



New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Te Māngai o Aotearoa

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

New Zealand intervention in segment on Oceans and Seas

Stephanie Lee, Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

4 February 2014

Check against delivery



**NEW ZEALAND
UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL
2015-16**

Oceans and seas is a very important issue for New Zealand and one which we want to see well-reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ideally as a standalone goal. Oceans are essential for sustainable development. Many of the reasons why are flagged in the Technical Support Team's useful brief:

- Oceans cover three quarters of the Earth's surface and produce much of the oxygen we breathe.
- Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods.
- Oceans are also the world's largest source of water and animal protein.
- Oceans absorb one third of the carbon dioxide emitted by humans.
- Oceans are the arteries for 90% of the world's trade.

The rapid decline in global fish stocks, sea level rise, ocean acidification, increasing demand for space, land-based impacts, and loss of marine biodiversity are threatening these essential services and along with them the health, livelihoods, homes and food security of billions of people. It is critical, therefore, that oceans are given priority attention as we develop the sustainable development goals.

There is a tendency for oceans to be seen as an environmental issue or one that only has relevance for SIDS and coastal states. This significantly diminishes their importance to the planet. While we recognise the specific challenges and opportunities oceans offer to such States, including our own, oceans is a global issue requiring global attention.

At Rio+20 we agreed that SDGs "should address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development", taking a holistic, integrated approach". New Zealand believes that oceans encompass all three dimensions:

Economic dimension

- The economic development benefits of oceans are undeniable. Globally over 350 million jobs are linked to marine fisheries and aquaculture and other oceans-related sectors such as shipping and oil and gas industries are also significant employers. Coastal and marine tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of global tourism and the global trading system relies on oceans for the delivery of goods and many services.
- New uses of oceans offer significant economic development potential too. Renewable energy opportunities and sustainable exploitation of marine genetic resources are examples.

Capitalising on the potential of oceans provides an important development pathway for millions of people. But it is crucial that States can benefit from the true economic value of their oceans resources.

Social dimension

- Oceans make a vital contribution to global food security with fish providing the world's largest single source of protein. For many developing countries the oceans are the only

affordable and easy way to acquire animal protein. Fish is also essential for healthy nutrition providing communities with essential amino acids, fats and micronutrients.

- In recognition of the important role of oceans, the General Assembly decided last year to make the role of fisheries in food security the focus of this year's Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and Law of the Sea. This initiative, of which New Zealand is a strong supporter, will usefully complement deliberations on the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.
- The Technical Support Team's brief usefully noted that the majority of rain that falls on land originates in the oceans, giving us water for drinking, hygiene and sanitation, agriculture and industrial development. This important role is one of the reasons why oceans are of critical importance for all, including non-coastal States.
- Oceans are an integral part of many indigenous cultures, including in New Zealand. The Maori proverb "Toitu te marae a Tane, toitu te marae a Tangaroa, toitu te iwi", meaning "If the world of Tāne (all living things on land) endures, if the marae of Tangaroa (the lakes, rivers and sea) endures, the people endure" has resonance here as we consider the role of oceans for sustainable development.

Environmental dimension

- The oceans are an essential component of the Earth's ecosystem and fundamental to sustaining human life worldwide. As well as providing most of the earth's water, oceans provide a vast array of ecosystem services. They are a regulator of the global climate and play a key role in carbon sequestration.
- Marine plants including phytoplankton and seaweeds produce 50% of the oxygen on Earth. That means every other breath you take is dependent on oceans, regardless of how close to the sea you live – another reason why oceans is a global issue.
- Oceans and their associated coastal ecosystems, such as coral reefs and mangrove systems, provide a major food source, filter pollutants, provide a buffer against the impacts of extreme weather events, and provide flood control and coastal protection from tsunamis and storm surges.

These points clearly illustrate the importance of oceans to economic, social and environmental development. They also illustrate why healthy, productive, and resilient oceans are relevant for all countries regardless of whether they have a coast.

But what takes oceans from just being important to being a priority issue that warrants inclusion in the SDGs?

Oceans are under considerable strain. As noted earlier, essential services and the ocean's food supply are threatened by the continued and rapid decline of marine biodiversity caused primarily by overfishing, IUU fishing, pollution including from land-based sources, and climate change. Ocean acidification threatens the survival of some marine organisms, including corals, which are essential for biodiversity, fish stocks, tourism and coastal protection. It also threatens a range of other species including molluscs, bryzoans and seaweeds, with significant implications for our oceans' biodiversity.

Rising sea levels created by climate change will make life impossible in some SIDS and low-lying regions. Intensive use of oceans and runoff from land-based pollution, particularly in coastal areas, increases risks to human health, for example, from waterborne infectious diseases and chemical pollutants. Like many marine industries, while the tourism sector provides significant employment and economic growth, its continued viability is inextricably linked to the health of the oceans and the species they support. Coral reef tourism is a perfect example of a tourism sector that is significantly threatened by continual decline in ocean health. In addition to these strains, the capacity for many developing States to address these issues and to capitalise from the potential of their oceans resources is limited.

We have not been blind to these problems: in *The Future We Want* we acknowledged the human impact on oceans and the importance of building the capacity of developing countries to be able to benefit from the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans. But we have reached a critical juncture where concerted collective action is necessary.

When we consider these commitments, some may ask why we need to address the oceans in the SDG process. In a crowded field of competing issues, what is the value-added of having an oceans SDG. It is this question that I wish to speak to today.

The overarching answer links to the truly critical nature of oceans to the health of our planet and our livelihoods. When considered in this light it is hard to imagine how member States could “map” the next 15 years of development priorities and *exclude* oceans and seas.

However putting aside that larger picture, there are also three other, relatively simple, reasons why for New Zealand considers having an oceans SDG would add value to existing commitments.

1. We could integrate existing commitments. While we address human activities in the oceans on a sectoral basis the impacts are not sectoral in nature. The call for a more integrated approach to oceans has been reiterated numerous times over the last two days. The first step is surely to bring all of these challenges and commitments into one place where we can see how they interact and intersect. An oceans SDG would do that.
2. Inclusion of oceans in the SDGs would catalyse much needed action to implement existing commitments. The time has well-passed for many of these commitments and yet change eludes us. The SDG process can build that momentum. It can also galvanise greater support to developing countries, particularly SIDS, to implement these commitments through capacity building and technology transfer.
3. Lastly, but certainly not least, the inclusion of oceans in the SDG will enable us to **measure** our progress towards achieving these objectives. Some data is available but we recognise that more will be needed. Measurability will be a challenge across all potential SDGs. It could also be an opportunity; there are impacts on the oceans that would benefit from greater monitoring but we lack the means or impetus to do this.

The co-chairs have stressed the need not just to identify potential goals but also possible targets/actions that would contribute to their achievement in the next 15 years. There are many existing targets relevant to oceans agreed in other processes but not achieved for some reason. One option is to build on those. The TST paper highlighted some key areas:

- Ensure conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas and of their resources. Key targets in this area could be targets on restoring fish stocks; combating IUU fishing; and eliminating fisheries subsidies;
- Reduce the incidence and impacts of marine pollution, with a key target being meeting the existing 2025 target on marine debris;
- Prevent introduction of alien invasive species and manage their adverse environmental impacts, and;
- Address issues such as ocean acidification.

New Zealand, as a strong supporter of an ambitious outcome for oceans, stands ready to work with others during the next phase of the SDG process on an oceans goal that builds on the outcomes in *The Future We Want*.

There is really only one ocean: something that happens in one part of the world affects oceans elsewhere. We all therefore have a stake in ensuring that the world's oceans deliver on their potential for sustainable development. New Zealand considers that oceans should be regarded as a priority issue and would be best addressed through a standalone goal.