



THE  
**OCEAN**  
**CONFERENCE**  
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 5-9 JUNE 2017

## The Ocean Conference

### Backgrounder

#### Overview

*“Whether you look at the declining fish stock that is reaching a tipping point or the ocean acidification level or the level of plastics in our oceans, I think any sensible person can conclude that time is running out and we need to take action fast.”*

**- President of the UN General Assembly Peter Thomson**

From 5 to 9 June 2017, the United Nations will convene a major conference that will energize efforts to promote ocean sustainability. The Ocean Conference, which will be the first UN conference of its kind on the issue, will coincide with World Environment Day (5 June) and World Oceans Day (8 June). It will present an invaluable opportunity for countries, the UN System, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the private sector, media and the general public to mobilize urgent and tangible action to reverse the cycle of ocean decline.

*Why do we need a conference on the oceans?* Simply put: our oceans are in serious trouble. Human activities are having major impacts on the oceans, affecting everything from the viability of marine habitats to the quality and temperature of the water, the health of marine life, and the continued availability of seafood—which in turn affects poverty eradication, economic growth, sustainable livelihoods and employment, global food security, human health and climate regulation. Basically, what happens in the oceans affects our daily life—and what we do matters a lot to the oceans.

Billions of people depend on the oceans for their main source of food and millions of others draw their livelihood from the seas. Major economic activities, such as tourism and trade, depend on healthy oceans. Oceans are the primary regulator of the global climate. They supply half the oxygen we breathe, and absorb a third of the carbon dioxide we produce.

Despite their critical role in sustaining life in this world, our oceans are increasingly threatened, degraded or destroyed by human activities, reducing their ability to provide crucial ecosystem services. Already today, 30 per cent of the world’s fish stocks are over-exploited, while more than 50 per cent are fully exploited. Coastal habitats are under pressure, with approximately 20 per cent of the world’s coral reef lost and another 20 per cent degraded. Plastic waste alone is estimated to kill up to 1 million sea birds, 100,000 sea mammals and countless fish each year. Approximately 80 per cent of marine pollution comes from land-based activities.

Moreover, vulnerable groups, including the poor, women, children, indigenous peoples as well as coastal communities and countries with a high dependency on the oceans and their marine resources, such as Small Island developing States (SIDS), are particularly affected.

*“Our ocean is warming up and changing the pattern of our main product, tuna. The degradation of the water is also depleting our resources and creating a lot of havoc in our ocean.”*

**- Minister of Fisheries of Fiji Semi Koroilavesau**

For more information on the conference, please visit: <https://oceanconference.un.org/>

## **Oceans and the Sustainable Development Goals**

In 2015, 193 UN Member States unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. The goals address a wide range of issues from poverty eradication and gender equality to climate change. SDG 14 specifically highlights the need to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, including through preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution, minimizing and addressing ocean acidification, sustainably managing, protecting and conserving marine and coastal ecosystems, ending overfishing and unregulated fishing, and increasing the economic benefits to SIDS from the sustainable use of marine resources.

We know that the oceans, which cover three quarters of the Earth’s surface, form an integrated and essential component of our planet’s ecosystem and are critical to sustainable development. With this in mind, the Ocean Conference is dedicated to supporting the implementation of SDG 14. Action on this goal, however, will support the implementation efforts of all the goals, given their interlinked nature. Every day, billions of people depend on healthy oceans for their food security, economic stability, and the chance to live in a diverse and sustainable environment. The oceans matter to all of us, no matter who we are or where we live, and we matter to the oceans.

*“People are saying that the oceans sink one third of greenhouse gas emissions. If we lose the sea and oceans, just imagine what kind of situation we are going to have.”*

**- Secretary-General of the Conference Wu Hongbo**

For more information on the Sustainable Development Goals, please visit:  
<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

## **Outcome**

The Ocean Conference will be an important step to reverse the decline of the ocean. It will not only serve as a place to raise awareness of the state of the ocean, but will produce a global call for action and generate new dialogues and partnerships aimed at implementing solutions. In addition, many participants will announce new voluntary commitments to address ocean challenges.

Three critical outcomes are expected at the Ocean Conference. UN Member States will adopt a “Call for Action” by consensus. It will act as a concise, focused and concrete declaration to set the course towards a more sustainable future for our oceans. The Conference is, however, not only about what Governments can do to address this issue—it is also about how we can all contribute and do our part, however big or small.

During the Preparatory Meeting in February 2017, the UN launched the process for registering voluntary commitments online for the implementation of SDG 14. The voluntary commitments are initiatives undertaken by anyone, individually or in partnership, including Governments, the UN system, financial institutions, civil society, academic and research institutions, the scientific community and the private sector. They can include various local, regional and global initiatives, addressing the different targets of SDG 14, ranging from efforts to protect the marine environment, curb marine pollution and address the impact of ocean acidification. A list of voluntary commitments will be included in the report of the Conference.

The report of the Conference will also include the co-chairs’ summary of the partnership dialogues. The partnership dialogues will deal with all targets of SDG 14 and aim to strengthen cooperation, scale up and replicate existing successful initiatives, and launch concrete and new partnerships that will advance the implementation of the goal.

“We need to take action now in order to leave our planet with good conscience to our children and grandchildren. We don’t have any excuses for not doing it. We think the ocean is endless, but it’s really not.”

**- Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden Isabella Lövin**

*For more information on the outcome, please visit: <https://oceanconference.un.org/about>. More information on the voluntary commitments can be found here: <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>*

*The Governments of Fiji and Sweden have the co-hosting responsibilities for the conference. To watch the panel interview with the President of the General Assembly, the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, the Minister of Fisheries of Fiji and the Secretary-General of the Conference, please visit: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/02/oceans-panel/>*