

Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States at the Preparatory Meeting, 15-16 February

1. The EU and its Member States welcome the Ocean Conference to support the implementation of SDG14. We believe that, by examining sustainability regarding ocean uses in the wider context of the UN 2030 Agenda, it has the potential to make a strong input to the High Level Political Forum and advance the implementation not only of SDG 14 but also of other related development goals and targets.
2. We have all agreed to the integrated and indivisible character of the 2030 Agenda and recognize that this Conference should fully respect this and should only aim at supporting its implementation process.
3. As global actors, the EU and its Member States share the fundamental obligation and responsibility to protect, conserve and sustainably use oceans and its resources in order to enable sustainable development for current and future generations and to achieve and maintain healthy and productive oceans. The EU and its Member States are therefore strongly committed to the achievement of SDG14 and ocean-related targets of other SDGs as part of their efforts contributing to the implementation of Agenda 2030. In our opinion, we should use the opportunity provided by this Agenda and its specific SDG 14 to advance a holistic approach to oceans.
4. We consider that such a holistic approach should include the protection and conservation of ecosystems, addressing pressures, including human induced climate change and including those from land-based sources, implementing an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities, achieving sustainable fisheries, ensuring integrated ocean and coastal management and creating conditions for sustainable development and a blue economy by focusing on implementation and action at all levels.
5. We believe that SDG 14 can be a strong driver for strengthening ocean governance and enhancing policy coherence. It provides an impetus for collective global accountability for oceans under the 2030 Agenda.

6. Turning to the topic of this session, the EU and its Member States thank the Secretary General very much for the proposed Partnership Dialogues' themes which we fully support. We consider that they capture well all the different elements covered by the 10 targets under Goal 14. However, we are also convinced that consideration should be given to some cross-cutting aspects within each of the different dialogues. In our opinion, these should include the regional dimension of cooperation in the implementation of SDG14, the inter-linkages with other ocean-related targets in the 2030 Agenda, the legal framework established by UNCLOS, the essential role of oceans in relation to climate change, the issues of governance and effectiveness, monitoring and control, as well as the role of civil society including the private sector. We also think that it would be useful for such cross-cutting aspects to also be taken into consideration in the drafting of the concept papers, in preparation for the Partnership Dialogues.
7. We see the added value of such Partnership Dialogues in the involvement and participation of all stakeholders as well as in the identification of concrete actions, best practices, exchange of experiences and lessons learnt. Partnership Dialogues could represent a great opportunity to bring together countries and all stakeholders and provide a proper context for concrete SDG 14 implementation, according to priorities, needs, constraints and challenges identified in specific situations.
8. We note that the Secretary General's Background Note states that more than 160 partnerships have been identified and that there is an uneven distribution of such partnerships across target areas. In addition, it points out their effectiveness cannot always be assessed adequately and there could be problems associated with fragmentation and duplication. In view of this, the EU and its Member States suggest that the process leading up to the Partnership Dialogues including the formulation of the Concept Papers could also be an opportunity for a gap assessment, for looking at ways to review the results and effectiveness of existing partnerships while establishing new ones where necessary to achieve the SDG 14 targets.
9. The EU and its Member States look forward to working with all partners on this crucial issue. We believe that this conference will complement and be complemented by other efforts being undertaken globally. The EU will be represented at its highest levels at the Ocean Conference in June through Mr Vella, our Commissioner for the Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs with high level participation also expected from EU Member States. In addition, the EU will also be hosting the 2017 session of the "Our Ocean" Conference in October this year in Malta. We see these two conferences as mutually reinforcing and providing opportunities for maintaining a continuous focus on oceans at a high political level, as well as raising general public awareness, and furthering progress in the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources.

