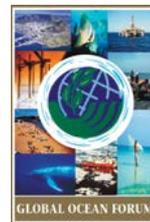


Proposal for a Sustainable Development Goal on Oceans and Seas

Prepared by the Global Ocean Forum¹



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Oceans are the point at which planet, people, and prosperity come together. And that is what sustainable development is about. It is about all of us as shareholders of Earth, incorporated, acknowledging and acting on our responsibility to the planet, to the people, and to its bloodstream, the oceans.

Elizabeth Thompson, Co-Executive Coordinator for the Rio+20 Conference, at Oceans Day at Rio+20

1. The centrality of oceans for sustainable development

The oceans are the most prominent feature on the planet, covering nearly 3/4 of the Earth, and play a critical role in major global processes. Regulating the water, nitrogen, and carbon cycles, the oceans provide ecosystem services that support life on Earth. Most of the global population depends on the oceans and seas as a means for sustenance, energy production, waste disposal, transportation, and recreation. Oceans and seas are essential to all the three pillars of sustainable development: environment, economy, and society.

This paper provides the perspective of the Global Ocean Forum regarding a stand-alone sustainable development goal on oceans and seas (SDG on Oceans and Seas). This paper also serves as an initial contribution to the development of a position paper on an SDG on oceans and seas of the Oceans and Seas Cluster of the UN Major Groups. Prepared with input from ocean leaders in the Global Ocean Forum network in 110 countries, this proposal was presented for consideration at the 8th session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, 3-7 February 2014. The proposal will be further discussed with government leaders, civil society, and the private sector, and will be revised and enhanced for input into the continuing SDG process.

The oceans and seas are essential for planetary survival

Just as a person cannot do without a healthy heart and lungs, the Earth cannot survive without healthy oceans and seas. They serve as the Earth’s respiratory system, producing oxygen for life and absorbing carbon dioxide and waste. The oceans provide storage and absorb 30 percent of carbon dioxide, while marine phytoplankton generates 50 percent of the oxygen needed for survival.² The oceans regulate the climate and temperature, making the planet hospitable to diverse forms of life on Earth. The hydrological cycle begins and ends with the oceans, and all rivers, streams, and tributaries lead to the oceans, giving

¹ The Global Ocean Forum (GOF) is an international, independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting good governance of the ocean, sustainable development for coastal and island peoples around the globe, and healthy marine ecosystems. The GOF was first mobilized in 2001 to help the world’s governments place issues related to oceans, coasts, and small island developing States on the agenda of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Since 2001, the GOF has brought together ocean leaders from 110 countries to advance the global ocean agenda. The GOF was very active in the Rio+20 process, also co-leading the Oceans and Seas Cluster of the UN Major Groups. The secretariat of the Global Ocean Forum, the International Ocean and Coastal Organization, has been accredited to UN ECOSOC since 2006, and is housed at the Gerard J. Mangone Center for Marine Policy, University of Delaware.

² UN DESA and UNDP 2013.

humans the means to thrive anywhere on Earth. In recent years, this fragile interdependency of life and the ocean has become strained due to overexploitation and adverse use of the marine environment and its resources. Therefore, all of Earth's inhabitants must care about the health of the oceans and seas and exercise ocean stewardship.

The oceans and seas are essential for national and global economic well-being

The global ocean economic activity is estimated to be between USD 3-6 trillion,³ contributing to the world economy in many important ways, such as:

- 90 percent of global trade moves by marine transport⁴
- Fisheries and aquaculture supply 4.3 billion people with more than 15 percent of annual consumption of animal protein⁵
- Over 30 percent of global oil and gas produced is extracted offshore⁶
- Coastal tourism is the largest market segment in the world economy, comprising 5 percent of the global GDP and 6 to 7 percent of global employment⁷
- Expanding knowledge on marine biodiversity has provided breakthrough advances in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food production, and aquaculture⁸
- 13 of the world's 20 megacities are coastal⁹
- Tides, waves, currents, and offshore wind are emerging sources of energy that have significant potential to contribute to low-carbon energy in many coastal countries¹⁰

While the oceans and seas sectors account for a large portion of global economic activity, the true value of the oceans is not yet fully known as many assessments do not take into consideration the non-market ecosystem services that can have significant impact on historical, cultural, and spiritual ties for much of the world population.¹¹

The oceans and seas are essential for social well-being

Over 40 percent, or 3.1 billion, of the world's population lives within 100 kilometers of the ocean or sea in about 150 coastal and island nations.¹² Regardless of whether a country is landlocked, or has a coastline, all nations are directly connected to the oceans and seas through rivers, lakes, and streams. Nations have placed significant importance on the benefits that are provided by the oceans, comprising over 60 percent of the global Gross National Product (GNP).¹³ In particular, coastal economic activity is the lifeblood of coastal and island nations.

Various marine economic sectors contribute to the alleviation of poverty in many ways. Studies have shown that having a "blue-green economy" increases the overall wealth of a nation while producing a higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate.¹⁴ Through activities such as sustainable fishing, renewable energy production, ecotourism, and "green" shipping, nations have been able to increase the rates of employment and good sanitation while decreasing poverty, malnutrition, and pollution.

³ IOC/UNESCO et al. 2011.

⁴ Ibid. 2.

⁵ Ibid. 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ UNEP 2011.

⁸ Ibid. 3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. 7.

¹¹ GPO 2013.

¹² Ibid. 3. The number of coastal countries varies according to different definitions of "coast" and "nations."

¹³ UNEP 2006.

¹⁴ Ibid. 3.

Ocean-based economies provide more opportunities for the empowerment and employment of women. Women make up the majority of the secondary activities workforce in marine fisheries and aquaculture. The results of increased female employment include the strengthening of the economic vitality of small and isolated communities and the enhancement of the status of women in developing countries.¹⁵

At the same time, coastal and island populations are some of the most vulnerable populations to climate change impacts. Oceans, seas, and coastal areas experience an increased frequency and intensity of climate extremes, including stronger hurricanes, typhoons, and cyclones. They are also subject to ocean acidification, sea level rise, and fluctuations in ocean circulation and salinity.¹⁶ These changes will be felt not only at the coast, but inland as well due to the widespread influence of ocean currents on weather systems. By 2050, it is estimated that 50 to 200 million people worldwide will be displaced due to the negative impacts of climate change, threatening food security, livelihoods, and social stability not only in coastal and island nations, but in all countries that will be assisting displaced populations. Mitigation and adaptation must be further enhanced to provide increased support for emergency preparedness programs and disaster response planning, as well as early warning systems, observations,¹⁷ and coastal planning and management. Reducing the threat to international peace and security posed by coastal and island disasters will only be accomplished through enhanced understanding of the role of the oceans and seas in the climate system.

Good ocean governance and capacity development are essential to achieve sustainable development

Good ocean governance and capacity development are essential to ensure planetary survival, global economic well-being, and social stability and prosperity of coastal and island populations. The integration of science, decision-making, and enforcement is crucial for future ocean governance. While many milestones have been attained in ocean policy in the past two decades, further participation and effort is needed by States, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to expedite the achievement and implementation of international goals and targets.¹⁸

2. Approach of this Proposal for a Sustainable Development Goal

Oceans and seas must have a central place in the SDG discussions and in the development of the post-2015 development agenda to fulfill the global commitments made at the 1992, 2002, and 2012 world summits on sustainable development and the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Nations and peoples around the world understand and appreciate the central role of oceans and seas in global, regional, and national sustainable development. Oceans have been prominently featured in the 1992 Earth Summit (Chapter 17, the longest chapter of Agenda 21), in the specific targets and timetables developed at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, and in the 2012 Rio+20 Conference (in particular the outcome document where oceans and seas were prominent). These summits have also underlined the important role of the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention for sustainable development. The 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out and is of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional, and global action. However, further work is needed to harmonize the three pillars of sustainable development into existing ocean governance.

¹⁵ Ibid. 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 3.

Oceans and seas are facing serious threats that must be addressed to achieve sustainable development

The vitality of the oceans and seas are threatened by the increasing rate of destructive activities being conducted, such as:

- Unsustainable extraction of marine resources (fisheries, minerals, oil and gas, bio-prospecting)
- Pollution (from land-based and marine sources)
- Loss of marine biodiversity
- Ocean acidification and climate change impacts
- Alien invasive species
- Inappropriate coastal development—e.g., physical alteration and destruction of marine and coastal habitats.¹⁹

If society continues on at a “business as usual” rate of consumption and activity, the negative changes to the marine and coastal environment will be irreparable. In turn, this destruction will have significant adverse impacts on the global economy, environment, and society.

An oceans and seas SDG should (as noted by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want”):

- Have a 2030 timeframe
- Be visionary, but attainable
- Address all three pillars of sustainability
- Be global in nature while sensitive to differences among countries
- Be aspirational
- Be accountable
- Be action oriented
- Be concise
- Be easy to communicate

Given the centrality of oceans in global and national sustainable development and planetary survival, an SDG on oceans and seas must include actions at the global, regional, and national levels.

Recognizing that effective governance at all levels is critical for advancing the sustainable development of the oceans and seas, an integrated approach that links key issues and challenges across ecological, jurisdictional and political boundaries is paramount. In particular, enhancing the effectiveness of regional implementation is crucial in facilitating national implementation of global targets and prescriptions.

3. Possible Elements of a Sustainable Development Goal on Oceans

The possible elements of a Sustainable Development Goal on Oceans noted below include one overarching goal and specific targets at global, national, and sub-national levels. All of the recommendations are rooted in existing global commitments on oceans found in the UN Convention on Law of the Sea, Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and in the outcome document of the Rio+20 conference.²⁰ A number of the prescriptions noted below have also been recommended by other entities and this is referenced in the footnotes. **Please note that specific indicators and time targets are to be added at a later point, after wide consultation with stakeholders around the world. Eventually, we look to the inclusion of a timeframe that incorporates the development and implementation of action plans on these targets by nations by 2025.**

¹⁹ Ibid. 2.

²⁰ These references will be noted in the next iteration of this document.

Goal on Oceans and Seas

Exercise stewardship of the oceans and seas, protect their vital role in sustaining life on Earth, and promote “blue growth” to achieve prosperous and resilient peoples and communities.

Targets

Target 1: Achieve healthy marine ecosystems and marine biodiversity by establishing and applying integrated and ecosystem-based management approaches and measures, at the sub-national, national, and regional levels as appropriate, to ensure the basic life-sustaining and regulating functions of the ocean (oxygen production, key processes in the climate system and in the hydrological cycle).²¹

Target 2: Safeguard the world’s fisheries by ensuring that all fish stocks are being fished sustainably and effectively²² through the following:

- Maintaining or restoring fish stocks to Optimum Sustainable Yield levels
- Eliminating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing
- Eliminating harmful fishing subsidies
- Enhancing access agreements for fisheries (and other marine resources) to ensure social equity, resource conservation, and public transparency
- Enhancing implementation of existing fisheries agreements
- Assessing the progress and enhancing performance of Regional Fishery Management Organizations under their respective treaties and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement

Target 3: Reduce the incidence and impacts of marine pollution (marine debris, plastics, POPs, heavy metals, nitrogen-based compounds) from marine and land-based sources and enhance the implementation of regional and global pollution protocols.²³

Target 4: Establish and effectively manage ecologically representative and well-connected systems of marine protected areas within and beyond national jurisdiction, covering at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas.²⁴

Target 5: Improve cooperation and coordination at all levels, especially regional cooperation on oceans and seas, and the implementation of regional protocols on integrated and ecosystem-based ocean and coastal management to guide actions at national and regional levels.

Target 6: Build the capacity of nations (including on marine management and on marine natural and social sciences) to sustainably and equitably manage the oceans and coasts under national jurisdiction.

Target 7: Address the special needs of least developing countries, African countries, and small island developing states in the management of coastal and marine resources and enhance the economic and social benefits derived from these resources.²⁵

²¹ This target is also emphasized by the International Council for Science.

²² This target is also emphasized by the Government of Palau; Governments of the Pacific Small Island Developing States and Timor-Leste; and International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development.

²³ This target is also emphasized by the International Council for Science; Government of Palau; Governments of the Pacific Small Island Developing States and Timor-Leste.

²⁴ Aichi Biodiversity Target 11.

²⁵ This target is also emphasized by the Governments of the Pacific Small Island Developing States and Timor-Leste.

Target 8: Develop the public’s capacity to exercise ocean stewardship by improving awareness, literacy, and opportunities for action regarding critical ocean issues.

Target 9: Integrate the principles and strategies of “blue growth/blue economy” in national economies to help eradicate poverty, move toward a low-carbon economy, enhance social inclusion, improve human welfare, and create job opportunities in coastal and island communities, while maintaining healthy oceans.

Target 10: Improve the management of oceans and coasts under national jurisdiction by scaling up successful national and sub-national efforts in integrated and ecosystem-based management to cover all coasts and ocean areas within national jurisdiction, and strengthen integrated institutions and ocean and coastal decision-making processes, including through the enactment of ocean and coastal laws.

Target 11: Ensure that coastal and island communities have adequate resources and management capacity in place for effective adaptation to the impacts of ocean warming and ocean acidification, including climate change-induced displacement of coastal and island peoples.

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