



Saving the ocean to protect our future

The time is now to scale up ocean action, for the sake of our lives and the future of our planet. This month, the global community will ‘set sail’ towards the [2022 UN Ocean Conference](#) convened in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon on 27 June – 1 July. The stakes are high, and the ambition is to turn the tide in favor of our blue planet.

Preparations for the event are in full swing and last month, UN Member States gathered at UN Headquarters in New York for a briefing about this pivotal milestone aimed at saving the ocean.

“Despite the progress made in ocean actions, the health of our ocean is still deteriorating fast, due to multi-dimensional challenges of pollution, overfishing and climate change,” said UN DESA’s Under-Secretary-General and Conference Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin.

“The outcome of the 2022 UN Ocean Conference will therefore be critical,” he stressed, adding that the Conference “will seek to propel much needed science-based innovative solutions aimed at starting a new chapter of global ocean action”.

And a new chapter filled with innovations and actions is desperately needed. According to the new [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\) State of the Global Climate report](#) released on 18 May, sea level rise, ocean heat and ocean acidification set new records in 2021.

Ahead of the event, young ocean advocates and activists have been sharing their concerns and hopes for positive change propelled by the UN Ocean Conference.

“When we think about climate change, we must think about the ocean because it is our biggest ally in fighting climate change,” said Ashlan Cousteau, journalist, TV host and ocean advocate. “I hope that the UN Ocean Conference this summer is going to remind the global community how important the ocean is.”

“What I’m concerned about now isn’t really [the](#) state of our ocean today, it’s the state of humanity’s interactions with it,” said Stephanie Shandorf, Associate Director of the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute. “We need to first and foremost be aware of the immense role the ocean plays in supporting life systems,” she added.

“Every individual action is valuable but at this time we need to unite and work together as a team – young people, adults, scientists, IDLC, governments, women, everyone needs to get really involved in this,” encouraged Pamela Tapia, biologist and scientific diver.

“I hope to see action from young communities, young people that start their own initiatives that provide the working solutions that showcase and actually you know solve this crisis,” added Lefteris Arapakis, Co-founder of Enaleia, an organization aimed at making the marine ecosystem sustainable.

And the Conference will be all about boosting action, as it takes place under the theme of “Scaling up Ocean Action Based on Science and Innovation for the Implementation of Goal 14: Stocktaking, Partnerships and Solutions.” It will feature nine plenary meetings and eight interactive dialogues. There will also be special events focusing on youth, the sustainable blue economy, fresh- and saltwater interlinkages and on ocean action at local and regional levels, along with a number of side events.

In addition to the adoption of an action-oriented and inter-governmentally agreed declaration and a Conference report, there is also the ambition that many new commitments will be made, adding to the over 1,700 voluntary commitments registered via the [online registry](#) since the first UN Ocean Conference in 2017.

“I call upon all Governments to showcase your existing and new initiatives as voluntary commitments in the online registry [...] to support the implementation of SDG14 in synergy with other ocean-related SDGs,” encouraged Mr. Liu.

Some have expressed that the future of the ocean will be decided in Lisbon. This may well be the case, and a chance the global community cannot afford to miss.

“It will offer an opportunity to give the ocean prime focus in the global efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and our climate objectives,” Mr. Liu said.

“We need all hands on deck to navigate our way towards a healthy ocean. To save the ocean, for current and future generations.”

For more information:

[2022 UN Ocean Conference.](#)

Registrations for international stakeholders have been extended until 3 June 2022 and can [be made here](#).

To register a voluntary commitment to help save our ocean, [visit this page](#).

All official meetings will be broadcast live via [UN Web TV](#).



EXPERT VOICES



“This is the year to stop the decline of the ocean’s health”

“With every breath we take, we are connected to the ocean,” says UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson. Ahead of the UN Ocean Conference taking place in Lisbon this month, we catch up with him about the current state

of the ocean and why this year will be critical to turn the tide to improving its health.

Why is the ocean’s health in trouble?

“Rising carbon emissions are making the ocean more acidic, weakening its ability to sustain life underwater and on land. Plastic waste is choking the ocean. And if we continue on our current track, more than half of the world’s marine species may stand on the brink of extinction by 2100.

Solutions exist to restore the health of the ocean, but they will require action from all parts of society, from world leaders down to every one of us.

There can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean’s health is measurably in decline.”

How can we make 2022 the year to stop the decline of the ocean’s health?

“If we are to halt the decline in the ocean’s health, the year 2022 presents the international community an unparalleled opportunity for decisive ocean action.

Six international gatherings are taking place this year, which taken together can really stop the decline.

Held earlier this spring in Nairobi, the [United Nations Environment Assembly \(UNEA5\)](#) consensually agreed to begin negotiations for a binding global treaty to end plastic pollution.

Secondly, the [World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference](#), to be held in mid-June in Geneva, where after two decades of negotiation, the WTO has the ability to ban harmful fisheries subsidies.

Thirdly, this year’s resumption of the [Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity Beyond Areas of National Jurisdiction \(BBNJ\)](#) presents the opportunity to conclude a robust and operable treaty for governance of the high seas, thereby safeguarding one of the planet’s most critical global commons.

Fourthly, the [Convention on Biological Diversity's Conference of the Parties \(COP15\)](#) to be held later this year in Kunming, holds the promise of the adoption of a new target to protect 30% of the planet by 2030.

Fifthly, we have the [UN Ocean Conference](#), co-hosted by the governments of Kenya and Portugal, in Lisbon, 27 June to 1 July, where we will launch a great fleet of innovative, science-based solutions. These solutions will be carried forward in well-funded partnerships, representing effective implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the ocean's resources.

And lastly, at the [UN Climate Change Conference 2022 \(UNFCCC COP27\)](#), in Sharm-El-Sheik in November, we must all deliver on the ambition and political will for the climate adaptation and finance required to bend the curve in the direction of security, equity and sustainability."

What do you want to say to everyday people out there who want to be part of efforts to save the ocean?

"Listen, the ocean is critical for our survival. It gives us oxygen, provides us with food and livelihoods. It stabilises our climate, absorbing most of the heat trapped in the Earth's system. Billions of humans, animals and plants rely on a healthy ocean.

You can take ocean action by making a voluntary commitment and [registering it in the online database](#). Also, make your voice heard in your community and let your political leaders know that you care about ocean issues. You can also join the conversation online, using the hashtag #SaveOurOcean.

Let us all commit to reversing the decline in the health of the ocean and redressing our relationship with Nature to one of respect and balance. Let us do this for our children and grandchildren, that they may live the good lives we wish for them."



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



5 reasons you should care about our ocean

Our ocean is in serious trouble. Heating, pollution, acidification, and oxygen loss pose serious threats to the health of the ocean and to all living beings who call this vast planetary resource their home. Why should you care? Here are 5 reasons:

1. The ocean regulates our climate and provides the air we breathe

Our ocean mitigates non-renewable industry pollution by absorbing 25 per cent of all carbon emission, while generating 50 per cent of the oxygen we need to survive. It not only functions as the lungs of the planet, providing us with the air we breathe, but also as the world's largest carbon sink helping to combat the negative impacts of climate change. Additionally, the ocean has taken up more than 90 per cent of the excess heat in the climate system helping to regulate temperatures on land. Thus, climate action depends on a healthy ocean, and a healthy ocean requires urgent climate action.

2. The ocean feeds us

The ocean and its biodiversity provide our global community with 15 per cent of the animal protein we eat. In least developed countries, seafood is the primary source of protein to over 50 per cent of the population. It is therefore critical to protect the ocean's biodiversity and practice sustainable fishing strategies for continued consumption. Currently, more than 10 million tons of fish go to waste every year because of destructive fishing practices. This is enough to fill 4,500 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Without significant change, UNESCO predicts more than 50 per cent of the world's marine species may face extinction by 2100.

3. It provides jobs and livelihoods

The ocean provides livelihoods to 3 billion people, nearly 50 per cent of the entire global population. Marine fisheries provide 57 million jobs globally. The blue economy is a strong industry that allows many to make their living and provide for their families. However, over 60 per cent of the world's major marine ecosystems that underpin these livelihoods are being used unsustainably, with a significant portion being completely degraded. Additionally, according to UNEP, pollution from the 11 million tons of plastic that enters the ocean annually, costs an estimated US \$13 billion, including clean-up costs and financial losses from fisheries and additional ocean-based industries. It is critical that we stop polluting our ocean.

4. The ocean is a tool for economic development

The ocean is a significant economic tool. Ocean economies are among the most rapidly growing in the world. The market value of marine and coastal resources and the developing industry is estimated by UNDP to be US \$3 trillion per year, which is about 5 per cent of total global gross domestic product. Thus, developing countries' access to the ocean and shorelines allow them to develop and attract foreign direct investments and direct industry production within the state. Additionally, 80 per cent of tourism happens in coastal areas. The ocean-related tourism industry grows an estimated US \$134 billion every year. However, for states to utilize their ocean resources, we must work together as a global community to protect the ocean. It is estimated that the loss of tourism due to coral bleaching alone is as much as \$12 billion annually. With ocean levels rising as the temperature of our planet increases, coastline-specific tourism and energy industries are at risk along with the 680 million people who live in low-lying coastal areas, a number that is expected to rise to one billion by 2050.

5. We need a healthy ocean to survive

The ocean affects us all in positive ways, no matter if you live on the coastline or in the desert. It provides climate regulation, food, jobs, livelihoods, and economic progress. Thus, we must work together to protect and save the ocean for the sake of our future survival on this planet. To learn more about the state of our ocean and what you can do today to help, visit the [2022 UN Ocean Conference website](#). Make your voluntary commitments here to save our ocean and follow the Conference taking place in Lisbon, Portugal, from 27 June to 1 July 2022, live via [UN Web TV](#).





Now is the time to save our ocean and protect our future

By Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General of UN DESA and Secretary-General of the 2022 UN Ocean Conference

Our ocean is a beautiful blue wonder. It regulates our climate, fills our lungs with oxygen and provides food and jobs for millions of people around the globe.

Most of us have a connection to the ocean. And we all depend on it for our survival. In fact, according to the latest SDG data, more than 3 billion people rely on the ocean for their livelihoods.

The ocean also serves as the home for countless ocean species and a wealth of biodiversity. There are even some species below the water surface that are yet to be known to us humans.

The ocean generates 50 per cent of the oxygen we need and absorbs 25 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions emitted into the air. It serves as the largest carbon sink, protecting us from some of the impacts of climate change.

But our ocean is not doing well. In fact, human activities have severely harmed the ocean's health, placing this vital resource – and those who depend on it – in the face of grave danger.

It is estimated that around 11 million tonnes of plastics end up in the ocean every year. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), this has affected 66 per cent of marine mammals, 50 per cent of seabirds and all species of sea turtles. In addition to threatening and harming marine life, plastic pollution also takes a toll on the global economy with a yearly price tag of roughly 13 billion for clean-up costs and financial losses.

The rate of ocean warming is another major problem. Since 1993, this has more than doubled due to carbon emissions from human activities. This has also led to acidification and oxygen loss in the ocean. It is estimated that around 30-35 per cent of critical marine habitats, such as seagrasses, mangroves and coral reefs have been extinguished.

If we do not act now, UNESCO estimates that more than half of the world's marine species could face extinction by 2100.

The latest data on Sustainable Development Goal 14 (to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), tell a similar story. They paint a disturbing picture of dead zones in the world's coastal waters increasing at a worrying pace. The data also reveals that funding for marine research pales in comparison to the massive economic contribution of the world's oceans.

It is against this urgent backdrop that the global community will be gathering for the 2022 UN Ocean Conference in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon from 27 June to 1 July 2022. As Conference Secretary-General, I am excited to see the great interest that the event is generating, from UN Member States, civil society, businesses, the scientific community, youth representatives, and a variety of other international actors.

Organized around the theme, "Scaling up Ocean Action Based on Science and Innovation for the Implementation of Goal 14: Stocktaking, Partnerships and Solutions", the Conference will bring together world leaders and prominent global experts on ocean issues.

In addition to a brief, action-oriented and intergovernmentally agreed declaration, with the Conference is expected to result in new voluntary commitments to improving the state of our ocean. These commitments will build on the efforts initiated at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference, when a large number of voluntary commitments were announced and launched. There are more than 1,700 registered voluntary commitments to date, covering all targets of SDG 14. These commitments have so far resulted in impacts that range from increasing coverage of marine protected areas to removing marine litter and enhancing scientific cooperation and education. We need even more commitments and increased action, so that we can create positive ripple effects that benefit our ocean's health.

Together, we also need to make sure that this event contributes to science-based solutions, innovations, and partnerships.

It is time to turn the tide. Now is the time to save our ocean, if we want to protect our future. For the sake of life on our planet – above and below water, and for current and future generations, let's make this an event that will go down in history books for the way it changed our course.



SDG 14 IN NUMBERS



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