

## Preface

As we seek to pursue sustainable development, we all need an understanding of the ways – environmental, social and economic – in which we humans interact with the world around us. Globally, the drive towards sustainable development cannot ignore the seven-tenths of the planet covered by the ocean. Such thoughts led to the recommendation of the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, that there should be a regular process for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socioeconomic aspects. We need to understand the overall benefits of the ocean to us humans, and the overall impacts of humans on the ocean.

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 14 (“Conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”). It is therefore timely that the work put in hand by the Johannesburg Summit has now produced *The First Global Integrated Marine Assessment – World Ocean Assessment I* under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly. The General Assembly considered and endorsed not only its Outline, but also the terms of reference and working methods of the Group of Experts and the guidance to contributors. The approach to the assessment has therefore been carefully considered at the global level.

Implementing the approach has been a major task, relying essentially on voluntary efforts from hundreds of experts in many fields. We and our colleagues in the Group of Experts of the Regular Process have been privileged to organize, contribute to, and produce the final version of, this Assessment. Crucial support has been provided by the secretariat of the Regular Process in the United Nations Secretariat, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs, by several international organizations and by a number of United Nations Member States, as detailed in Chapter 2 (Mandate, information sources and method of work). The full draft assessment was reviewed by United Nations Member States. Under the terms of reference and working methods, the Group of Experts is collectively responsible for the final text.

The Regular Process was tasked with providing a first Assessment that could serve as a baseline for future cycles of the process. The vast scale of the ocean and the complexities of its many facets are revealed again and again throughout this first Assessment. Likewise, the challenges that must be faced are presented. We have also sought to identify the main gaps in knowledge and in capacity-building that hinder the responses to these challenges. These elements are all summarized in Part I of the Assessment – Summary – under ten themes: climate change, over-exploitation of marine living resources, the significance of food security and food safety, patterns of biodiversity and the changes in them, the pressures from increased uses of ocean space, the threats from increased pollution, the effects of cumulative impacts, the inequalities in the distribution of benefits from the ocean, the importance of coherent management of human impacts on the ocean, and the problems of delay in implementing known solutions.

The General Assembly decided that the Assessment should not undertake policy analysis. We have therefore not ranked these themes in order of importance. Similarly, recommendations for action were not sought. It therefore remains for national governments and the competent international authorities to decide what action to take in the light of the Assessment.



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