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Oceans and the law of the sea

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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which covers the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024, is submitted pursuant to paragraph 372 of General Assembly resolution [78/69](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on developments and issues relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, including the implementation of the resolution, for consideration at its seventy-ninth session. The report, which is also submitted to States parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, pursuant to article 319 of the Convention, highlights developments reported by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, funds and programmes, as well as by the bodies established under the Convention.

* [A/79/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report highlights key developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, including those undertaken by the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations pursuant to General Assembly resolution 78/69. It should be read together with other reports relevant to oceans and the law of the sea issued by the United Nations during the period under review,¹ as well as the detailed contributions provided by the specialized agencies, funds, programmes and bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations.²

II. Legal and policy framework

2. During ocean-related meetings in 2024, States commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, paying tribute to it as the constitution for the oceans and a testament to multilateralism, while reaffirming that it sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

3. Following the accession of San Marino on 19 July 2024, the number of parties to the Convention increased to 170. San Marino thereby also became a party to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 (1994 Agreement), which now has 153 parties. The number of parties to the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks remained at 93.

4. Subsequent to its adoption on 19 June 2023 (see [A/CONF.232/2023/4](#) and [A/CONF.232/2023/5](#)), the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction was opened for signature on 20 September 2023.³ As at 31 August 2024, 91 States or regional economic integration organizations had signed the Agreement and 8 had ratified it. A Preparatory Commission for the Entry into Force of the Agreement and the Convening of the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties held an organizational meeting in June 2024 at which it elected two Co-Chairs and a Bureau consisting of 15 members. It decided to meet from 14 to 25 April and from 18 to 29 August 2025 and for at least one session of two weeks in 2026. It also requested the Co-Chairs, in consultation with the Bureau, to prepare a provisional programme of work based on the clusters of issues discussed at the meeting.

5. The Council of the International Seabed Authority continued its work to develop draft regulations on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area by completing a first reading of the consolidated text at its twenty-ninth session in 2024, with a view to adoption of the draft regulations at its thirtieth session in 2025. The Assembly of the Authority, at its twenty-ninth session, exchanged views on a second periodic review of the international regime of the Area pursuant to article 154 of the Convention, and on a proposal to elaborate a general policy of the Authority related to the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

¹ The advance and unedited version of the report, with comprehensive footnotes, and other relevant reports are available at www.un.org/depts/los/general_assembly/general_assembly_reports.htm.

² For the detailed contributions, see www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/contributions79.htm.

³ See C.N.203.2023.TREATIES-XXI.10 (depositary notification).

6. At the thirty-fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, delegations recognized the importance of the work of the Authority, but different views were expressed on the development of the regulatory framework for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. While several delegations supported the timely adoption of the draft regulations in accordance with the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, several others called for a precautionary pause or a moratorium on seabed mining in the Area until there is sufficient scientific knowledge on the impacts of such activities and effective measures are in place for the protection of the marine environment.

III. Maritime spaces and law of the sea proceedings

7. During the reporting period, States continued to deposit with the Secretary-General charts and/or lists of geographical coordinates of points under the Convention.⁴ The Secretariat continued to draw the attention of States to the importance of technical standards for the collection, storage and dissemination of ocean-related geospatial information, which are essential for ensuring certainty in respect of the geospatial location of baselines, outer limits of maritime zones and lines of delimitation, as well as of protection or management zones or tools.

8. Among other developments, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf commenced consideration of three submissions, suspended its consideration of one submission and reviewed the modalities of its work with a view to increasing its efficiency. It also initiated upgrades to technical facilities and the development of training courses to assist States in the preparation, filing and maintenance of submissions.

9. The International Seabed Authority reported that a total of 30 contracts for exploration were in force, namely 19 for polymetallic nodules, 7 for polymetallic sulphides and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. The Authority also received two applications for approval of plans of work for exploration activities, one of which it approved.

10. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea delivered its advisory opinion in the proceedings concerning the *Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law* (Case No. 31). Procedural orders were adopted by the Tribunal in *The “Zheng He” Case (Luxembourg v. Mexico)* (Case No. 33), by the special chamber of the Tribunal hearing *The M/T “Heroic Idun” (No. 2) Case (Marshall Islands/Equatorial Guinea)* (Case No. 32) and by the International Court of Justice in the case concerning the *Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899 (Guyana v. Venezuela)*.

11. The Permanent Court of Arbitration continued to administer two arbitrations brought under the Convention, namely the *Dispute Concerning Coastal State Rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)* and the *Dispute Concerning the Detention of Ukrainian Naval Vessels and Servicemen (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)*.

IV. Importance of the human dimension

12. The importance of the ocean for human well-being cannot be overstated, with 350 million people depending on it for their livelihoods. The fisheries and aquaculture sectors are particularly crucial as sources of employment, especially in developing

⁴ See www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/depositpublicity.htm.

countries, and also for ensuring nutrition and food security. Workers faced numerous challenges, however, including labour violations and high injury and fatality rates, as well as risks of forced labour. Seafarers also faced threats as a result of armed attacks against commercial vessels.

13. Situations of instability and conflict caused people to undertake dangerous journeys by sea. United Nations entities addressed these challenges by working to alleviate the root causes of irregular migration, supporting just transition to the blue economy and creating sustainable employment. Particular attention was given to vulnerabilities and building the capacities of communities in small island developing States and the least developed countries.

Gender equality and ocean issues

14. The workforce in most ocean-related sectors remained male-dominated, but women played an important role in labour-intensive activities in commercial and artisanal fishing, as well as aquaculture processing. Women in these sectors were often assigned unstable roles, or held poorly paid or unpaid positions, typically in the post-harvesting stage. These challenges, along with the lingering effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, held back labour market recovery and hindered efforts to close the global jobs gap for women.

15. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) assisted coastal States in assessing national legal and policy frameworks that regulate coastal fisheries, including the gender dimensions, and conducted baseline surveys focusing on empowering women in small-scale fisheries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) carried out gender research into decent work challenges and opportunities in various sectors, including fisheries in Namibia. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported that the seaweed industry had the potential to support the economic empowerment of women, who operated approximately 40 per cent of industry start-ups but faced gender-related barriers such as limited access to resources, technology and decision-making positions. The Technical Cooperation Committee of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) approved a global strategy for women in maritime associations to create a more diverse and inclusive work culture in the maritime sector and endorsed the development of a new regional strategy for women in the Pacific. The International Hydrographic Organization implemented a project to empower women in hydrography. The International Seabed Authority expanded its project for women in deep-sea research and secured financial support to advance empowerment and leadership for women in marine scientific research. In promoting gender equality in ocean-related sectors, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia supported the enhanced representation of women in key maritime sectors in the country, including through leadership training and radio broadcasts.

A. Labour at sea

16. Seafarers and fishers faced challenges due to violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault, as well as detention and abandonment at sea. The ILO-IMO database on incidents of abandonment of seafarers recorded 132 new cases in 2023 and as many as 143 by mid-June 2024. In the light of these challenges, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on promoting and protecting the enjoyment of human rights by seafarers.

17. Acting on recommendations of the Joint ILO-IMO Tripartite Working Group, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee adopted amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers

code on the prevention of and response to violence and harassment, which will enter into force on 1 January 2026. The Committee also requested that the ILO and IMO secretariats launch a campaign to raise awareness of addressing violence and harassment in the maritime sector. The IMO Legal Committee finalized guidelines on the fair treatment of seafarers detained on suspicion of committing crimes, for consideration by the Tripartite Working Group.

18. In advancing protections in the fisheries sector, FAO conducted a range of capacity-building activities, including on the role of fishing ports in contributing to social sustainability and decent working conditions. ILO delivered online training courses on labour condition inspection systems on-board fishing vessels and the training of inspectors. FAO and ILO also engaged with regional fisheries bodies to mainstream decent work and social protection, including the elimination of forced labour and child labour in fisheries.

19. A joint FAO, ILO and IMO working group on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing was developing guidance on implementing instruments that governed fishers and workers in the seafood industry throughout the supply chain. It adopted recommendations that urged FAO, ILO and IMO members to accede to relevant conventions, enhance port State control of fishing vessels, address forced and child labour in fishing and continue inter-agency cooperation to ensure the welfare and safety of fishers globally. FAO actions to improve occupational health and safety for the fishing and seafood processing industry were ongoing. A joint IMO-ILO meeting adopted guidelines on the medical examination of fishers.

20. In addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for international shipping, the IMO Assembly adopted a resolution to endorse recommendations emanating from a joint action group to review the impacts of the pandemic on the world's transport workers and the global supply chain.

B. Migration by sea

21. Thousands of refugees and migrants embarked on perilous journeys by sea, with many lost at sea. People moving by sea also faced risks of trafficking, kidnapping and inhuman and degrading treatment, especially when relying on migrant smugglers. These risks were compounded by limited State-led search and rescue capacities, incidents of pushbacks at sea, violations of the principle of non-refoulement and restrictions on humanitarian assistance. The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, reported on these challenges, as well as the need to ensure the safe disembarkation of people in distress at sea in addition to safe and regular migration pathways.

22. In addressing these challenges, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched a multi-stakeholder pledge to develop comprehensive responses to the challenges faced by refugees and migrants moving by sea. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) signed a statement of partnership to strengthen strategic cooperation on transnational organized crime related to migration. The first maritime rescue coordination centre in Somalia was established. UNODC held a round table with Libyan and European Union officials to bolster cooperation and uphold human rights in maritime law enforcement in Libya.

23. Actions were also taken to build capacity for the protection of life at sea. IOM and UNHCR launched an online course on the protection of migrants and refugees moving by sea, to build capacity. IOM was preparing a training curriculum on protecting the human rights of migrants at sea for the Middle East and North Africa region. UNODC delivered training programmes to promote the safety of life at sea

and human rights-compliant approaches in responding to migration by sea and to counter trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling across multiple migration routes. UNODC established a regional centre of excellence in partnership with Trinidad and Tobago.

24. At IMO, consideration was given to the impact of unsafe migration on shipping and the need for cooperative arrangements among States and relevant organizations, alongside the development of guidelines concerning non-survivors in migrant boats. UNHCR promoted protection-sensitive and human rights-compliant approaches to search and rescue and disembarkation with coastal States and other stakeholders, including through regional forums. A UNHCR-led inter-agency group on the protection of refugees and migrants moving by sea continued to exchange information to advance the protection of life at sea, consistent with international law.

V. Maritime safety and security

25. With the safety of navigation remaining a high priority for the international community, IMO continued work on a non-mandatory maritime autonomous shipping (MASS) code, which is expected to take effect in 2025 and form the basis of a mandatory code that will enter into force no earlier than January 2032. IMO also continued to consider the implications of MASS operations for instruments under its purview.

26. IMO adopted amendments to its instruments concerning communication to coastal States and reporting on containers lost at sea. Work also continued on better implementation of the Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic. The Convention on the International Organization for Marine Aids to Navigation entered into force on 22 August 2024 following ratification, acceptance or accession by 30 parties. Updated guidelines on places of refuge for ships in need of assistance were also adopted.

27. The International Hydrographic Organization continued its work on the creation and maintenance of interoperable maritime data product specifications, including agreement on an implementation road map for the digital provision of all relevant marine geoinformation themes. The International Whaling Commission maintained its global database of ship strikes by adding historic and new records. The World Meteorological Organization collaborated with IMO and the International Hydrographic Organization on meteorological and oceanographic information, as well as warning and forecast services for the safety of life and property at sea, with a focus on the polar regions.

28. With regard to maritime security, as detailed in the contributions to the present report, efforts were made to address a wide range of crimes at sea, including piracy and armed robbery against ships; illegal traffic in hazardous wastes and other wastes and illegal traffic in hazardous chemicals; wildlife crime related to marine species and smuggling wildlife on ships; human trafficking; drug and weapon smuggling; fisheries offences, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and intentional damage to submarine cables.

29. In response to a number of serious attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the Security Council adopted resolutions [2722 \(2024\)](#) and [2739 \(2024\)](#) condemning the Houthi attacks and demanding their cessation. IMO condemned attacks on commercial ships and seafarers, underscoring the importance of preserving the safety and welfare of seafarers and stressing the critical importance of maintaining the freedom of navigation of commercial ships.

30. Regarding the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, IMO adopted a resolution on the impact of the Russian armed invasion of Ukraine on international shipping, stressing the critical importance of maintaining freedom of navigation, as well as the functioning of navigational aids, communication, search and rescue and hydrographic services during armed conflict.

31. In addressing fraudulent registration and fraudulent registries of ships, IMO promoted actions to prevent illegal operations by the “dark fleet” or “shadow fleet”, noting that such ships posed a real and high risk of incidents by disguising cargo destinations and origins and avoiding oversight or regulation by flag or coastal States. IMO also adopted a resolution to enhance the framework on the fight against organized crime in the maritime sector.

32. Piracy and armed robbery at sea saw a slight increase in 2023, with 120 incidents reported compared with 115 in 2022, including the first successful hijacking of a merchant vessel due to Somali-based piracy since 2017.⁵ Incidents in the Singapore Strait remained high, with 37 incidents reported in 2023. In the Gulf of Guinea, piracy and armed robbery at sea continued to decrease overall from a peak of 84 incidents in 2020 to 22 in 2023, despite a slight uptick in cases in the first quarter of 2024 when 6 incidents were reported, compared with 5 in the same period in 2023.

33. IMO member States reaffirmed their commitment to combating piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Gulf of Guinea region through national mechanisms and under regional frameworks. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs supported maritime safety and security efforts in various regions, including regional cooperation mechanisms to address and prevent piracy and armed robbery at sea. UNODC provided global capacity-building, training and technical assistance concerning the prevention of threats to maritime safety and security, and facilitated the development of a draft national submarine cable protection and resilience framework. The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal provided the framework for capacity-building for developing States, including the development of guidance documents on preventing and combating illegal traffic of hazardous waste.

VI. Climate change and the ocean and sea level rise

34. The climate emergency continued unabated, in particular as a result of impacts such as ocean warming and the melting of glaciers and ice sheets.⁶ Ocean heat content reached its highest level in the 65-year observational record and the global mean sea level reached a record high since satellite observations began in 1993. Among other impacts on marine life and ecosystems, climate change also exacerbated the spread of invasive alien species.

35. Sea level rise continued to pose an existential threat to some small islands and low-lying coasts,⁷ in addition to causing coastal habitat contraction, geographical shifts of species, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functionality, and encroachment on coastal settlements and infrastructure. Global mean sea level rise in the past decade (2014–2023) was more than twice the rate during the first decade of the satellite record (1993–2002), and is virtually certain to continue to rise until at least 2100.

⁵ International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Report for the Period 1 January–31 December 2023* (London, 2024). Available at www.icccs.org/reports/2023_Annual_IMB_Piracy_and_Armed_Robbery_Report_live.pdf.

⁶ World Meteorological Organization, *State of the Global Climate 2023* (Geneva, 2024). Available at <https://library.wmo.int/records/item/68835-state-of-the-global-climate-2023>.

⁷ See www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers.

36. The International Law Commission continued its work on sea level rise in relation to international law, in particular on issues related to the law of the sea, statehood and the protection of persons affected by sea level rise. The General Assembly will hold a high-level plenary meeting on addressing the existential threats posed by sea level rise on 25 September 2024, with a focus on building common understanding, mobilizing political leadership and promoting multisectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration and international cooperation.

37. The role of the ocean in climate action continued to be increasingly recognized, as exemplified by the annual Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The outcome of the first global stocktake under the Paris Agreement invited parties to scale up ocean-based mitigation action. A total of 56 per cent of the 148 new or updated nationally determined contributions integrated coastal and marine nature-based solutions as part of mitigation or adaptation measures. The Convention secretariat also published a climate solutions implementation road map, which included scalable ocean-based solutions.

38. In other developments, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) made progress on blue carbon initiatives, including through the International Partnership for Blue Carbon and the Blue Carbon Initiative and the steering committee of the newly established Global Decade for Blue Carbon. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals was developing management strategies for mitigating climate change impacts on nesting marine turtles. The Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution conducted work on wider societal implications of different ocean interventions for climate change mitigation, previously known as marine geoengineering.

39. In terms of adaptation, the outcome of the first global stocktake urged parties to accelerate the use of ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions, including through the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems. Of the 158 parties to the Paris Agreement with an adaptation component in their nationally determined contributions, 30 per cent identified ocean ecosystems as a priority sector for adaptation. Adaptation actions and measures to address the vulnerability of coastal and low-lying zones were included in national adaptation plans under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

40. UNCTAD increased its focus on climate change adaptation and resilience-building for seaports and other key coastal transport infrastructure, in particular in small island developing States. In partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) launched its global programme for integrated urban resilience in small island developing States and coastal cities that will support national and city entities in implementing multidimensional and inclusive risk resilience actions.

41. In its advisory opinion in Case No. 31, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea found that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and excess energy absorbed by the ocean constituted “pollution of the marine environment” under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and that States have the specific obligation to take all measures necessary to prevent, reduce and control this type of pollution and to cooperate to adopt relevant rules and standards directly or through competent international organizations. The Tribunal also found that, where the marine environment had been degraded, the obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment may call for measures to restore marine

habitats and ecosystems, to both maintain the mitigation function of ocean ecosystems as carbon sinks and build the resilience of ecosystems as a form of adaptation.

42. Access to climate finance remained essential to address climate change, highlighting the need for stable and accessible funding to ensure sustainable ocean management, marine conservation and ecosystem restoration (see also para. 53). However, a significant adaptation finance gap persists. A sectoral review of nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans conducted by FAO indicated that adaptation costs for fisheries and aquaculture in developing countries could reach \$4.8 billion per year by 2030. Adaptation finance flows to this sector averaged only \$0.22 billion per year from 2017 to 2021.

43. While efforts increased to support technology transfer for a low-carbon, climate-resilient transition in the marine sector, many necessary technological advancements remained underdeveloped. In addition to reducing fleet sizes, UNCTAD reported that improving vessel energy efficiency and adopting smarter navigation and lighter fishing gear resulted in the most significant carbon dioxide emission reductions in the fisheries sector over the past 20 years. Technological alternatives for the transition, such as fuels, engines, vessels and port infrastructure, were still in the prototype or product development phase, however, with the exception of energy-efficient measures and green biofuels derived from seaweed, fish waste and other agricultural wastes. The IMO revised greenhouse gas strategy set out a collective ambition to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions for international shipping by 2050 and a commitment to foster the adoption of alternative zero and near-zero greenhouse gas-emitting fuels by 2030. The IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee also conducted a comprehensive impact assessment and refined a series of midterm greenhouse gas reduction measures.

44. Capacity-building remained essential in efforts to address climate change, including for integrating blue carbon into nationally determined contributions and long-term strategies by enhancing knowledge on marine biodiversity conservation and coastal resilience. UN-Habitat promoted disaster risk management through urban resilience planning and risk mapping in small island developing States and coastal cities in Africa. The International Atomic Energy Agency supported capacity-building on blue carbon by advancing scientific knowledge on the capacity of coastal vegetated ecosystems to store carbon in the long term. The Global Ocean Oxygen Network working group of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission advanced capacity-building on deoxygenation. FAO offered training programmes on climate-resilient fisheries management and fishing safety to address the impacts of climate change. A report on access to information on climate change and human rights (A/79/176), issued by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, underlined the importance of access to information in the context of oceans and climate change.

VII. Ocean sustainability

45. The ocean faced significant challenges from multiple stressors, such as increasing eutrophication, worsening acidification, declining fish stocks, rising temperatures and widespread pollution, which destroyed habitats, resulted in biodiversity loss (notably damage on coral reefs) and threatened coastal communities and the health of marine ecosystems, which is vital to over 3 billion people.⁸ Key actions to address these issues included implementing sustainable fishing practices, effectively managing marine protected areas, promoting marine science and

⁸ United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024* (New York, 2024). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>.

technology, increasing capacities for monitoring ocean health and carrying out monitoring, control and surveillance, and reducing pollution, but they remained uneven. Coordinated efforts are needed to maintain and restore ocean health and better understand and address the cumulative impacts of these multiple stressors.

46. The sustainability of the ocean is central in efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 14 on life below water. However, only target 14.b on providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets remains on track. According to the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*, the majority of the targets for Goal 14 are in regression or need significant acceleration.

47. Nevertheless, momentum to renew commitments and accelerate efforts to achieve these targets and effectively implement the 2030 Agenda was seen in the outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 (see General Assembly resolution 78/1, annex) and the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2024,⁹ and in preparations for the Summit of the Future taking place in September 2024. The 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development will also provide a high-level dedicated opportunity to accelerate action for achieving Goal 14.

48. Significant opportunities to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the ocean also exist through increasing participation in and enhancement of the implementation of ocean-related instruments, including the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. The latter marks a major step towards ocean sustainability by prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. In addition, increased participation in the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the development of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, could make vital contributions to achieving ocean sustainability.

49. The sustainability of the ocean has become increasingly integral to climate- and biodiversity-related processes, reflecting a deepened understanding of the intrinsic linkages between the ocean, climate and biodiversity. In the joint statement on climate, nature and people issued at the twenty-eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, it was acknowledged that efforts to promote sustainable land management, drought resilience and ocean health provide cross-cutting benefits to action on climate change, biodiversity loss and sustainable development. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework catalysed new political attention and commitment to the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity. Efforts towards ocean sustainability were also taken under other biodiversity-related conventions, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

50. Sustainable ocean-based economies offered tremendous opportunities for economic growth and social development, while safeguarding the health and productivity of the ocean. The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States indicated that promoting sustainable ocean-based economies

⁹ Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States: A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity (see General Assembly resolution 78/317, annex; see also A/78/L.80).

requires a multifaceted approach, taking into account climate adaptation efforts that leveraged sector-specific opportunities, public-private partnerships, innovative financing and an enabling environment, among other things.

51. Efforts continued at all levels to support sustainable ocean-based economies, including by developing and implementing initiatives, policies, regulations, strategies and action plans, promoting sustainable trade in ocean-related goods and services, fostering partnerships, galvanizing investments, sharing data and knowledge, building capacity and providing technical assistance. Particular attention was given to tools such as marine spatial planning, integrated land-sea planning, integrated coastal zone management and a circular economy approach.

52. Traditional sectors, such as coastal and marine tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, and shipping received focused attention, while emerging sectors, such as offshore energy, marine biotechnology, seaweed farming and plastic substitutes production, gained increasing interest. A new UNCTAD report explored the potential of seaweed for increasing income, promoting food security, preserving marine biodiversity and empowering women along value chains.

53. Securing accessible and long-term financing at scale in both traditional and emerging sectors remained critical for enabling sustainable ocean-based economies. However, insufficient funding and investment were key challenges for many States, including small island developing States and coastal African States. Efforts to address this challenge included leveraging climate financing, capitalizing on blue carbon credits and promoting innovative financing instruments such as “blue bonds” and “blue loans”, which raise and earmark funds for investment in areas such as water and wastewater management, reducing ocean plastic pollution, marine ecosystem restoration, sustainable shipping, eco-friendly tourism or offshore renewable energy. Notably, the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda contained commitments to explore, develop and promote innovative financing solutions and to facilitate easier access to affordable and concessional finance, including by considering multidimensional vulnerability.

A. Promoting marine science and technology

54. The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development provided impetus to increase knowledge and promote marine science and technology, with a diverse portfolio of endorsed actions. An Ocean Decade Capacity Development Facility was launched to match capacity development needs with existing or new capacity development initiatives.

55. The Barcelona Statement issued at the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference outlined priorities for science and knowledge, ocean science infrastructure and cross-cutting recommendations that were critical to achieving the Ocean Decade vision by 2030. Additional efforts to support implementation of the Ocean Decade included deep-sea research, ocean acidification, empowerment of women, ocean science diplomacy, connecting science to communities, strengthening linkages with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and improving data collection.

56. The collection, sharing and management of ocean-related data remained a priority, with the Global Ocean Observing System monitoring the ocean through more than 8,700 platforms and across 13 global ocean observing networks. The Global Ocean Observing System steering committee endorsed the development of observation plans for ocean carbon, biology and ecology, and a digital ecosystem to integrate relevant observation data. The Ocean Biodiversity Information System grew by incorporating one new data set daily and 1 million new marine species observations each month. The Executive Council of the Intergovernmental

Oceanographic Commission encouraged its member States to contribute to the ongoing work of its ad hoc intersessional Working Group on Ocean Observations in Areas under National Jurisdiction.

57. Progress was made in the collection of new data on marine acidity for indicator 14.3.1 of Goal 14, and activities were undertaken to advance the methodology used for the indicators for targets 14.1 on marine pollution, 14.3 on ocean acidification and 14.a on marine scientific knowledge, research capacity and the transfer of marine technology. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and FAO jointly compiled global data on harmful algal blooms and cooperated on implementing early warning systems for such events.

58. Efforts to strengthen the ocean science-policy interface continued, including by promoting science-based decision-making, tailored capacity-building, the effective use of science communication and knowledge generation for a healthy, safe and resilient ocean. The *State of the Ocean Report 2024* was launched by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and offered insights on scientific activities and knowledge around the seven outcomes of the Ocean Decade.

59. The Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, co-organized an international symposium with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission on strengthening the ocean science-policy interface.¹⁰ Building on the resulting insights, the secretariat of the Regular Process and the Commission articulated the importance of the science-policy interface on the margins of the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference. Progress was made on the third World Ocean Assessment, with the list of expertise needed for the writing teams, assessing potential gaps and overlaps in expertise and determining ways to manage them, and providing guidance for the writing teams. In order to improve information accessibility, a call for expressions of interest was launched for collaboration in digitizing the Assessment in order to present its content in an interactive web-based format.¹¹

B. Conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources

60. The proportion of global fish stocks sustainably exploited declined from 90 per cent in 1974 to 62.3 per cent in 2021, while the percentage of overfished stocks has increased by 2.3 percent since 2019, from 35.4 to 37.7 per cent. Global marine fish landings remained relatively stable in 2021, averaging 80 million tons since 1995, although global demand for aquatic foods continued to increase.

61. A wide range of actions were taken to improve fisheries management and strengthen the fisheries sector. At the global level, the seventeenth round of informal consultations of States parties to the Fish Stocks Agreement focused its discussion on the topic of sustainable fisheries management in the face of climate change. The twenty-fourth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea held multi-stakeholder discussions on the theme “The ocean as a source of sustainable food”. At its thirty-sixth session, the FAO Committee on Fisheries focused on the vital role of fisheries and aquaculture in tackling food insecurity, fisheries and climate change, fisheries management, fish trade, fisheries and biodiversity, and marine plastics pollution. The Committee also adopted guidelines for sustainable aquaculture.

62. The second Small-scale Fisheries Summit provided a global platform for small-scale fisheries stakeholders to address governance and development challenges. The

¹⁰ See www.un.org/regularprocess/Symposium.

¹¹ See www.un.org/regularprocess/woa3.

event also commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. As part of its global programme to support implementation of the Agreement on Port State Measures, FAO published capacity-building materials and guidance documents to facilitate legal, policy-level, institutional and operational alignments.

63. UNCTAD undertook a range of activities on trade-related aspects of fisheries and making the fisheries sector more carbon neutral. Following the adoption of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies in 2022, negotiations advanced on the outstanding issues relating to fisheries subsidies.

64. At the regional level, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements continued efforts to improve the management of fisheries, including through ecosystem-based management of fisheries and the adoption of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. In the light of the importance of the marine environment for sustainable livelihoods in the Caribbean, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism adopted a regional protocol on the principle of the sustainable use of marine living resources for blue economic growth and sustainable development. The North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission made progress on the ecosystem-based management of fisheries by developing nomination templates for other effective area-based conservation measures for areas to be closed and restricted to bottom fishing to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems.

C. Protection and preservation of the marine environment and conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity

65. Important developments took place during the reporting period to stop and reverse marine biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and restore ocean health. The secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity continued its work on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, including by providing support to facilitate and enhance implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, building awareness of the framework through capacity-building workshops and engaging with other international processes. It conducted a strategic review of work on coastal and marine biodiversity, as well as island biodiversity in the context of the framework. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice recommended that the Conference of the Parties recognize that the programmes of work on marine and coastal biodiversity and on island biodiversity, together with relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties, still corresponded to global priorities, while stressing that many areas were not fully implemented and required the enhanced provision of financial resources.

66. The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted a resolution on strengthening ocean-based efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and plastic pollution. A ministerial declaration further welcomed recent important multilateral achievements, such as the adoption of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

67. Negotiations continued to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, with the intergovernmental negotiating committee holding its third and fourth sessions. The committee requested the secretariat to issue a compilation document of the draft text to serve as the starting point for continued negotiations at its fifth meeting to be held in November and December 2024. An open-ended legal drafting group was also established to start its work at the fifth meeting.

68. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals requested parties to integrate strategies addressing marine pollution into conservation plans for migratory marine species, focusing on understanding and mitigating pollution-induced threats from chemicals, oil spills and plastic pellets. The United Nations-coordinated operation completed the transfer of more than 1.1 million barrels of oil from the decaying floating storage and offloading unit (FSO) *Safer* off the coast of Yemen. The Secretary-General urged donors to contribute the additional funds required to safely recycle the vessel.

69. Regarding hazardous chemicals and waste, activities were undertaken under the Basel Convention to address advancements in the scientific understanding of plastic waste. Amendments were adopted to the Minamata Convention on Mercury to phase out the manufacture, import or export of new mercury-added products, which will enter into force in April 2025.

70. At the regional level, developments in the context of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme included: the adoption and opening for signature, in September 2023, of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Protocol for the Western Indian Ocean to the Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region and the development of a regional marine spatial planning strategy to inform relevant national strategies of the contracting parties; the addition of new species to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region; and the endorsement by the contracting parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean of the *Mediterranean Quality Status Report 2023* to implement the ecosystem approach in the Mediterranean.

71. Progress was also made in developing and strengthening management tools for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, including area-based management tools and related scientific processes. The International Whaling Commission reviewed the Southern Ocean sanctuary management plan, highlighting its expanded focus on broader environmental and conservation goals beyond the management of commercial whaling. The Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic expanded the North Atlantic current and Evlanov Sea basin marine protected area to include additional species and habitats listed under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, as well as the seabed, ocean floor and subsoil.

72. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission advanced marine spatial planning by resuming MSPglobal 2.0, a joint initiative with the European Commission to develop international guidelines, focusing on two pilot projects aimed at enhancing technical capabilities and fostering the development of marine spatial plans that consider transboundary issues in West and Central Africa and the Western Pacific region.

VIII. Strengthening international cooperation and coordination

73. Building on the momentum to accelerate collective ocean action, UN-Oceans continued to strengthen its cooperation and coordination on ocean and coastal issues.¹² During the reporting period, its membership grew to 31 with the addition of UNODC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. While holding regular meetings for the sharing of information and best practices,

¹² See www.un.org/depts/los/coop_coor/un_oceans.htm.

UN-Oceans members supported ocean-related processes such as the twenty-fourth meeting of the informal consultative process, the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. UN-Oceans also made a submission on the elements for consideration in the global stocktake under the Paris Agreement.

74. Following the adoption of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, UN-Oceans held a high-level meeting in January 2024 at which participating organizations agreed, in the context of the goals of UN-Oceans on strengthening and promoting the coordination and coherence of United Nations system activities, on a statement of commitments to promote together a better understanding of the Agreement and prepare for its entry into force as well as its future implementation.

75. UN-Oceans showcased its critical role in enhancing cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary cooperation and coordination among relevant international organizations by organizing side events on the margins of intergovernmental meetings, including the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, at which UN-Oceans members highlighted activities to promote ocean-based climate change ambition with a focus on solutions and projects involving multi-stakeholder collaboration. At the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, a side event explored the role of UN-Oceans members in supporting small island developing States to chart a course towards resilience, prosperity and sustainable development.

76. Efforts to strengthen international cooperation and coordination at all levels continued, with a focus on addressing marine pollution, including plastic pollution, conservation and the sustainable use of marine and coastal biological diversity, ocean-related activities on climate change, emergency prevention, preparedness and response, maritime safety and security, ocean science, the safety of fishers and fishing vessels and tools to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, as well as addressing the vulnerabilities of coastal communities and small island developing States.

77. Among these developments, the fourth meeting of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Dialogue promoted cooperation between regional seas organizations and regional fisheries bodies, both within and across regions, to achieve the vision of a sustainable, healthy and productive ocean. Through the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network, FAO contributed to efforts to strengthen regional cooperation between regional fishery bodies and other fisheries-related institutions. The Joint FAO/IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Related Matters held its fifth meeting and adopted over 50 recommendations for consideration by the governing bodies of the three organizations.

78. In support of efforts to tackle marine pollution, cooperation between the parties to the Basel Convention and IMO and ILO was ongoing regarding regulations on the prevention of pollution from ships, sustainable ship recycling and emergency response to marine oil spills and hazardous substances, including implementing decisions on ship dismantling and wastes generated on-board ships.

79. Significant efforts were made to advance international cooperation and coordination towards integrated and cross-sectoral approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, with the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction acting as a catalyser. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a

recommendation for consideration by the Conference of the Parties on the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity, in which it requested that the Executive Secretary continue to cooperate with the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs and organizations with competence in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals requested parties, when developing conservation plans for migratory marine species, to integrate the need to address the threat of plastic pollution. The Conference also requested the Convention's secretariat to seek enhanced cooperation and coordination with other United Nations bodies and multilateral environmental agreements, including the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and the international treaty to end plastic pollution currently being negotiated. The Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic and the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission continued to cooperate under a collective arrangement between competent organizations on cooperation and coordination regarding selected areas in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the North-East Atlantic, focusing on enhancing marine protection through marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

80. Strengthening cooperation and partnerships was also at the centre of recent and upcoming processes related to sustainable development. In anticipation of the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference, the preparatory meeting held in 2024 pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/128](#) discussed the themes for the ocean action panels, including a theme focusing on all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional and subregional levels. The outcome document of the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States emphasized innovative partnerships based on cooperation, trust and transparency.

IX. Capacity-building and technical assistance

81. Through its capacity-building programmes, the Division provided information, advice and assistance to States and intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders, including by facilitating technical assistance projects and fellowships and by participating in conferences, meetings, workshops and training events.¹³

82. The Division continued to assist developing countries in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its implementing agreements through a programme of assistance funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.¹⁴ It also continued to implement a project to strengthen participation in and implementation of the Fish Stocks Agreement, funded by the European Union and implemented with FAO.¹⁵

83. The Division was implementing a programme of activities to promote a better understanding of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and prepare for its entry into force. These activities included regional workshops, technical assistance at the

¹³ See www.un.org/oceancapacity and www.un.org/depts/los/general_assembly/documents/DOALOSListActivities1Sep2023-31Aug2024.pdf.

¹⁴ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/norway for resources and assistance available through the project activities.

¹⁵ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/UNFSAproject for resources and assistance available through the project activities.

national level, briefings and side events and the development of tools and outreach materials.¹⁶ Some activities were supported by funding from the European Union.

84. The Division further continued its collaboration with partners under an ocean governance training programme funded through the PROBLUE programme of the World Bank, as well as with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to deliver briefings on ocean affairs and the law of the sea.

85. The Division continued to administer nine voluntary trust funds to assist developing States with the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its implementing agreements, participation in ocean-related meetings and intergovernmental processes and the settlement of disputes through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.¹⁷

86. The International Seabed Authority expanded its capacity-building activities with several new initiatives, including an e-learning platform and an alumni network for trainees, as well as by opening the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy and a Joint Training and Research Centre for Africa and the Middle East in Alexandria, Egypt. In addition to its established activities, the Tribunal expanded its junior professional officer programme and held workshops for legal advisers.

87. Activities to assist developing States in sustainably managing ocean spaces, resources and activities, including through the implementation of the Convention and related instruments, were also reported by many organizations and entities.

Fellowships

88. Collaboration between the Division and the Nippon Foundation under the Fellowship Programme for Human Resources Development and Advancement of the Legal Order of the World's Oceans continued to strengthen. Established 20 years ago, the project has benefited 257 fellows from 93 countries, along with 181 individuals under the training programme to reinforce capacity in the context of the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, through various fellowships and capacity-building activities, including under the former programme. The fellowships have demonstrated broad geographic participation, involving nationals from landlocked developing countries, the least developed countries and small island developing States. Gender parity has been achieved across all programmes.

89. During the reporting period, the Division continued to implement the United Nations-Nippon Foundation and Strategic Needs Fellowships, building the capacity of 25 professionals from developing States dealing directly with ocean affairs and law of the sea issues.

90. The Division also held an alumni meeting in Antigua and Barbuda to coincide with the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States. Aimed specifically at United Nations-Nippon Foundation alumni from small island developing States, the meeting gathered 14 former fellows from such States across various regions, who participated in official programme events and various side events, as well as training activities.

91. During the reporting period, the Division also launched the new Ocean Governance Fellowship for Small Island Developing States, aimed at addressing the special circumstances of such States in the context of ocean affairs and the law of the

¹⁶ See www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en.

¹⁷ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/tf and www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/SGReportTrustFunds1August202331July2024.pdf.

sea. The fellowship is set to start in September 2024 with a cohort of 10 fellows from the following regions: Caribbean, Pacific, Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea. All selected fellows are government officials holding positions in their administrations relevant to ocean affairs and the law of the sea.

92. The Division also continued to administer and implement the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship, with a national from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela being the twenty-fifth awardee.

X. Conclusions

93. Marine ecosystems remain under constant threat from the impacts of human activities, including overfishing, pollution, ocean warming and ocean acidification. These impacts are felt most acutely by coastal communities, especially small island developing States and the least developed countries, with resulting risks to food security and threats to local economies.

94. Urgent actions are needed to address the wide range of threats that continue to threaten marine ecosystems and biodiversity and deteriorate the health of the ocean. With ocean warming and global sea level rise reaching record levels, the climate emergency is intensifying and remains a grave threat to the ocean and its resources. Cumulative impacts from human activities that affect the ocean, including coastal development, overfishing and pollution, have combined to threaten food security, local economies and the very existence of small island developing States and some coastal populations. Now more than ever, concerted actions are needed to defend the ocean and address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

95. Climate actions focusing on the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus offer significant potential to address these complex challenges, while also providing cross-cutting benefits for humanity. Despite growing efforts in capacity-building, climate finance for the aquatic food sector remains insufficient and technological advancements for significant carbon dioxide emission reductions in the fisheries sector lag behind. Implementation of ocean-based mitigation and adaptation solutions to climate change and driving forward the outcomes of the first global stocktake will be crucial for slowing climate change and preparing for its continued impacts.

96. Thirty years after its entry into force, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea remains the keystone for global ocean governance. The adoption and opening for signature of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and the number of signatures and ratifications already garnered demonstrate the fundamental importance of the Convention and its implementing agreements in addressing the serious threats facing the ocean. The high level of engagement on the advisory opinion on climate change issued by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea illustrates the relevance of the institutions established by the Convention in addressing such challenges.

97. Efforts to enhance scientific understanding of the ocean and strengthen the science-policy interface are gaining momentum, as evidenced by the extensive actions supporting implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Developing and progress in developing the third World Ocean Assessment. To achieve the vision of the Ocean Decade and ensure informed decision-making, significant actions must be scaled up, as guided by the priorities outlined in the Barcelona Statement.

98. Efforts are progressing to improve the working conditions of seafarers and fishers. Violence and harassment, as well as detention and abandonment at sea, remain a serious concern. While promising initiatives are under way to promote gender equality in ocean-related industries, continued concerted efforts are needed to close remaining gaps and enhance the representation of women in these sectors.

99. Further efforts are crucial to ensure the effective implementation of relevant legal instruments on the safety of life at sea, including with regard to rendering assistance to those in distress at sea and for their disembarkation to places of safety. Initiatives to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons remain essential to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable migrants and refugees. In addition, a holistic approach to address the root causes of irregular migration and flight through enhanced cooperation is urgently needed.

100. Positive steps are being made to reverse marine biodiversity loss and safeguard the health and resilience of the ocean and its ecosystems. Addressing marine pollution, conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity and combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing remain areas of priority. Progress was made at the regional level in the context of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme to strengthen management tools for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.

101. In the light of the significant increase in the percentage of overfished stocks, further coordinated efforts to improve fisheries management and the fisheries sector as a whole are urgently needed to ensure the full implementation of the international legal framework for fisheries and support the long-term sustainability of marine living resources.

102. Negotiation of an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, and ongoing work in support of the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework represent other key developments. Additional efforts are needed to conclude these negotiations and ensure the early entry into force and implementation of relevant legal instruments and frameworks, in particular the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. The timely and effective implementation of the Agreement could make vital contributions to addressing ocean challenges.

103. Enhanced cooperation and coordination across the ocean mandates of relevant organizations, including through UN-Oceans, will be essential to identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration in tackling the triple planetary crisis and achieving the 2030 Agenda, in particular Goal 14. Among other things, additional and accelerated actions will be needed to advance science and technology, conserve and sustainably use marine resources and promote sustainable ocean-based economies. Maintaining progress and seizing the momentum at upcoming major events such as the Summit for the Future and the 2025 United Nations Oceans Conference will be critical.