

STATEMENT OF THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES

The EU and its Member States would like to thank the co-facilitators for their excellent work in the production of the zero draft of the Declaration, as well as for the alternative arrangements for providing our views, which we greatly appreciate.

As we had stated at the preparatory meeting, the EU and its Member States are gravely concerned with the poor status and health of the oceans and seas and their biodiversity, as highlighted in the latest scientific reports (such as the IPCC special report and the IPBES report), as well as with regard to the fact that the SDG 14 targets due this year will not be met. This adds to the sense of urgency of action which needs to be transmitted through the Declaration. Significantly greater ambition is required in this respect.

We recognise that there was significant convergence in the interventions at the preparatory meeting with regard to the main challenges facing the ocean particularly climate change, marine pollution notably from plastic, biodiversity loss and habitat degradation and achieving sustainable fisheries as well as the need for strong science to support the necessary actions to overcome them.

We consider that the first draft of the Declaration reflects well many of the substantive issues raised by the UN SG's background note, as well as the interventions made in the February preparatory meeting, including from the EU and its Member States.

In view of the lack of improvement since the last conference in 2017, the Declaration should be stronger and not regress from what was agreed in the "Call for Action" (A/RES/71/312). In view of the scientific advice relating to the huge challenges facing the oceans and seas, we would like to see the Declaration strengthened even further.

In our opinion, the Declaration should make clear that science alone will not solve these huge challenges. Transformative and decisive action is necessary. This is in line with the concept of responsible stewardship for the benefit of current and future generations which underpins sustainable development, which should be emphasised.

We would like to reiterate the relevance of the precautionary principle in the context of the debate on science and innovation: As stated in the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, States shall be more cautious when information is uncertain, unreliable or inadequate. The absence of adequate scientific information shall not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation or management measures. This should be clear in the Declaration.

In addition to these general comments, we would like to make some more detailed comments on specific elements of the draft Declaration:

- Throughout the text, reference is made to the health and productivity of the oceans. We think that reference should be made to the state, health, productivity and resilience of the oceans and seas as this is a more accurate reflection of the challenges they face in relation to the services they provide. The oceans and seas need to be clean, healthy, productive and resilient if they are to support the blue economy and sustainable development;
- We agree with the co-facilitator’s decision to “reaffirm” the commitments made in the 2017 Call for Action to avoid renegotiating the agreements reached in 2017. However, we feel that it would be more accurate to refer to “our commitments to take action” as this reflects more accurately paragraph 13 of the “Call for Action”;
- The Declaration should highlight more clearly the lack of achievement of the four SDG14 targets which are due this year as well as the necessary actions to overcome this impasse, which should be in line with the ecosystem approach and the precautionary principle and which should include the identification of what is hampering such achievement. There should be a strong commitment to achieve these targets as soon as possible without undue delay;
- With regard to climate change and acidification, the role of carbon dioxide emissions should be stressed as well as the concomitant need to reduce such emissions. In addition, the impact on the polar regions which are among the most highly affected areas should also be included;
- We strongly support the reference to UNCLOS as proposed since it is language taken from the UNGA resolution on oceans and law of the sea;

- We would like to underline the importance of the Post 2020 Biodiversity Global Framework under the CBD and the work on oceans and seas under United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) and the UN decade on Ecosystem Restoration in implementing the SDG 14, and strongly support that these UN processes are included in the zero draft. We support the reference to the UN Decade on ocean science for Sustainable Development, as well as the linkage to the ongoing BBNJ process as it does not prejudge the outcome of negotiations.
- In line with the aims of the Conference, science and innovative actions should support informed decision and policy-making so that actions can be implemented and scaled-up in order to support the achievement of SDG 14. We fully recognise and support the need for appropriate capacity building measures for developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries, as well as overseas countries and territories, to tackle their challenges in meeting the SDG 14 targets;
- In order to avoid and minimize negative impacts of human activities, including cumulative impacts on the marine environment, our understanding of basic oceans processes, functions and interlinkages is necessary as well as understanding impacts on human health and food safety;
- We consider that, in line with target 14.4, the restoration of fish stocks to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield requires a diversity of actions including tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, minimizing overfishing, and addressing destructive fishing practices, waste, by-catch and discards;
- We strongly support appropriate action to tackle plastics and microplastics, including through adopting life-cycle approaches, sustainable consumption and production patterns and improved environmentally-sound waste management. Nevertheless, more attention should be given to other pollutants and stressors such as nutrients, chemical contaminants including pharmaceuticals, anthropogenic underwater noise, invasive alien species and land-sea interactions. Both land-based and sea-based sources of pollution should be addressed in the Declaration;

- We also consider that there should be increased use of different area-based management tools, effective and well-managed marine protected areas, integrated coastal zone management and maritime spatial planning and other ABMTs;
- In line with commitments to limit climate change, to prevent different impacts on biodiversity as well as on human health and safety, the reduction of global emissions should be stressed, utilising different forms of renewable energy, not only ocean-based ones, as well as nature based solutions with safeguards;
- All these actions will require the enhancement of data collection and management, including environmental and socio-economic, and management at different levels, global, regional/subregional and national. The application of the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) can support the dissemination of data and knowledge;
- We fully support the need for cooperation at all levels as one of the basic principles under the UNCLOS. However, we feel that more attention should be given to the regional level of cooperation, in particular through Regional Seas Conventions and Programmes and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, including through relevant process. The regional level is also important with regard to marine quality status assessments which may contribute to global assessments like the World Ocean Assessment;
- A strong science policy interface is necessary to ensure that adaptive management policies can be implemented which take into consideration new knowledge and emerging challenges. For it to be effective, it is also necessary that scientists are informed of the requirements of policy makers;
- We consider that in order to ensure that voluntary commitments are being followed-up and can contribute to the achievement of SDG14 targets, there should be appropriate follow-up and review.

In conclusion, we would like to ensure that the declaration can bring about a transformative change that is necessary to accelerate the implementation and scaling up of actions to support the achievement of SDG14 and the 2030 Agenda.
