BECAUSE OUR PLANET IS BLUE
Declaration for the United Nations Ocean Conference 2025

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Within the vast embrace of our planet lies a realm of fragile beauty – the Ocean. Within its depths lies the cradle of life, nourishing and connecting the entire planet. We all depend on the balance of the endless blue. We all have the duty to take care for it.

The Ocean covers more than 70 per cent of the planet's surface and constitutes 95 per cent of the biosphere. Changes in the Ocean drive weather systems that affect both terrestrial and marine ecosystems. The Ocean and its ecosystems also provide significant benefits to the global community, including climate regulation, around 50 per cent of the oxygen production on Earth, food, livelihoods, employment, maritime trade, recreation and cultural well-being. These benefits depend, to a large extent, on the maintenance of ocean processes, marine biodiversity and related ecosystem services.

However, the Ocean, seas and marine wildlife are increasingly being threatened, degraded or destroyed by human activities, reducing their ability to provide the vital functions on which life on Earth depends.

A Wounded Giant

The world is facing simultaneous crises of climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity, which pose a serious threat to the future existence of humanity and all forms of life, including marine fauna and flora.

We are failing to meet the climate goals of keeping global warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, with some regions, such as the Mediterranean, already exceeding 1.5°C.

As the planet's largest carbon sink, the Ocean absorbs the excess heat and energy released by rising greenhouse gas emissions and trapped in the Earth's system. Up until now, the Ocean has absorbed about 90 per cent of the heat generated by rising emissions. As the excess heat and energy warms the Ocean, the change in temperature leads to unprecedented cascading effects, including ice melting, sea level rise and marine heatwaves.

Marine heatwaves have doubled in frequency and have become longer, more intense and more widespread. Heat waves have already contributed to widespread coral bleaching and reef degradation. Rising temperatures increase the risk of irreversible loss of marine and coastal ecosystems, including damage to coral reefs and mangroves that support ocean life.

These changes will ultimately have lasting impacts on marine biodiversity, and on the lives and livelihoods of coastal communities and beyond - including some 680 million people living in low-lying coastal areas, nearly 2 billion people living in half of the world's megacities that are located on the coast, nearly half of the world's population (3.3 billion) that depends on fish for protein, and nearly 60 million people employed in fisheries and aquaculture worldwide.

The climate and environmental emergency we are experiencing is a crisis of unprecedented proportions and threatens our very survival. Addressing the ocean crisis responsibly means accepting the need to take rapid and far-ranging action to avoid the worst consequences of our unsustainable and unhealthy dependence on fossil fuels and strategic minerals – and putting the Ocean on a path to recovery.

Six Steps to Turn the Tide

We must stop harming our planet and start caring for it. We must protect and restore the Ocean so its inhabitants can survive and thrive.

A healthy Ocean with flourishing and well-protected wildlife, as well as resilient marine ecosystems, is essential for a healthy planet.

To turn the tide, we must take immediate action on the following six steps at global, regional and national levels:

1. Ban offshore oil and gas exploration and phase out existing fossil fuel extraction;
2. Implement mandatory measures to reduce vessel speed;
3. Ban destructive fisheries such as bottom trawling;
4. Adopt global rules to end plastic pollution, addressing the full life cycle of plastics;
5. Agree on a global moratorium on deep-sea mining;
6. Ensure effective protection of marine habitats and enforce marine conservation measures to restore ecosystems damaged by human activities.

1) Leaving the Fossil Fuel Era Behind

Fossil fuels account for more than 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and almost 90 per cent of all CO_2 emissions. Yet projections based on plans of the hydrocarbon sector indicate that by 2030, fossil fuel production will be about 120 per cent higher than would be consistent with a 1.5 °C trajectory. A continuation of current policies is projected to result in global greenhouse gas emissions of 56 gigatonnes of CO_2 equivalent in 2035, which is 55 per cent higher than the level consistent with a pathway below 1.5 °C, according to the UN Emissions Gap Report 2023.

The Paris Agreement's targets can only be met if we immediately stop looking for new hydrocarbon deposits. In its Net Zero by 2050 Roadmap, the International Energy Agency recognises that achieving carbon neutrality by that date is incompatible with investing in new fossil fuel supplies.

Despite this, billions of dollars continue to be invested in the search for new oil and gas deposits in the seabed. Even marine protected areas are not excluded from these efforts. Such exploration involves the use of airguns, which produce some of the loudest human-made noise ever, potentially damaging marine wildlife from the smallest planktonic organism to the largest whale.

Commercial activities related to the exploitation of hydrocarbons at all stages (drilling, extraction, transport, refining, etc.) are also a frequent cause of major oil spills.

The European Union's Marine Strategy Framework Directive is a promising legal instrument for tackling the deteriorating state of the Ocean. It uses an ecosystem-based approach to seek to achieve good environmental status of the EU's marine waters. The legally binding framework defines and enshrines measures, including science-based thresholds for seabed integrity, protection of marine biodiversity, reduction of eutrophication, marine litter, underwater noise, and other descriptors.

We therefore agree to ban oil and gas exploration at sea and phase out existing hydrocarbon exploitation:

1.1. States shall prohibit all fossil fuel exploration activities throughout their territory, including their territorial sea, the Exclusive Economic Zone and the continental shelf, in agreement with the agreed objective in the First Global Stocktake at Climate COP28 of "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science".

1.2. To improve the transparent and measurable phase-out of the fossil fuel era, and in the spirit of regional and multilateral cooperation, in line with the UNFCCC principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, States shall develop and agree on regional carbon budgets (the total amount of CO_2-equivalent emissions that can be released by 2050) in order to meet the objective of not exceeding the 1.5 °C increase above pre-industrial levels threshold set by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change

1.3. States shall set threshold values for both, impulsive and continuous, underwater noise generating activities, for within their territorial seas, the Exclusive Economic Zones and over the continental shelves in order to protect marine wildlife from negative impacts. They will also monitor underwater noise emissions and impose appropriate measures to ensure that the thresholds are not exceeded.

2) Making Maritime Transport Sustainable

The Ocean enables maritime transport, which is responsible for more than 80 per cent of the world's traded goods. While it is true that shipping can be considered as the backbone of international trade and therefore the global economy, it is also a sector with a growing negative environmental impact on climate, public health and biodiversity.

The shipping sector, whose greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 20 per cent in the last decade, operates with an ageing fleet that is 98.8 per cent dependent on fossil fuels for its operations. As a result, emissions of various air pollutants and black carbon are also increasing.

The sector already accounts for around three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Whereas the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has adopted a new emissions reduction strategy to align the shipping sector with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Anthropogenic noise in the marine environment is increasing at an alarming rate. In some areas, underwater noise levels have doubled every decade over the last 60 years. This poses a significant threat to marine ecosystems and to the survival of mammals, turtles, fish, and other marine life. Shipping is the main source of continuous noise emissions into the marine environment. Collisions with ships remain in many regions a major cause of mortality of large whales and other marine fauna, some of which are in a worrying conservation status.

Scientific calculations predict that a reduction of vessel speed of the global shipping fleet by 10 to 20 per cent could reduce CO_2 emissions by about 13 to 24 per cent, reduce shipping noise by 40 to 67 per cent and is likely to reduce the risk of collisions with cetaceans by 50 to 78 per cent.

Reducing ship speed is the most cost-effective way to reduce the environmental impact of shipping. It is an immediate measure and does not require technological modifications. Regulated slower shipping has no impact on the overall costs of the shipping industry. It will only lead to a marginal increase in logistics and supply chain costs that might impact consumer prices.

We therefore agree to introduce mandatory measures to reduce vessel speed:

2.1. States to agree, within the IMO, to impose mandatory measures to reduce underwater noise from shipping.

2.2. States and the private sector to take immediate steps to impose and implement slow steaming and vessel slow down to achieve immediate multiple environmental benefits.

2.3. States and the private sector shall collaborate within the IMO, as well as on regional and national level to impose, where appropriate, mandatory routing and/or vessel slow-down measures, as appropriate in high-risk areas to reduce the risk of collisions with endangered marine megafauna.

2.4. In marine areas with some form of legal protection where there are vulnerable or endangered megafauna species threatened by the risk of collision (e.g. the Northwest Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area , which includes the Cetacean Migration Corridor and the Pelagos Sanctuary, the Hellenic Trench and Crete; and the Dronda Head in Sri Lanka), mandatory measures should be adopted to divert traffic from cetacean routes, and where this is not possible, mandatory speed reductions to between 10 and 12 knots (a range

recommended by the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area - ACCOBAMS).

3) Ending Destructive Fisheries

The majority of fish stocks monitored by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are currently fished at maximum sustainable levels. The percentage of stocks fished beyond that threshold, i.e. at unsustainable levels, has increased steadily since the late 1970s. In 2019, more than a third of the world's capture fish stocks was classified as overfished by the FAO.

The lack of effective and sustainable governance in some of the world's fisheries has led to overexploitation, extreme bycatch rates and abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear. It has also enabled destructive fishing methods such as bottom trawling, and illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing (IUU), which is estimated to account for 20 per cent of the world's catch.

Overfishing and the use of destructive fishing gear is one of the major threats marine ecosystems face today. A primary management approach that could help mitigate the harmful effects of destructive fishing gear, and to be consistent with international commitments to protect the marine environment, entails the use of less destructive gear, combined with the creation of more areas where destructive fishing is either not allowed or is at least effectively regulated.

In particular, trawling and dredging should be banned in vulnerable seabed habitats and in areas where these fishing methods result in incidental harm and mortality of threatened megafauna species (e.g. elasmobranchs, sea turtles, seabirds and marine mammals). Harmful fisheries subsidies (including fuel subsidies) that increase the capacity and effort of trawling and dredging fleets must be eliminated.

We therefore agree on the following measures to end destructive fishing practices:

3.1. Create more areas where destructive fishing methods such as bottom trawling and dredging are either not allowed or are at least effectively regulated.
3.2. Prohibit trawling and dredging in vulnerable seabed habitats and in areas where these fishing methods result in incidental harm and mortality of threatened megafauna species.
3.3. Promote the use of less destructive fishing gear (e.g. individual pots and traps).
3.4. Eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies (including fuel subsidies) that increase the capacity and effort of trawling and dredging fleets, while making use of beneficial subsidies that help to convert or decommission trawl and dredge fleets, while ensuring that people employed in the industry are provided with viable alternatives.
3.5. Ensure that the EU Action Plan to phase out bottom trawling within Marine Protected Areas and Natura 2000 sites by 2030 is fully implemented and enforced. Bottom trawling and dredging should also be permanently banned in all Fisheries Restricted Areas established under Regional Fisheries Management Organisations.
3.6. Mandate the use of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS, combined with IMO identification numbers) on all trawlers and dredges, irrespective of vessel size, and ensure that 1) switching off the system or altering transmitted data is considered as non-compliance; and 2) AIS data are publicly available.
3.7. Mandate the use of on-board electronic monitoring systems on all fishing vessels using trawl and dredge gear, to ensure adequate monitoring of catches, by-catches and discards, and full compliance with existing regulations.

4) Reducing Plastic Production and Stopping the Pollution at Its Source

From Antarctic Sea ice to the deepest ocean trenches, plastic pollution is ubiquitous in marine ecosystems. An estimated 9 million tonnes of plastic waste enters the Ocean every year. At least 914

species are directly affected, with plastic ingestion recorded in all marine turtle species, nearly half of all seabird and marine mammal species surveyed as well as 69 freshwater birds and 49 land birds from 53 families. Some 68 per cent of cetacean species are known to be affected by plastic pollution. Countless marine animals also become entangled in plastic fishing gear and suffocate or drown.

As recognised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the pollution caused by the overproduction and consumption of plastics, including the toxic chemicals both inherent in plastics themselves and emitted by production methods, has become an existential threat to the planet. According to the OECD, global plastics production is projected to triple from 460 million tonnes per year in 2019 to 1,231 million tonnes in 2060 unless it is significantly regulated.

The international community has recognised that urgent efforts are needed to reduce the production and consumption of plastics to sustainable levels. In 2022, the UN Environment Assembly adopted Resolution 5/14 entitled "End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument", which mandates the development of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment and regulate plastic throughout its entire life cycle.

The new instrument must be used not only to protect human health, the environment and the Ocean from plastic pollution but also to keep the world on track for a 1.5 °C future. Studies have shown that without legally binding measures to freeze and phase down the production of primary plastic polymers, the best-case scenario will merely stabilise emissions at current levels. It is therefore crucial that states agree to introduce legally binding measures to reduce virgin plastic production.

We therefore agree to adopt global rules to end plastic pollution, addressing the full life cycle of plastics:

4.1. The full life cycle of plastic must be addressed through legal measures to globally end plastic pollution.
4.2. States must adopt legally binding rules that freeze and phase down the production of all plastics – not just those known to be problematic – to sustainable levels both nationally and internationally.
4.3. Provisions are necessary to protect human health and the environment from chemicals used in plastic production, as well as of monomers and polymers of concern.
4.4. States must explore and emphasise reduction and prevention solutions, including a transition to safe and accessible reuse and refill systems.
4.5. Effective control measures must be put in place to address microplastic pollution throughout the life cycle of plastic.
4.6. States must adopt national implementation measures with monitoring so that they can report on complying with their international obligations.
4.7. States must provide financial assistance for countries with insufficient own means to ensure the rapid and effective implementation of the Plastics Treaty and compliance with its provisions by all countries.,
4.8. States should adopt a comprehensive global strategy on plastic fishing gear, including aquaculture gear, that includes action across the entire fishing gear value chain to prevent, reduce and eliminate abandoned and lost fishing gear ("ghost gear"). Better coordination and cooperation between existing instruments as well as knowledge sharing, gear tracking and capacity building are needed.

5) Adopting a Moratorium on Deep-Sea Mining

There is a growing economic interest in extracting minerals from the deep-sea. Proponents claim that the necessary transformation of the energy sector requires such activities. However, at the same time, an increasing number of governments and representatives of the private sector, reject such claims. They support the call for extreme caution when it comes to the future of arguably the world's most

fragile ecosystems. Once launched, deep-sea mining would result in one of the largest extractive operations in ocean history. It would also interfere with one of the planet's largest carbon sinks in the midst of a global climate emergency.

Exploring deep-sea habitats is challenging, and scientific research on deep-sea species and ecosystems is only beginning to reveal what the planet could lose if destructive seabed activities were allowed to proceed. Deep-sea mining is still in the experimental stage and its possible impacts on the deep ocean remain largely unknown. But existing information and observations from exploratory deep-sea mining are leading scientists to warn that biodiversity loss would be inevitable, extensive and most likely irreversible.

Scientists warn that the impacts of deep seabed mining operations on the Ocean would act cumulatively to existing stressors such as climate change, pollution and overexploitation, likely causing direct and irreversible environmental and ecological effects, risking damage and loss of habitats and species.

We therefore agree to introduce a global moratorium on deep-sea mining:

5.1. States to support a moratorium on deep-sea mining until there is a comprehensive scientific understanding of deep-sea ecosystems, it can be demonstrated that it is possible to protect the environment from the harmful effects of deep-sea mining. Including preventing damage to deep sea flora and fauna.
5.2. States to participate in key meetings of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and support the establishment of a general policy for a moratorium and/or precautionary pause on deep-sea mining.
5.3. States not to grant exploitation licences for deep-sea mining activities in their national waters.
5.4. States to foster direct investment in the recycling of minerals identified as key to the transition to a low-carbon economy and agree on policies to promote a shift to new technologies using less critical minerals, extending the lifetime for products and materials, and reducing demand.

6) Helping the Ocean to Recover

With the Agenda 2030, the United Nations have agreed on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), committing to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated way. Governments have pledged to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainable management of its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can meet the needs of the present and future generations.

While many of the SDGs are relevant to ocean conservation, number 14 – "Life below water" – is at its heart. Currently, the world is failing to meet this goal on all the targets set. The window of opportunity for meaningful action to change this is likely to close within the next 5 to 10 years.

At the heart of the collective failure is the fact that countries are largely falling short of complying with existing decisions and rules that have already been agreed at national, regional and/or international level, including a fundamental lack of implementation and enforcement of conservation measures.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), also known as the Kunming Protocol, adopted in December 2022 calls for effective restoration of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.

According to the GBF, at least 30 per cent of coastal and marine areas, in particular areas of high importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, must be effectively conserved and

managed by 2030. This requires the establishment of ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably managed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

The High Seas Treaty, which was formally adopted by member states of the United Nations in June 2023, is critical in achieving this objective. The Treaty provides the necessary institutional structure and mechanism to establish marine protect areas in the high seas and contains other importance conservation tools, such as environmental impact assessments that play an essential role in assessing and managing planned human activities that can harm marine biodiversity, especially considering the transboundary nature of many pollutants (i.e. underwater noise pollution).

We therefore agree to take effective measures to protect marine habitats and to implement and enforce marine conservation action:

6.1. States to ratify the High Seas Treaty (UNCLOS BBNJ) as a matter of highest priority, but no later than by the 3rd UN Ocean Conference in June 2025 in Nice, France, and to implement the provisions of the Treaty as swiftly as possible, including the use of environmental impact assessments prior to planned human activities that may affect marine biodiversity in the high seas.

6.2. States to urgently meet the agreed targets to protect at least 30 per cent of coastal and marine waters by 2030 and have in place an effective management framework including monitoring, compliance and enforcement measures.

6.3. States to effectively restore at least 30 per cent of areas or degraded coastal and marine ecosystems by 2030.

The World Must Act Now – Because Our Planet Is Blue!

The UN Ocean Conference 2025 provides a unique opportunity for governments to agree on a global strategy to protect and restore the Ocean. It is vital that such a strategy addresses the key gaps in the current failure of world governments to meet the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 ('Life below water'). It must also match the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The window of opportunity for meaningful action is likely to close in the next 5 to 10 years. This document sets out the immediate steps that governments around the world need to agree and implement to ensure that this opportunity is not lost. The proposals have been put forward by international experts from OceanCare, an international marine conservation NGO founded in Switzerland in 1989, holding Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (UN ECOSOC). The organisation works to protect and restore the marine environment and its wildlife through a strong policy focus and a combination of research, conservation projects and education.

OceanCare's remit includes marine pollution – tackling chemical, plastic and ocean noise pollution – climate change, marine mammal hunting and destructive fishing, including the environmental impacts of fishing. Its work is supported by a team of scientific, legal and policy experts and involves strategic collaboration with civil society organisations and coalitions around the world.

The time to act is now. Because our planet is blue.