



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

## The Ocean Conference

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Why do we need a major conference on the oceans and why should I care about the oceans?**

A: The oceans matter to everyone, no matter where you live or what you do. Billions of people depend on the oceans for their main source of food and millions 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.

We also matter to the oceans and can play a significant role in safeguarding their health and sustainability. Climate change, for instance, continues to lead, among others, to rising sea levels and an increase in extreme weather events that directly threaten the lives of coastal communities, especially in Small Island Developing States. A sea level rise of half a metre could displace 1.2 million people from low-lying islands in the Caribbean Sea, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with that number almost doubling if the sea level rises by 2 metres.

The Ocean Conference, the first major UN conference on the issue, will present an important opportunity to take urgent and tangible action to reverse the decline of the health of our oceans and seas with concrete solutions. It will be our chance to chart a more sustainable course for the future of our oceans and our planet.

**Q: In a world beset by conflict, terrorism and economic stagnation, why the urgent focus on the oceans?**

A: Our oceans are in serious trouble. Human activities are having a major impact 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, a major source of protein for many people.

Trouble for the oceans means trouble for people. Human health, economic prosperity, and a stable climate depend on a healthy ocean. Action now to address ocean problems will go far to promote sustainable development which is critical for a more equal and peaceful world.

**Q: Why is it called The Ocean Conference? Don't we have five oceans?**

A: There is only one global ocean, the vast body of water that covers more than 70 per cent of the Earth—the waters flow and intermingle all around the globe. Pollution in the ocean anywhere can show up everywhere.

The oceans that we commonly refer to—the Arctic, Pacific, Atlantic, Indian and Southern—are more aptly described as ocean regions. Then there are a multitude of sub-regions that flow from seas into bays, estuaries, and so forth.

**Q: There have been other ocean conferences before but what makes this conference particularly important?**

A: There has been an uptick in the interest and activity to address ocean concerns. This is an important time to capture and maintain the momentum going forward and the Ocean Conference marks the first time that countries have agreed to hold a conference at the UN dedicated to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 14) pertaining to the health of the oceans. The UN brings a far greater global dimension to the issue.

**Q: What will the Ocean Conference accomplish?**

A: The Ocean Conference will be the first step to reverse the decline of our oceans. The Conference will bring together just about every group that has a stake in the health of the oceans, including Governments, the UN system, other intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other relevant actors.

The Conference not only will serve as a place to raise awareness of the state of our oceans, but will produce a global call for action, and generate new dialogues and partnerships aimed at implementing solutions. In addition, many participants are expected to announce and register on the Conference website new ocean initiatives, or voluntary commitments, undertaken individually or in partnership, and others will report on progress and challenges from existing programmes and initiatives.

**Q: Are you expecting any concrete outcomes or commitments?**

A: 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 commitments are initiatives undertaken, individually or in partnership, by anyone, 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. The list will be included into 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 SDG 14 targets 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.

**Q: What are some of the areas where we need to make progress?**

A: There are many actions that can be undertaken now, including efforts to prevent and clean up marine pollution such as the growing islands of plastic waste that are circulating in the ocean. Urgent action is needed to reduce land-based pollution, which accounts for 80 per cent of marine pollution, including by reducing agricultural run-off that ultimately ends up in the oceans and causes “dead zones.”

Action is also required to end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices. We need to take steps to sustainably manage, protect and conserve marine and coastal ecosystems by increasing community-based conservation measures, and educating and raising awareness. We need to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change—we will have to reduce emissions that are causing changes in our oceans, as well as take measures that build resilience to the impacts of ocean acidification and climate change, such as sea-level rise. The targets of SDG 14 outline the areas where progress is needed: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14>

**Q. How is climate change impacting our oceans?**

A. Because of climate change, sea-level is rising, causing coastal erosion and threatening coastal communities. We have also been seeing an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather and climate events. The oceans are warming, and that is already having an impact on marine biodiversity, such as coral reefs.

Changes in ocean temperature are also affecting the migratory patterns of many fish species, which are moving toward cooler waters. In addition, ocean acidification has increased as a result of more carbon dioxide being absorbed by the oceans, posing a major threat leading to the loss of shellfish, coral reefs and calcareous plankton, the base of much of the marine food chain.

**Q: How bad is the pollution in our oceans?**

A: Each year, more than 8 million tonnes of plastic ends up in the oceans, wreaking havoc on marine wildlife, fisheries and tourism, and costing at least \$8 billion in damage to marine ecosystems. Plastic waste is estimated to kill up to 1 million sea birds, 100,000 sea mammals and countless fish each year. Plastic remains in our ecosystem for years harming thousands of sea creatures every day.

We need to act now to eliminate major sources of marine litter, including through policies, recycling efforts and more responsible means of consumption, to prevent the irreversible damage that is being done to our oceans. If we don't act now and continue at the same rate, dumping items such as plastic bottles, bags and cups after a single use, by 2050 oceans will carry more plastic than fish and an estimated 99 per cent of seabirds will have ingested plastic.

**Q: Is recycling going to really help reduce plastic pollution in the oceans?**

A: Yes. Since 60 to 90 per cent of marine litter is made up of different plastics polymers, one of the main solutions to addressing marine pollution in our oceans would be to reduce our plastic footprint, including through efforts to reuse and recycle all plastic instead of throwing them away after one use and implement better waste collection on our shores.

Recent estimates show that our world produced some 322 million tonnes of plastic in 2015 and about 8 million tonnes of that ended up in our oceans. Recycling is one of the main ways we can all play our part to tackle this global challenge and reduce pollution—don't just throw away your plastic waste; reduce, reuse, recycle and rethink your consumption habits. Littering is a major problem and not a solution; litter doesn't just go away.

**Q: How will the Conference contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?**

A: The Ocean Conference is dedicated to supporting the implementation of SDG 14, which focuses on efforts to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources. Action in support of this goal will support implementation efforts of all 17 Goals, across the board. Healthy oceans directly contribute to poverty eradication, food security, health, clean water, renewable energy, sustainable livelihoods and decent work, economic growth and climate regulation.