 were made by government entities, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society and businesses for the Pacific and Indian Ocean basins; this represents more than half of all Commitments made globally at the UN Oceans Conference in 2017.

The United Nations have launched nine multi-stakeholder Communities of Ocean Action (COAs)[2] to follow up on implementation of Voluntary Commitments, to catalyse new initiatives, and to facilitate collaboration and networking in support of SDG 14, inclusive of science, business and civil society.

At the halfway mark between the 2017 Ocean Conference and the next global meeting planned in 2020, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in close cooperation with custodian agencies of the COAs and the UN Special Envoy for the Ocean, organized the first Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean. The Day provided a platform to take stock of progress made on Voluntary Commitments in ocean basins and seas in the region, to share lessons learned from ongoing efforts, expand the Communities, and catalyse new initiatives for a healthy ocean in the region.

In an open call of interest, ESCAP invited all stakeholders currently implementing Voluntary Commitments in ocean basins, seas and countries in Asia-Pacific, working on initiatives for a healthy ocean in the region, or interested in making a Voluntary Commitment and joining a Community of Action to participate and present their achievements. Review of activities and Commitments took place in the form of interactive discussions and presentations, along a grouping of themes of the COAs and SDG 14 targets, in line with regional priorities.

The day was organized in four sessions clustering the COAs thematically, presenting progress across the COAs, updates from two dozen Voluntary Commitments and sharing other ongoing initiatives for ocean health. These included: marine and coastal ecosystems management, coral reefs and mangroves; marine pollution and closing the loop on plastic waste; ocean acidification, promoting scientific knowledge and accelerating action; and sustainable fisheries and blue economy.

Participants were asked to provide their input and feedback on useful follow-up mechanisms at the regional level, better alignment of processes and frameworks, and steps to strengthen and improve the COAs. This report summarizes key messages and recommendations responding to these issues.

All presentations and more information can be found on the event webpage:
https://www.unescap.org/events/asia-pacific-day-ocean

[1] In the declaration "Our ocean, our future: call for action", member States agreed on the follow-up to The Ocean Conference. Find the Call for Action at: https://oceanconference.un.org/callforaction

[2] The nine Communities of Ocean Action can be found at: https://oceanconference.un.org/coa

## Highlights and outcomes of Day for the Ocean

Discussions showed that while Asia and the Pacific significantly contributes to the deterioration of ocean health, efforts to tackle challenges in the region will have an enormous impact at the global scale and need to be a central part of the solution.

Group photo of participants attending Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean

The Asia-Pacific region is highly reliant on marine and coastal ecosystems: fisheries resources in the region provide livelihoods to 200 million people; the Pacific Islands alone supply one-third of the world's tuna with a first-sale value of over US$4 billion[3]; and marine and coastal tourism provide significant opportunities and can significantly boost national economies.

However, despite the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ocean health in Asia and the Pacific has deteriorated further, for example, unsustainable exploitation of marine resources has resulted in the disappearance of over 40 per cent of coral reefs[4]; about 60 per cent of coastal mangrove protecting coastlines have been lost; and approximately 80[5] per cent of the region's coral reefs are at risk from coral bleaching and destructive human activities. Fragmented ocean governance across sectors, areas of jurisdiction and scale is challenging the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and threatening the sustainable future of the ocean.

To address these issues and strengthen action for a healthy ocean in Asia and the Pacific, participants were asked to provide their input and feedback on useful follow-up mechanisms at the regional level, better alignment of processes and frameworks, and steps to strengthen and improve the COAs.

Participants highlighted that ocean governance needs to be further enhanced across national, regional and global systems. They welcomed the idea of strengthening ESCAP's role to build coherence across policy processes, sectors and levels of governance and address transboundary issues of ocean health by convening multi-stakeholder and intergovernmental platforms. Discussions stressed that coordination at the regional level could help to align the follow-up and review of Voluntary Commitments with reporting on

[3] World Bank (2014) Oceans; sector results profile. http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/04/13/oceans-results-profile
[4] UNEP, The State of Biodiversity in Asia and the Pacific.
[5] UNEP, Global Environment Outlook: GEO-6 Regional Assessment for Asia and the Pacific (Nairobi, 2016).

SDG 14. Linking Voluntary Commitments and initiatives for ocean health in the region more explicitly with efforts to achieve and report progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through regional channels would facilitate addressing linkages between goals and avoid duplication and over-burdening of member States. The need to use existing regional structures to address transboundary challenges –such as marine pollution, ecosystem degradation and unsustainable use of marine resources—and the need to coordinate efforts across entities in the region, was emphasized in all sessions. Participants also called for better alignment across UN and non-UN processes (such as the UN Ocean Conference, UN Decade of Ocean Science, Our Ocean Conference, Sustainable Blue Economy Conference).

Participants called for multi-stakeholder approaches to engage inter alia the private sector to generate more meaningful solutions. To make the COAs more meaningful and strengthen their work, discussions identified a need for: (i) better sharing of lessons learned across entities implementing Voluntary Commitments; (ii) enabling pooling and matchmaking of resources; (iii) creating a better network of entities to cooperate and develop new commitments; (iv) connecting with other existing networks to align efforts; and (v) making reporting and updating progress easier. Suggestions included enhancing global and regional mapping of Voluntary Commitments through geographic visualization on the Ocean Conference website to strengthen the platform, facilitate coordination across entities and address gaps.

The discussions showed the need to raise awareness for a better understanding of the UN Ocean Conference process, Voluntary Commitments and Communities of Ocean Action with member States, civil society, businesses and the public, using innovative communication channels and easy to understand messages and language. Knowledge exchange and sharing was identified as critical for ocean protection and to build a solid evidence base for action and policy making. Moreover, coherent data collection was considered crucial to improve understanding of the human pressures on the marine environment, to communicate these challenges and to inform future solutions.

The following sections present in more detail the key messages and recommendations identified across all sessions for useful follow-up mechanisms at the regional level, better alignment of processes and frameworks, and steps to strengthen and improve the COAs.

Ms. Milika Sobey, Chairperson, Women in Fisheries Network, Fiji and Ms. Maeve Nightingale, Mangroves for the Future (MFF), IUCN

Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Ocean

## Channelling existing regional mechanisms for follow up, energizing action and alignment

The Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean was the first event of its kind at the regional level that provided a space to follow up on Voluntary Commitments in regional ocean basins and seas, share lessons learned from ongoing initiatives, raise awareness for and strengthen the Communities of Ocean Action. Participants were invited to share their views and recommendations regarding the usefulness of a review and support mechanism at the regional level to accelerate action for a healthy ocean in Asia-Pacific. The value of a regional platform to coordinate ocean action was reaffirmed in participant evaluations (see Annex I).

Responses across stakeholder groups throughout the day were overwhelmingly in favour of strengthening the role of existing regional intergovernmental entities and platforms to localize SDG 14 and related goals, to integrate and better align implementation and reporting processes for a healthy ocean within the 2030 Agenda, to facilitate knowledge exchange and multi-stakeholder engagement. Participants welcomed the idea of building on and expanding ESCAP's convening role and regional mandate to coordinate across development partners and implementing entities, provide exchange and engagement mechanisms to address transboundary ocean-related challenges and solutions.

Partners identified for better cooperation and alignment of action in the region included the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This includes leveraging the work of existing regional networks that focus on particular issues and coordinating with existing platforms to address transboundary ocean issues. For instance, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) as the official arm of ASEAN to promote fisheries development, could play a larger role in combatting illegal fishing in coordination with countries beyond Southeast Asia. Similarly, coordination of ecosystem-based efforts at the regional level could involve the Locally Managed Marine Areas Network, Pacific Science Association, Coral reef working group or regional programmes like Mangroves for the Future and The Coral Triangle Initiative.

Better alignment should also be achieved between UN and non-UN processes, such as the UN Ocean Conferences and Our Ocean Conferences in particular, to avoid duplication or double counting of efforts and enhance efficient financing and cooperation.

Better coordination and cooperation through a regional platform could help to strengthen integration of SDG 14 with other goals (such as SDGs 12 and 15 for marine pollution), to break down the silos identified as a key barrier to ocean action. Participants called for better sharing of progress, solutions, best practices and robust action plans from the local and national to the regional and global level to facilitate localization and build capacity for SDG 14. In this regard, discussions emphasized the importance of data collection and sharing mechanisms at the regional level, to allow open access to data and address existing gaps. Better alignment of reporting on Voluntary Commitments and SDG 14 to avoid overburdening and address fragmentation, requires higher quality and coherence of ocean data.

## Improving and strengthening the Communities of Ocean Action

Participants called for greater awareness for and more effective support and outreach through the COAs to overcome a perceived disconnect with existing regional and global follow-up mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda and national efforts to achieve the SDGs. Opportunities identified to improve the work of the COAs included more strategic stakeholder engagement to involve civil society, private sector actors, and academia inter alia by ensuring their inclusion in meetings, sharing progress reports and related

communications with a wider audience, and better information sharing to enable partnerships with government entities. Local governments, too, should be engaged more strategically to facilitate localization and local-level reporting of action. UN Country Teams could help to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement at the national level.

To improve outreach, awareness and communication, suggestions included simplifying language around COAs and Voluntary Commitments and strengthening the links with the SDGs. Innovative engagement, communication and knowledge sharing channels could include reporting capabilities via apps or offline mechanisms for stakeholders with unreliable internet access. The Ocean Conference website and platform should be developed further to ensure responsive reporting of updates and could include an online map to display geographic distribution of Voluntary Commitments. There is a need to provide better support and recognition to key players and areas where progress is made on Voluntary Commitments (through an award scheme, for example).

COAs could better serve developing countries by sharing knowledge and creating access to information and technologies for communities, focusing on achieving multiple development benefits linked to a healthy ocean. COAs could strengthen their network within and across Communities to enable better cooperation, pooling of capacities and access to funding resources across implementing agencies, development cooperation partners, and stakeholders interested in collaborating to accelerate ocean action. One suggestion included establishing a second level of communication to link larger organizations to grassroots initiatives and smaller projects. To make the COA platform more useful, a new data layer could be added to display ideas or projects that seek funding and enable matchmaking with potential funders who are looking to invest in particular issues or Voluntary Commitments. Further suggestions to make the registry of Voluntary Commitments more transparent and useful for reporting in line with the 2030 Agenda included subdividing Commitments that cover multiple thematic areas and refining the filters for registration to better align with (primary or secondary) SDG indicators. Participants called for a more practical COA network to improve the connection between implementing entities and ocean stakeholders that addresses the needs and of developing countries more strategically.

Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of ESCAP and Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Ocean with delegates in the exhibition space

Opening of Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean

## Next steps toward 2020 and beyond

Looking toward the 2020 UN Ocean Conference and the achievement of SDG 14, participants called for the mobilization of funding and improved donor coordination as well as better engagement of the private sector, including through responsible practices. In the short term, strategic communication needs to be improved to ensure stakeholders are aware of what Voluntary Commitments have been pledged, what progress has been made and where gaps remain –more innovative and inclusive communication tools are required. The discussions showed that better coordination between COA and SDG reporting processes is required to generate a coherent flow of information relevant for stakeholders and decision-makers. Engagement of local communities in actions and solutions is key. The role of regional engagement, reporting and exchange mechanisms, facilitated inter alia through Regional Commissions, could significantly support the implementation and transparent follow up of action for a healthy ocean. These issues should inform the planning process and be integrated into the discussions at the 2020 UN Ocean Conference, to improve the integration, implementation and reporting of Voluntary Commitments at a regional and global level.

Participants in parallel sessions

Opening of Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean

## Annex I. Participant Evaluation Summary

An evaluation was carried out to assess the impact and value of the first Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean. Almost all respondents of the survey agreed that the Day had increased their understanding of the Communities of Action and indicated their support for a regional platform to follow-up on these issues and to catalyse further action for a healthy ocean. Similarly, most respondents agreed that discussions were of good quality and that the content was relevant for their work (Figure 1).

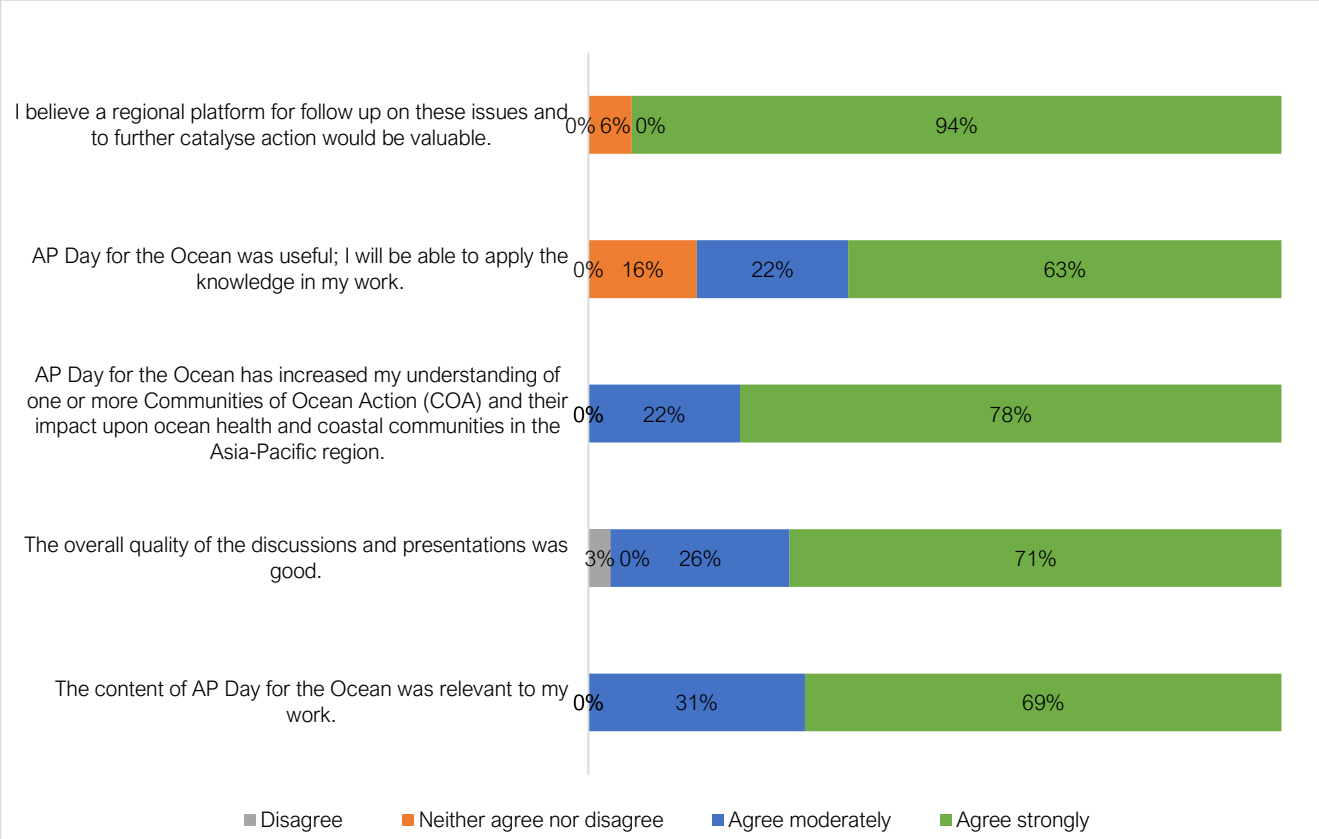



*Figure 1: Results of Participant Evaluation*

## Annex II. Programme

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| 07:30 | Registration of participants | UN Conference Centre ground floor |
| | **Opening: Our region – Our Ocean** *(Conference Room 4)* | |
| 09:00 – 09:45 | *Welcome remarks – The role of regional platforms and cooperation for a healthy ocean:*<br>Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)<br>*Setting the scene – The Communities of Ocean Action and the role of a healthy ocean for sustainable development in Asia-Pacific:*<br>Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Ocean<br>*Progress made since the 2017 UN Ocean Conference:*<br>• Mr. Taholo Kami, Special Representative for the Ocean Pathway of the Fiji COP23 Presidency<br>• Ms. Åsa Heden, Counsellor, Head for Regional Development Cooperation, Embassy of Sweden in Thailand<br>*Video message:* Mr. Michael Lodge, Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, Community of Ocean Action on Implementation of International Law as Reflected in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea<br>*Moderator:* Mr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP | |
| 09:45 – 10:00 | **An Ocean Accounts Partnership:** ESCAP's Voluntary Commitment to strengthen ocean governance and statistical capacity in the region<br>Mr. Hongjoo Hahm, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP | |
| | Coffee break and photo | |
| | **Taking stock of ocean action in Asia-Pacific** *(parallel sessions in breakout rooms)* | |
| 10:15 – 12:15 | **Session A: Marine and coastal ecosystems management, coral reefs and mangroves**<br>*Meeting Room A*<br>*Moderator:* Mr. Paul Marshall, Reef Ecologic<br>*Setting the Scene – regional progress for healthy marine and coastal ecosystems:*<br>• COA on mangroves: Ms. Aban Marker Kabraji, IUCN Regional Director<br>• COA on coral reefs: Mr. Paul Marshall, Reef Ecologic<br>*Presenting progress on Voluntary Commitments:*<br>• Improving the effectiveness of coastal and marine resource management: Mr. Jonathan Baines, Conservation Manager, Marine Conservation Philippines<br>• Stopping fish bombing: Mr. George Woodman, Executive Committee, Stop Fish Bombing!<br>• Planting 1 Million 'SeaTrees': Mr. Michael Stewart, Co-Founder, Sustainable Surf<br>• Community and Stakeholder Based Coral Reef Restoration: Mr. Beginer Subhan, Biorock Indonesia<br>• Towards sustainable management of marine and coastal habitats: Mr. Wannakiat Thubthimsang, Marine Resource and Ecologies Management specialist, Phuket Marine Biological Center<br>*Plenary discussion – sharing progress, growing the Communities and catalysing action* | |
| 10:15 – 12:15 | **Session B: Marine pollution and closing the loop on plastic waste**<br>*Meeting Room H*<br>*Moderator:* Mr. Jerker Tamelander, COBSEA Coordinator, UN Environment | |

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| | *Setting the Scene* – Marine pollution in the region<br>• Ms. Natalie Harms, Associate Sustainable Development Officer, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP<br>*Presenting progress on Voluntary Commitments:*<br>• Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and the Regional Seas Programme for ocean-related SDGs: Mr. Jerker Tamelander, UN Environment<br>• The role of country networks and improving waste education: Ms. Nina van Toulon, Indonesian Waste Platform<br>• Reducing waste through sustainable production and consumption in the food industry: Mr. Thirach Rungruangkanokkul, Agricultural and Food Marketing Association for Asia and the Pacific and Sustainable Ocean Ambassador<br>• Trash into gold: Mr. Lim Thiam Aik, Environmental Protection Voluntary Advisor, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation<br>• Tackling ghost gear: Ms. Darian McBain, Global Director of Corporate Sustainability for Thai Union<br>• Reducing plastic pollution in India: Swapan Ray, Honorary Secretary, Indian Centre for Plastic in the Environment (ICPE)<br>*Plenary discussion – sharing progress, growing the Communities and catalysing action* |
| | Lunch and exhibits |
| 12:15 – 13:15 | Lunch break & Walk of ideas – exhibits of Voluntary Commitments and ocean action<br>*Exhibition space outside Conference Room 4* |
| | Taking stock of ocean action in Asia-Pacific *(parallel sessions in breakout rooms)* |
| 13:15 – 15:15 | Session C: Ocean acidification, promoting scientific knowledge and accelerating action<br>*Meeting Room H*<br>*Moderator:* Ms. Katinka Weinberger, Chief, Environment and Development Policy Section, ESCAP<br>*Setting the Scene – Challenges of ocean health in the region*<br>• COA on ocean acidification (video message): Mr. David Osborn, Director, Environment Laboratories, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)<br>*Presenting progress on Voluntary Commitments:*<br>• Develop research capacity and transfer of marine technology in the West Pacific: Mr. Somkiat Khokiattiwong, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources of Thailand, Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON) Executive Council and Vice Chair of IOC-UNESCO<br>• Ocean Literacy Campaign in Bangladesh: Mr. Mohammad Muslem Uddin, Associate Professor of Oceanography, President of Blue Green Foundation Bangladesh<br>• Blue Solutions Partnership: Mr. Jerker Tamelander, UN Environment Programme<br>• Accelerating action for SDG 14: Ms. Caridad Canales Davila, Associate Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP<br>• Comprehensive Assessment and Conservation of Blue Carbon Ecosystems and their Services in the Coral Triangle (BlueCARES): Dr. Sakaguchi Noriaki, Senior Advisor, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)<br>*Plenary discussion – sharing progress, growing the Communities and catalysing action* |
| 13:15 – 15:15 | Session D: Sustainable fisheries and blue economy<br>*Meeting Room A*<br>*Moderator:* Ms. Cassandra De Young, Fishery Planning Analyst, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) |

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| | *Setting the Scene – Sustainable fishery and use of the ocean in the region:*<br>• COA on sustainable fisheries: Ms. Cassandra De Young, FAO<br>*Presenting progress on Voluntary Commitments:*<br>• The Oceans and Fisheries Partnership: Ms. Cristina Vélez Srinivasan, Project Manager, Regional Environment Office of the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia<br>• Networking of Islands for Sustainable Oceans: Masanori Kobayashi, Research Fellow, Ocean Policy Research Institute of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation<br>• Promoting Gender Equality in Sustainable Fisheries Management: Ms. Milika Sobey, Chairperson, Women in Fisheries Network, Fiji<br>• Initiatives Toward Sustainable Development of Fisheries in ASEAN Region: Mr. Kom Silapajarn, Secretary General, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)<br>• A Holistic Solution for the Eradication of Destructive Fishing Practices in South-East Asia: Mr. Adrian Chan, Founder & Director, Reef Defenders<br>• Combating IUU Fishing: Mr. Adisorn Promthep, Director General, Department of Fisheries, Thailand<br>*Plenary discussion – sharing progress, growing the Communities and catalysing action* |
| | Coffee break |
| | Progress made and action needed in Asia-Pacific *(Conference Room 4)* |
| 15:30 – 16:45 | Tracking progress on Voluntary Commitments in the region & growing the Communities - Outcomes of parallel sessions<br>*Conference Room 4*<br>*Moderator:* Mr. Paul Marshall, Reef Ecologic<br>*Rapporteurs of Sessions A, B, C and D* |
| 16:45 – 17:30 | Closing: Accelerating action in the region<br>*Conference Room 4*<br>*Moderator:* Mr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP<br>*Regional review and call for action:* Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Thomson<br>*Toward 2020 and beyond:* Mr. Francisco Vaz Patto, Ambassador of Portugal in Thailand<br>*Leading the way in Asia-Pacific:* Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP |
| | Networking cocktail reception *(outside Conference Room 4)* |