The UN Ocean Conference - June 2017, Guidance to the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament

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KEY FINDINGS

- The Ocean Conference is the **first conference in a series** planned to address the SDGs. **Its outcomes will establish the standard for subsequent conferences** in terms of stringency in the Call for Action and the follow-up mechanisms including monitoring, reporting, and verification.

- To a large extent, **SDG 14 reflects existing commitments**. The Ocean Conference should mark a shift **from political commitments towards concrete actions** with a view to set in place monitoring, reporting and verification, while adjusting **policy where necessary**.

- SDG 14 **consists of 10 targets focused on the ocean,** each with significant interlinkages with other SDG goals and targets. **Recognising interdependencies between goals will be essential to meet SDG 14** and other SDGs.

- The EU policy framework for managing marine areas includes an array of initiatives focusing on **sectors, protecting the environment**, **integrating efforts**, and providing **long-term strategies – all relevant to SDG 14**.

- Governments and stakeholders have highlighted areas of priority in preparation for the Ocean Conference. The EU has identified priorities as: **regional cooperation; addressing pollution,** including **marine litter**; the development of the **maritime economy; fisheries, overfishing and illegal and unregulated fishing; research capacity and addressing knowledge gaps**; and **climate change.**

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1. BACKGROUND

It is widely agreed that the environmental health of the oceans is under significant threat and at risk of being irreversibly damaged without targeted and coordinated efforts by the world community. Current pressures on the marine environment include damage to habitats, invasive species, pollution and nutrient enrichment, as well as high exploitation rates of marine species and acidification induced by climate change. These pressures stem from human activities that use and extract ocean resources (e.g. fishing, deep sea mining), but also from land-based activities (e.g. agriculture, waste management) and activities contributing to global climate change (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions).

Managing the marine environment is inherently challenging, as it is a shared resource with multiple uses, pressures and actors. The current framework of marine governance is fragmented and is hindered by poorly coordinated and sometimes competing objectives, numerous stakeholders, and lack of information. The transboundary nature of the oceans[1], as well as the transboundary nature of activities and the pressures that they cause, means governments must work collaboratively across marine regions to ensure the sustainability of mutual resources. To further complicate governance, over 60 % of the oceans are established

as the high seas[2]. This makes them an internationally shared resource that is difficult to garner mutual responsibility for which results in free riding. The multiplicity and complexity of ocean governance therefore requires a broad range of interdisciplinary expertise as well as regional and international cooperation.

This briefing, provided to the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament in preparation for the UN Ocean Conference in New York in June 2017 considers developments until March 2017. The briefing includes: an overview of the UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14); a description of the Ocean Conference including the Preparatory Meeting held in February 2017 and other events leading up to the Conference; the position of governments and stakeholders in ocean use and governance; the role of the EU and its current marine policies, actors and bodies; and a conclusion with recommendations for the ENVI Committee's participation.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, also referred to as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), on 25 September 2015 with the backing of 193 UN Member States. The 2030 Agenda is a set of political commitments that include 17 interlinked SDGs and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. It is a global agreement and agenda for action to support the transformation towards social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The health of the oceans and coasts is recognised as a stand-alone goal. SDG 14 "Life Below Water" calls on the international community to, "**Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**." SDG 14 has ten targets[3] and highlights the global agreement on the deteriorating health of the oceans and their questionable capacity to continue to provide the resources on which society depends.

Table 1:   SDG 14 Targets (summarised)

14.1	Prevent and reduce marine pollution
14.2	Sustainably manage marine and coastal ecosystems
14.3	Minimise impacts of ocean acidification
14.4	End overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as well as destructive fishing practices
14.5	Conserve marine areas
14.6	Remove harmful fisheries subsidies
14.7	Increase economic benefits for Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries
14.a	Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity, and transfer marine technology in support of biodiversity and small island developing states
14.b	Increase market access for small-scale artisanal fishers
14.c	Enhance conservation by implementing international law

Source: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. "Sustainable Development Goal 14," 2017. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14

Despite its stand-alone status, the achievement of SDG 14 is closely related the achievement of other SDGs and targets. SDG 14 targets interact with SDG 1 on ending poverty; SDG 2 food security; SDG 12 sustainable consumption and production patterns and SDG 13 on climate change. Pursuing other SDG goals and targets will affect the achievement of SDG 14's targets, just as SDG 14 will contribute to and, in some cases, conflict with the achievement

of other SDG goals and targets. For example, increasing fishing quotas or opening protected areas to fishing activities are likely to support progress towards SDG 2 to end hunger, reach nutrition goals and achieve food security. However, such short-term gains in providing seafood would have adverse effects on ocean health. It would also be in direct contradiction to targets outlined in SDG 14[4] on setting sustainable fishing quotas and establishing marine protected areas, among others. Fully implementing the individual SDGs means considering both the positive and negative effects they will have on achieving other SDGs[5]. In particular, **the objectives of SDG 14 and SDG 13 on climate change can only be attained if the other is also attained.**

To a large extent, **SDG 14 reflects existing commitments dispersed across international, regional and national legislation**. However, for the first time, objectives on **the use and conservation of the ocean are combined under one heading and set in the wider sustainability context at the global level.** Some existing agreements covering remain relevant to the international governance of the oceans and SDG 14. Adopted in 1982, **the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides a basic legal framework by which to coordinate efforts** and give a structure to address global ocean issues.[6] There are currently 168 countries party to UNCLOS from among the 193 UN Member States. In addition to UNCLOS, a number of other instruments are relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the high seas. This includes the regulations and instruments adopted by the International Seabed Authority to protect and preserve the marine environment; within the Convention on Biological Diversity; by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization relevant for fisheries; within the International Maritime Organization on point and non-point sources of pollution; by the World Trade Organization on trade and subsidies and the World Intellectual Property Organization intellectual property on marine genetic resources.

In addition, UNGA Resolution 69/292 established a process to develop a new legally binding treaty for the high seas under UNCLOS.[7] States are committed to complete a preparatory process towards a formal treaty negotiation by September 2018. Two final UN preparatory committee meetings occur before and after the Ocean Conference, in March and July of 2017 in New York.

2. THE OCEAN CONFERENCE

The decision to hold the Ocean Conference was confirmed by UNGA Resolution 70/226[8] in December 2015. The Ocean Conference arose from the recognised need for coordinated action on SDG 14. A subsequent UNGA Resolution 70/303[9] adopted in September 2016, established that the Ocean Conference would take place in New York from 5-9 June 2017. Fiji and Sweden were named as co-hosts of the Ocean Conference.

The Ocean Conference is tasked to **develop and support a robust implementation framework for SDG 14** and emphasises a participatory process. In this way, the Ocean Conference aims to **build on existing successful partnerships** as well as **strengthen cooperation between new and diverse stakeholders**. It invites governments, the private sector, and the public (e.g. non-governmental organisations, civil society, academic, scientific, and philanthropic) to take action to implement SDG 14[10].

In the short term, the objective of the Ocean Conference is to support the follow up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[11]. The UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is scheduled to meet in July 2017 to discuss the implementation of SDG 14 and the outcomes of Ocean Conference will be evaluated[12]. In the long term, the Ocean Conference is expected to build the follow-up and review framework necessary to advance the agreed upon efforts and ensure their success[13].

Resolution 70/303 outlines a clear agenda with the following expected outcomes for the Ocean Conference:

1. Adopt by consensus a **Call for Action** that is a concise, focused, inter-governmentally agreed declaration to support the implementation of SDG 14;

2. A report containing the co-chairs summaries of the **seven partnership dialogues**;

3. A list of **voluntary commitments** for the implementation of SDG 14 to be announced at the conference.

The Ocean Conference is the first conference in a series planned to address the SDGs. **Its outcomes will establish the standard for subsequent SDG conferences** in terms of stringency in the Call for Action and the follow-up mechanisms including monitoring, reporting, and verification.

A number of relevant actions and events took place leading up to the Ocean Conference, including: the Our Oceans Conference in Chile in 2015; the first UN World Ocean Assessment published in December 2015; the Rome Call to Action on SDG target 14.5 in March 2016; the High Level Political Forum review on "Ensuring that no one is left behind" in July 2016; and the Our Oceans Conference in Washington, DC, USA in September 2016. The Preparatory Meeting for the Ocean Conference, discussed in detail below, was the prerequisite to the Ocean Conference. Following the Ocean Conference, opportunities to further develop action for the EU and international community exist and include the High Level Political Forum in New York on 10-19 July 2017 and the EU-hosted Our Ocean Conference on 5-6 October 2017 in Malta.

Preparatory Meeting for the Ocean Conference

On 15-16 February 2017, the Preparatory Meeting for the Ocean Conference convened at the UN Headquarters in New York. The objective of the meeting was to take stock of stakeholder positions and allow parties to exchange views, specifically on the **Call for Action**[14]. The Call for Action will set a path for actionable achievement of SDG 14 and will be the main output of the Ocean Conference. The Call for Action will take the form of a declaration and be agreed by consensus. Several consultations have taken place prior to the Ocean Conference, ensuring that all stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to it and thus facilitate its eventual adoption at the Conference by consensus.

The first round of intergovernmental consultations on the zero draft of the Call for Action was held from 20-22 March 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The zero draft highlights the pressing need by the global community to commit to conserving and sustainably using oceans and marine resources. The draft acknowledges the numerous pressures on the oceans and their importance for human well being, acting as a carbon sink, providing food and nutrition, trade and transportation, and as an opportunity for sustainable growth. It also stresses the importance of an integrated, interdisciplinary, and cross-sectoral approach as well as enhanced cooperation, effective partnerships, coordination, and policy coherence at all governance levels. The draft also recognises the need to work with diverse stakeholders, including business and industry, local authorities and communities, indigenous people, women and youth. Finally, the draft highlights the need for an increased understanding of the oceans both in the form of scientific and traditional knowledge, as well as assessments, research, data and best practice sharing. The second drafting round for input was held on 24, 25 and 27 April 2017 (results not available at the time of writing this briefing).

At the Preparatory Meeting, **seven themes for the partnership** dialogues for the Ocean Conference were proposed: [15]

1. Addressing marine pollution (target 14.1);

2. Managing, protecting, conserving, and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems (targets 14.2 and 14.5);

3. Minimising and addressing ocean acidification (target 14.3);

4. Making fisheries sustainable (targets 14.4 and 14.6);

5. Increasing economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries and providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets (target, 14.7 and 14.b);

6. Increasing scientific knowledge, and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology (target 14.a);

7. Implementing international law, as reflected in UNCLOS (target 14.c).

An [information note](#) on the concept papers for the seven partnership dialogues to be held during the Conference is available. For each of the themes, UN Member States and stakeholders are invited to provide inputs on: a) status and trends, b) challenges and opportunities, c) existing partnerships, d) possible areas for new partnerships, and e) guiding questions for the dialogue. The advance, unedited concept papers will be available on the Conference website in early May 2017.

The Ocean Conference Registry of Voluntary Commitments

An online [registry of voluntary commitments](#) was launched where governments and stakeholders are encouraged to submit voluntary commitments, which will be included in the report of the Ocean Conference at its conclusion.

About the Ocean Conference Programme

The [Ocean Conference programme](#) includes **plenary meetings**, **seven partnership dialogues** (see above themes) and a special event commemorating World Oceans Day. The official events commence on Monday, 05 June in the morning and close in the evening of Friday, 09 June. The list of speakers for the plenary meetings will be established on a first-come, first-served basis, with the customary protocol that ensures Heads of State or Government to speak first, followed by other heads of delegation.[16] **The EU will be included in the list of speakers**. Mr. Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries will speak on behalf of the EU.

The partnership dialogues are to take place in parallel with the plenary meetings. The dialogues are intended to be interactive and multi-stakeholder in nature, and to focus on recommendations to support the implementation of SDG 14. They will be presided over by two co-chairs, to be appointed by the Presidents of the Conference. The co-chairs will include one representative from a developing country and one from a developed country. The Secretary-General of the Conference will select a moderator and up to four panellists for each of the partnership dialogues. The discussions will be followed by a debate among governments and other relevant stakeholders. In addition to the official programme, a number of [side events](#) and exhibitions are organised.

Participation at the Ocean Conference is open to government and non-governmental stakeholders accredited by the United Nations. Qualifications for participation are detailed in the [Participation and Registration Note](#). This includes Member States of the United Nations, members of specialized agencies and parties to UNCLOS, intergovernmental organisations, associate members of regional commissions, United Nations System, non-governmental organizations and major groups as well as other relevant stakeholders and media.[17]

3. GOVERNMENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

There is a consensus among governments, international institutions, and NGOs that the UN Ocean Conference is an important opportunity for the international community[18] to agree on concrete measures to reverse declining ocean health and develop a framework for collective action. The outcome of the Preparatory Meeting[19] provides an indication on the views of governments and stakeholders and agreed themes and priorities are summarised in this section. [Statements and presentations](#) are also being collected for the conference.

From the Preparatory Meeting, there was consensus that the Call for Action must be concise and action-oriented as well as easy to understand by the public. Several areas were identified as key points of agreement and attention. First, **emphasise action that addresses all three dimensions of sustainable development** (i.e. economic, social and environmental). The **interlinked nature of the 17 SDGs,** and particularly the overlap between SDG 14 and SDG 1 eliminating poverty; SDG 2 eliminating hunger; SDG 8 ensuring decent work and economic growth; and SDG 13 combating climate change and its impacts was highlighted. Participants also agreed on the urgency imposed by the current state of the oceans. **Special attention to targets with fast approaching deadlines** was flagged, as these are areas where action would need to take effect swiftly.

There was broad support for the seven proposed partnership dialogues. However, it was suggested by China, Ecuador, Iceland, Mauritius, Norway, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste to **change Theme 7 which refers to international law to more closely reflect SDG Target 14.c**. and to use the text "enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS." Countries that are not party to UNCLOS argued for not including UNCLOS explicitly in target 14.c. However, a majority of participants strongly supported it, thus recognising UNCLOS as the overarching legal framework upon which SDG 14 implementation will be based.

The ten **targets outlined in SDG 14 were generally supported by participants**, with some governments (Iceland, Maldives for Alliance of Small Island States, Thailand, and USA) speaking out against any attempts to re-negotiate previously agreed targets. **On Target 14.5**, however, which calls for establishing the conservation of at least 10 % of coastal and marine areas by 2020, some participants (High Seas Alliance and NGO Major Group) argued that **the international community should be more ambitious**.

The EU, G77/China, the International Chamber of Conference, Germany, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Thailand, and USA emphasized **that the Call to Action should be concise and with concrete actions including reporting and follow up.** The need to **prioritise certain issues** was brought forward by the EU, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, UN Development Programme, and Vanuatu, emphasizing urgency on specific matters such as **banning harmful fishing subsidies.** Attention to **plastics, waste and pollution** was emphasized by Argentina, Bangladesh, Egypt, Fiji, France, Morocco, Nauru for Pacific Small Island Developing States, the Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Venezuela. Reference to a **well-managed maritime economy** and **engagement with maritime sectors** was made by China, EU, France, and the World Ocean Council.

The discussions also covered a broad range of cross-cutting issues, such as the **need to explore finance mechanisms** (Algeria, Bangladesh, Ghana, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Mauritius, the Netherlands, Palau and Sudan,); implement **regional approaches to cooperation** (Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), Belize for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), G77/China, Germany, the Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Korea, Solomon Islands, Turkey, Venezuela, and Vietnam); and **decision-making tools for management** (e.g. indicators, maritime spatial planning) (Belize for the Caribbean Community CARICOM, Canada, EU, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and Nauru), including **research, data and scientific approaches** (Cabo Verde and Small Island Developing States, Indonesia, International Hydrographic Organization, Japan, Monaco, Morocco, Sudan, Turkey, Vietnam, and USA).

The **issue of implementation was of key concern** and the question of the 'added value' of having an Ocean Conference was put forward. Several participants stated that the Ocean Conference should secure commitments and implementation action and move away from reliance on voluntary commitments. There was a call from numerous governments for **Means of Implementation**, e.g. support including finance and increasing scientific knowledge. Argentina, Ghana, Iran, Mauritius, Morocco, Sierra Leone, and Vietnam emphasised the need for **cooperation and capacity building in relation to technology transfer and research**

in marine science. The Least Developed Countries focused on Means of Implementation including debt swaps, blue bonds, and support for national legislative development.

A need for a flexible approach to the discussions at the UN Ocean Conference was also raised, as these thematic areas are key to addressing the cross-cutting themes highlighted by participants, such as **regional cooperation** in implementing SDG 14; **interlinkages with other ocean related targets** in the 2030 Agenda; the **legal framework of UNCLOS**; the essential relationship between **ocean and climate change**; and the importance of **follow up and review**.

4. THE EU AND OCEAN ACTION

The EU is well suited to be a first mover towards the sustainable use of the oceans and to bring new and innovative ideas for governance and management into the world discussion. This section first provides a snapshot of the current state of the marine environment, and then provides a short summary of the EU's governance approach, actions and actors relevant for marine issues. It also includes an overview of the potential role of the EU in global ocean governance.

The EU Marine Environment

The European Environment Agency assessed the State of Europe's seas in 2015[20] and despite data limitations showed that while the **numerous policies and actions put in place do show positive results, pressures on the marine environment continue to rise**. Indeed, the EU 2015 mid-term review of the Biodiversity Strategy also showed that while progress has been made, increased efforts in many areas is still needed. Pressures on marine ecosystems such as habitat changes, climate change, invasive species, pollution, and nutrient enrichment continue to rise, sometimes rapidly[21]. In some areas, the EU is already demonstrating clear contributions to the SDG 14 targets. For example, the EU has made **significant progress in establishing Marine Protected Areas** in European seas. By 2012, **Europe established 5.9 % of its seas as Marine Protected Areas**, and work is continuing with a view to achieve 10 % coverage by 2020.[22] This reflects commitments under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to ensure the conservation of 10 % of its coastal and marine areas by 2020 and is **also reflected in SDG 14.5**. The next challenge is to **ensure that the coverage of Marine Protected Areas is effective**, with monitoring and enforcement, and the possibility of adjusting or adapting objectives and protected areas.

Existing EU Marine Policies, Actions and Actors

The EU policy framework for managing marine areas includes an array of initiatives focusing on different sectors, protecting the environment, integrating efforts, and providing long-term strategies – all relevant to SDG 14. The **7th Environmental Action Programme**[23] and the **EU Biodiversity Strategy**[24] set out the overall EU vision to achieve a sustainable and healthy environment by 2050. On marine issues, the 7th Environmental Action Plan focuses on achieving sustainable fisheries and reducing marine litter. The EU Biodiversity Strategy aims to stop the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services within the EU and globally and sets out six targets and 20 actions for the EU by 2020. In the marine realm, it calls for better management of fish stocks and control of invasive species.

The **Integrated Maritime Policy** is an umbrella policy focusing on bringing a coherent approach and coordination between marine policies by covering issues that are cross-sectoral, such as marine knowledge and data sharing[25]. Under this umbrella, the **EU Blue Growth Strategy**, adopted in 2012, sets the long-term growth strategy for maritime activities, and provides a specific focus on aquaculture, coastal tourism, marine biotechnology, ocean energy, and seabed mining as sectors that have a high potential for growth[26]. The **Maritime Spatial Planning Directive**, adopted in 2014, functions as a planning tool for maritime activities in an effort to reduce conflicts between sectors, encourage investment, increase

coordination and cross-border cooperation, as well protect the environment[27]. Adopted in 2008, the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** brings the environmental component to the Integrated Maritime Policy and sets the boundaries for the sustainable use of marine resources[28]. It obliges Member States to protect and preserve their marine areas towards the objective of 'good environmental status' based on eleven prescribed descriptors. The **Common Fisheries Policy** is the primary instrument used to manage fisheries resources and conserve fish stocks, fostering sustainability for both the fishing and aquaculture sectors, as well as aiming to ensure a standard of living for fishermen[29]. In addition, there are a number of policies targeting specific sectors or environmental objectives (e.g. **Birds and Habitats Directives**, **Regulation on Invasive Alien Species**, recommendations on **Integrated Coastal Management**, **Civil Protection Mechanism**, and numerous measures regulating waste) that must be considered within the complete EU marine policy framework.

Marine issues are particularly cross-cutting, with for instance, marine litter requiring coordination with waste management policies, or fisheries policies that must consider environmental status of biodiversity as well as the economic interests of European industries and communities. Within the EU, responsibilities for marine sectors and issues are spread through DG Mare (Ocean Governance, Common Fisheries Policy, Blue Growth, Maritime Spatial Planning Directive), DG Environment (Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Integrated Coastal Management, Birds and Habitats Directive), and DG Research and Innovation (Horizon 2020 funding for research and pilot projects). Other EU bodies also play a major role in achieving SDG 14 – with the Joint Research Centre, European Environment Agency, and Eurostat as data and knowledge hubs providing research, assessments and indicators essential to evaluating EU progress towards SDG 14. The regional sea basin approach within EU marine governance equates to a geographical divide between management and assessments and requires coordination with relevant Regional Seas Conventions and their managing bodies: Oslo-Paris Convention, Helsinki Convention, Bucharest Convention, and the Barcelona Convention, involving countries outside the EU. Adding to the complexity, competencies to achieve SDG 14 are divided between the EU and Member States, based on the different legislation.

The extensive legal frameworks, actions and actors described above mean that the EU has a policy framework to potentially cover the array of marine issues addressed in SDG 14. However, it is a fragmented one divided across different EU governing bodies, legal instruments and sectors, as well as Member States – potentially impeding successful implementation.

The Potential Role of the EU in Global Ocean Governance

In November 2016 the European Commission laid out next steps for a sustainable European future[30] and mapped existing EU policies against the SDGs[31]. In addition, the European Commission provided a joint communication to share its vision of the EU as both a regional and global leader in ocean governance[32]. It focuses on three priority areas where the EU's own legislative frameworks and action could be valuable to global approaches on the same issues. The three priority areas are: 1) improving the international ocean governance framework; 2) reducing human pressures on the ocean and creating the conditions for a sustainable maritime economy; and 3) strengthening international ocean research and data.[33] The Council concluded a draft on the 'International ocean governance: and agenda for the future of our oceans' on 24 March 2017[34]. The Commission also plans to further the implementation of the SDGs with the Council and Parliament by launching a **multi-stakeholder platform** to follow up and exchange best practices[35].

Improving the ocean governance framework entails strengthening regional and global efforts by **promoting already agreed multilateral instruments and strategies** while **continuing to work with international partners for their improved implementation**. The EU also has the potential to boost action towards SDG 14 **by facilitating coordination on transboundary issues** through its own policy processes, and its own efforts to increase trans-national policy coordination. For instance, both the Marine Strategy Framework

Directive and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive require EU Member States to work across national boundaries including states outside of the EU (e.g. through the Regional Sea Conventions). Such trans-national governance approaches provide valuable processes and mechanisms. This could **help to develop guidelines and regionally coordinated indicators, or institutional capacity building and support for scientific research, especially in the southern Mediterranean.**

Creating a sustainable maritime economy and reducing pressures on the marine environment requires swift action on many fronts, including: **the implementation of the United Nations Framework – Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Conference of the Parties 21 Paris Agreement (COP21)** to mitigate climate change; **ending illegal fishing** and boosting sustainable global seafood production; **promoting maritime spatial planning** globally; **establishing 10 % of marine and coastal areas as Marine Protected Areas**[36]; as well as **removing harmful subsidies** and strengthening the global **fight against marine litter and plastic**.

In particular, the [EU action plan for the circular economy](#) [37] offers a platform for SDG 14 for **integrating sustainable consumption and production objectives with economic growth**. Its monitoring framework is expected in 2017[38]. Sustainable finance is also high on the agenda of the G20 and in Europe[39], and indeed **aligning fiscal policies** (e.g. with fisheries objectives) **at a global level with SDG 14** could provide an opportunity for balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives as long as the proper enabling conditions and governance frameworks are established[40]. This is becoming increasingly pressing as not just the EU but **numerous ocean and coastal nations are actively developing their blue economies** (i.e. maritime sectors).

Enhancing ocean research and data – necessary for making sound and cost effective policy decisions - begins with: developing a **coherent EU strategy on ocean observation, marine data and accounting**; building on the already established [European Marine Observation and Data Network](#) (EMODnet); and boosting **support for and investment in ocean research**; as well as fostering greater **cooperation in international research initiatives.**

The first step[41] for the EU is to fully integrate the SDGs into the existing European policy framework and current priorities. The second step[42] is to **further develop the long-term vision and the focus of sectoral policies after 2020.** This will ensure the EU is prepared for the long-term implementation of the SDGs. A key question is how the EU will **reorient its budget's contributions towards the achievement of its long-term objectives in alignment with the SDGs**, i.e. whether this is the Multiannual Financial Framework beyond 2020 or another instrument.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In advance of the Oceans Conference, the EU has submitted two statements to the Conference organisers outlining the EU's position on certain issues and priorities. [43] The EU's statements indicate key areas of interest as well as areas where it is likely to put forward propositions for action. Other stakeholders (i.e. private, public and governmental) as well as EU Member States have also participated in the consultation and submitted statements indicating areas of interest and priority. [Submitted statements](#) are available on the Ocean Conference website. Given the statements collected in the consultation for the Preparatory Meeting, the ENVI Delegation is encouraged to consider the following at the Oceans Conference:

The EU advocates **regional cooperation** as important to facilitate coordination on SDG 14 and to help foster action, policy implementation and follow up on the different targets. Specifically, the EU supports a regional approach to coordinate activities on land-based sources of pollution, marine litter, and area based management tools and the management of shared resources. **Collaboration is recommended with other stakeholders advocating a regional approach**: Alliance of Small Island States, Caribbean Community

(CARICOM), Group of 77 and China, Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), Indian-Ocean Rim Association, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission-UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO), Oslo-Paris Commission (OSPAR), Pacific Islands Forum, Pacific Small island Developing States (PSIDS), Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Pollution, in particular from land based sources, including marine litter is a key issue for the EU. It ties into the EU's Circular Economy agenda and supports the upcoming EP ENVI Committee's workshop, 'EU Action to Combat Marine Litter'. **Dialogue is encouraged with key stakeholders that highlight the importance of action on marine pollution**: Belgium, Fiji, , Honduras, Japan, Netherlands, Pacific Small Island Developing States, Global Ghost Gear Initiative and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Supporting **the development of the Blue Economy** is in line with the EU's Blue Growth Strategy and focuses on the sustainable use of marine resources for the long-term economic growth of marine sectors. In the EU, the sustainable growth of marine sectors also aims to ensure that Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States may meet their sustainable development objectives (i.e. important role of small scale artisanal fishers). In addition, the EU is encouraged to foster collaboration with key organisations on the blue economy such as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Bank, and the World Ocean Council. Countries prioritizing blue economy are Bangladesh, France, Group of 77 and China, India, Timor Leste, Tonga, and Sudan.

In relation to **fisheries, overfishing and illegal and unregulated fishing** the EU promotes the need for science based management measures and the application of the precautionary approach when data is limited. To this end, the EU calls on states to honour global agreements on harmful subsidies, recognising their role in fisheries management. Key organisations for cooperation are the Marine Stewardship Council, World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

EU supports developing **research capacity and addressing knowledge gaps**. Key partners are the Future Earth (Ocean Knowledge Action Network), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission-UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO), Ocean Frontier Institute for the Scientific and Technological Community, and the UN World Ocean Assessment.

The EU emphasizes the **role of climate change in SDG14 as well as the role of oceans in addressing climate change**. The EU encourages countries to fully implement commitments under the Paris Agreement. Key stakeholders are Conference co-facilitator Burhan Gafoor (Permanent Representative of Singapore), Deep Ocean Stewardship, France, Global Ocean Oxygen Network, Greece, Italy, Monaco, and the World Meteorological Organisation.

The Ocean Conference **will establish the standard for subsequent SDG conferences** in terms of stringency in the Call for Action and the follow-up mechanisms including monitoring, reporting, and verification. Following the Ocean Conference and the reporting back to the High Level Political Forum, the EU will host the Our Ocean Conference in Malta in October 2017. The EU is therefore in a key position to build on this momentum and contribute to the pursuit of achieving SDG 14 in Europe.

[1] Unger, S., Müller, A., Rochette, J., Schmidt, S., Shackeroff, J., and G. Wright. "Achieving the Sustainable Development Goal for the Oceans." Policy Brief. Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), 2017. http://www.iass-potsdam.de/sites/default/files/files/policy_brief_1_2017_en_archieving_the_sdgs_for_oceans.pdf

[2] EC. "International Ocean Governance: An Agenda for Our Future Oceans." Maritime Affairs, 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/ocean-governance_en.

[3] Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. "Sustainable Development Goal 14," 2017. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14

[4] Schmidt, S., Griggs, D.J., Nilsson, M., Stevance, A., McCollum, (Eds). "A Guide to SDG Interactions: The Science Perspective." Paris: International Council for Science, 2017.

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