

Report: UN Ocean Conference

27 June - 1 July

What is the UN Ocean Conference?

The 2nd UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) took place in Lisbon (Portugal) on the 27 June - 1 July co-organised by Portugal and Kenya. The aim of the Conference was to support the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) "Life Below Water" - to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development - and its ten targets. SDG 14 is part of the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development](#) adopted in 2015. The 2nd UNOC focused on scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of SDG 14: stocktaking, partnership and solutions. During the Conference, the French President Emmanuel Macron announced the candidacy of France and Costa Rica as co-organisers of the next UN Ocean Conference in 2025. For more information, please find the website and the programme of the 2nd UNOC [here](#).

In practice

More than 6000 people from all around the world participated in the Conference including 24 Heads of States and 2000 representatives of civil society. It was organized as such:

- Plenary sessions where the opening, closing sessions, and declarations took place as well as the adoption of the final text of the Lisbon Declaration (see below).
- Interactive dialogues where representatives of international organizations, governments, and civil society discussed several topics concerning the ocean, maritime affairs, and fisheries and made commitments.
- Side events and networking events organized by the stakeholders on several topics of interest.

North Sea Advisory Council

Alexandra Philippe (Chair of the FG Climate Change) and Tamara Talevska (Executive Secretary) represented the NSAC at the Conference. They followed numerous meetings during the entire week and connected with multiple stakeholders (schedule available [here](#)). There were several topics relevant to the NSAC work such as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Maritime Spatial Planning, climate change, bottom-trawling, small-scale fisheries, fisheries management, aquatic food security, and pollution. You will find below a summary of the information gathered by the NSAC representatives. Additionally, in the networking part of the Conference, there was also the occasion to raise awareness about the work of the NSAC by interacting with different stakeholders.

Outcomes: the Lisbon Declaration "Our ocean, our future, our responsibility"

The conference was concluded with the adoption of the [Lisbon declaration](#) – a statement to support the implementation of SDG 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The declaration calls for greater ambition to address "ocean emergency" and recognizes that the states missed the achievement of 2020 targets for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. It emphasizes the indispensable role of SGD 14 in achieving all other SGDs. It acknowledges the importance of implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Glasgow Climate pact by strengthening ocean-based action. Furthermore, it recognizes the need for transformative change in the protection of marine biodiversity and mitigation of cumulative human impacts through strong governance and funding structures. It welcomes the decision

by the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2) in Nairobi to convene an intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. In this regard, it recognized the impact of COVID-19 in exacerbating plastic issue in marine environment. It affirms the need to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and its vision to carry out relevant science is emphasized including science-based and innovative actions and international cooperation and partnerships, technology, and innovation, in line with the precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches. Ocean literacy and empowering youth and women through quality education are referred to as important steps towards achieving SGD 14 targets. Finally, the reduction of greenhouse gases in international maritime transport should be further pursued

Topics of interest

Marine protection and spatial planning

The [Interactive Dialogue on Managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems](#), recognized MPAs and other area-based management tools as the most effective way for protecting, maintaining, and restoring species and ecosystems, while at the same time ensuring fair sharing of benefits and sustainable use of renewable resources through equitable stakeholder engagement. The conference called for the expansion of MPAs networks with clear objectives and improved management. The commitment to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 was pledged by more than 100 States, with some going even further. In the North Sea region, the Netherlands pledged to incorporate the Wadden Sea into a well-connected trans-European network of MPAs. Mobile protected areas were introduced as an adaptive management relevant for climate change-induced shifting of species' ranges across space. Stakeholders at the [OSPAR side-event](#) stressed that designation of MPAs should entail clear objectives (not merely numerical in terms of coverage, but also qualitative), effective monitoring, control, and surveillance.

Marine spatial planning (MSP) was considered as an important management tool guiding sustainable use of the ocean, minimizing conflicts between uses and stakeholders, and fostering compatibilities between them through the concept of co-design. Marine data value chains in the form of publicly available and quality assured data were a crucial component of effective MSP, according to pannelists at the side-event Seabed mapping and marine data supporting multifunctional spatial planning. [Seabed mapping](#) was one example of activities providing data flow for improved management of MPAs. Cross-sectoral and cross-regional collaboration in data-sharing, artificial intelligence, and interoperability reduce uncertainty in marine management. Interactive dialogue on managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems recognized North Sea as one of the most intensively used regions in the world where 30% of the sea is protected and with Nature restoration law in place across the NS countries by 2030, making MSP an essential tool for managing space and resources.

In terms of nature conservation, deep sea protection had been one of the pronounced topics with delegates calling for a deep seabed mining moratorium and the EU Commission announcing the closing of 94 deep sea areas containing VMEs to bottom trawling.

Aquatic food and sustainable fisheries management

Aquatic food was at the center of different events attended by therepresentatives such as the event organised by the newly launched Aquatic Blue Food Coalition or the FAO event introducing the State of the World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 (SOFIA report). The Aquatic Blue Food Coalition is gathering different States and NGOs with the aim of raising awareness on the potential of aquatic food to achieve several SDGs such as SDG 2 "Zero hunger", SDG 3 "Good health and well-being", SDG 12 "Responsible consumption and production", SDG 13 "Climate action" and SDG 14 "Life below water". According to the Coalition, aquatic food is essential for our food systems to become sustainable and to ensure food security. The Coalition voiced to mobilize financing and partnerships on aquatic food.

During the interactive dialogue on "[Making fisheries sustainable](#)", the representative of Norway pointed out that fish is a primary source of protein for 30% of the world population and therefore plays an essential role in our future. According to the FAO, aquatic food is also part of the solution but under the condition of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors being sustainably managed. Indeed, in the presentation of the SOFIA report 2022, the FAO showed that aquatic food production will grow by 15% by 2030. As the population grows, the demand for aquatic products grows as well. The FAO believes that clear transformation is needed to achieve food security and climate objectives and introduced the concept of "Blue transformation" - transforming aquatic food systems for a sustainable future. It consists of (1) aquaculture expansion, (2) effectively managed fisheries (marine and inland), and (3) upgraded value chain. During the interactive dialogue on "Making fisheries sustainable", Charlina Vitcheva (Director-General DG MARE) called for sound science-based sustainable fisheries management policies. She explained that the EU has a robust legislative framework for sustainability but in some areas, these policies are not yet well implemented (such as in the Mediterranean and Black Sea). Numerous events also pointed out the necessity for the food chain to be more inclusive for small actors as well as for women. Small-scale fisheries and the role of women were often referred to as being an area where intensive work remains to be done. Small-scale fishers and women voiced for more recognition of their role in food security and asked for more rights.

Climate and fisheries

Climate change was recognized as "one of the greatest challenges of our time " (cfr. above the Lisbon Declaration). The consequences of climate change on oceans and fisheries were identified as rise in ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, deoxygenation, sea level rise, shifts in the abundance and distribution of marine species, decrease in marine biodiversity, etc. The necessity to mitigate climate change as well as to adapt to its unavoidable consequences was mentioned as a top priority. French President Macron emphasized, during his speech at the plenary session, the link between the land and the seas and therefore the importance of implementing the Paris Agreement. Moving away from fossil fuels and decarbonizing the blue economy sectors were presented as the main solutions to tackle climate change and its consequences on the oceans. Several events organized by NGOs such as "[The indivisible link: European NGOs` priority areas for action on oceans and climate](#)" referred to bottom-trawling as being the main source of ocean pollution and biodiversity loss concerning fisheries. According to several NGOs, bottom-trawling is responsible for releasing the carbon stored in the seabed and therefore should be banned (especially in MPAs). Fuel subsidies were also mentioned in several NGOs events such as "[Fisheries Management As Climate Action](#)" as being counterproductive to achieving decarbonization of the fisheries sector. Despite the newly adopted [WTO Agreement on fisheries subsidies](#), several NGOs voiced for more ambition in the matter. On an event entitled "[Ocean-based climate solutions in action - from offshore renewable energy to a clean, resilient maritime sector](#)", it was pointed out by the panel that regarding decarbonization, the shipping sector can set an example for other sectors and thereby encouraging the IMO and private sectors to step up. At several occasions, it was mentioned that climate change should be part of fisheries management raising the importance of implementing an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

Marine science and innovation

The [Interactive Dialogue: Increasing scientific knowledge and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology](#) stressed the importance of science-based and innovative actions to inform integrated ocean management, restore and maintain fish stocks within sustainable levels (through MSY approach, science-based management plans, minimizing unwanted catches, waste, monitoring, control and surveillance and ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management), mobilize actions for sustainable food systems, prevent, reduce and control marine pollution and plastic litter (through contributing to comprehensive life-cycle and source-to-sea approaches that include improved waste management), plan and implement effective area-based management tools (MPAs), develop and implement measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change including through increased use of

renewable ocean-based energy technologies and decarbonization of marine transportation. As a matter of urgency, scientific and systematic observation and data collection efforts need to be strengthened, indigenous and traditional knowledge taken into account, women, and youth empowered and cooperation and partnerships enhanced. The crucial role of ocean sciences in understanding and anticipating changes in the ocean, climate, and biodiversity as well as improving ocean management was emphasized. A holistic approach to ocean mapping, the development of observation networks, further transfer of knowledge, capacities and technologies across regions were considered crucial for improved ocean knowledge and scientific prediction. Social sciences and capacity building were underlined as important contributors to the effective use of systems and data.

A real-time model of the ocean informing decision-making regarding protection of the ocean was presented at side-event [Digital Ocean Systems To Support and Strengthen Implementation of SDGs](#) as a feature of marine science helping to understand multiple stressors affecting marine services. Mission Starfish aimed at restoration of the water cycle as a whole is a 1 billion EUR program building on the existing forecast and climate modelling infrastructures and services (including Copernicus services for marine, climate, coastal, emergency, inland waters, etc.) and pool together all available observation data into an open-source, easily accessible and understandable interface and matching application and an interactive platform: the Digital Twin of the Ocean.

Largely under-funded, ocean research amounts to only 1.7% of total budgets. To this end, important commitments were made to enhance funding in support of work on SDG 14 (Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology). The EU pledged to invest 350 million EUR in marine innovation and research for the next decade.