

**Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, U.S.
Representative to ECOSOC, for the US/Canada/Israel Team,
10th Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on
Conservation and sustainable use of marine resources,
oceans and seas; Ecosystems and biodiversity**

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Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

Let me address the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans, and seas. Our team agrees with AOSIS, CARICOM, the Pacific Small Island Developing States and others those who say the time is ripe for a **dedicated goal to protect the world's oceans and seas**. The health of our oceans and seas affects us all – our food security, our economies, our climate, our health, and a well-crafted goal and targets on this issue would be truly transformative.

Oceans are an essential source of livelihood for more than 50 million people directly – and 300–500 million indirectly –employed in fishing or aquaculture, many of whom work in small-scale fisheries that are economically critical to their communities. Marine fisheries contribute over \$250 billion to the global economy, and more than one billion people rely on seafood as their primary source of protein and nutrients.

We therefore support several of the proposed target areas in the Co-chairs' document. Among these is the **reduction of marine pollution and debris**, including from land-based activities, where an estimated 80% of marine pollution originates. These have resulted in 600 “dead zones where neither fish nor other forms of marine life can thrive. Similarly debris – 60–80% plastics – have concentrated in massive “garbage patches,” and illegal discharge of oil at sea presents a serious ongoing problem. Obviously, the governance of biodiversity and of marine resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction requires a different kind of discussion than we are having here and are the subject of different processes.

We see scope for a target to **establish Marine Protected Areas**. Only an estimated 1–3% of the world’s oceans are protected, compared to 12% of land. Yet conservation of coastal and marine areas would provide multiple benefits as these ecosystems provide key services such as breeding grounds for marine species, carbon “sinks” and natural resilience against storms and other disasters.

Our agenda should also address **overfishing and other unsustainable fishing practices**. Of the world’s marine fisheries for which reasonable data exists, 57% cannot support expanded harvest and 30% are overexploited. We see scope for the proposed target area to address illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices.

We are similarly intrigued by an **ocean acidification** target. The upper oceans continue to warm, causing a 30% increase in ocean acidity since the Industrial Revolution and a threat to food chains connected to oceans.

Finally, we see potential for a target to **eliminate harmful subsidies that promote overfishing and overcapacity**.

Let me turn to **ecosystems and biodiversity**. Our team shares the widely expressed view that a goal and associated targets on the sustainable management of natural resources is a high priority for this framework, alongside key ecosystems–related targets under other relevant goals. This is an opportunity to learn from the experience of implementing MDG 7 and craft a truly meaningful and transformative next–generation goal.

There is much to support in the areas outlined by the Co–chairs, and we would highlight the following target areas as high priorities for us where we also see scope for genuine common agreement:

Protecting threatened species and halting loss of biodiversity: Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity safeguards critical natural systems and preserves the genetic richness that underpins ecosystem services, provides clean water and air, recycles nutrients, promotes human health and well–being, and provides food and other natural resources.

Reversing the loss of forest cover through sustainable forest management and improved forest governance: There are many ways to frame a target in this area, but scaled–up action would have profound and wide–ranging benefits across a range of issues from climate impacts to health to employment. We see scope to combine forest issues in a single target that reflects the full scope of forest concerns and is not exclusively focused

on the issue of agriculture conversion noted by the Co–chairs. Any forest target should also capture the importance of forest–related employment.

Significantly reducing land degradation and increasing the area under sustainable land use planning and management, and/or restoration: We strongly support efforts to prevent and reverse land degradation, which is materially important to so many countries. There are different ways to craft such a target to slow, halt, or reverse land degradation, and it is important that we do so.

Stopping poaching and trafficking of protected species: This is a significant and rising priority globally that has the potential to disrupt economies and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods, contribute to the spread of disease, and contribute to illicit flows.

We are **less persuaded by some of the other target areas** that are either narrower in their formulation and relevance or that go more to instruments and strategies to achieve targets.

One area that seems missing is **the integration of sustainable natural resource management, ecosystems, and biodiversity into development planning and decision–making** at different levels. This could help draw attention to the issue of ecosystem services and their wider contributions to employment, livelihoods, health, and food security and nutrition. We would welcome further discussion on this topic.

We appreciate the Co–Chairs’ highlighting the need for development and use of **high quality, timely, disaggregated data**. This is a broader issue that relates not just to Ecosystems but which, we’ve noted before, would be productive to discuss further.

Finally, we would like to close with a brief point on **climate change**, which we did not address earlier this morning. As we have said before, climate change could not be a more critical global priority for every one of us here, and certainly for our team. We strongly believe that a post–2015 framework will only be successful if it takes climate change fully into account.

But in strong concurrence with the rest of this room, we also believe the goals and objectives for managing climate change are rightly the focus of the UNFCCC rather than here, and we thus do not believe our framework will be strengthened by a standalone goal on climate change.

Instead, strong climate change-relevant targets should be integrated into key goal areas throughout our agenda, such as food security, health, oceans, ecosystems, energy, etc. We have already suggested several areas during the stocktaking phase as well as earlier this week.

Thank you very much, Mr. Co-chair.