



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Seventy-sixth session**

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Items 2, 5 (c) and 5 (f) of the provisional agenda*

General debate on the theme topic “Promoting economic, social and environment cooperation on oceans for sustainable development”**Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific:****Environment and development****Transport****Executive summary of the theme study on promoting economic, social and environmental cooperation on oceans for sustainable development****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document contains the executive summary of the theme study, *Changing Sails: Accelerating Regional Actions for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific*.

Through the prism of regional cooperation, the theme study identifies and examines the key areas around which regional platforms can rally interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral solutions for the oceans. It highlights the lack of data and statistics on the oceans, the growing demand for moving towards inclusive and green maritime shipping, the deteriorating fish stocks and gaps in fishery management, and the mounting pressure of marine plastic pollution.

The theme study calls for enhanced sharing of ocean data and stronger investment in the national statistical system for collecting and harmonizing ocean data. It highlights the need for enforcing international conventions, norms and standards in relation to maritime shipping, sustainable fisheries and marine pollution. It proposes the strengthening of regional platforms such as the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean as avenues for rallying partnerships, facilitating data-sharing and supporting the implementation and monitoring of international norms and standards.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific may wish to review the findings of the present document and provide the secretariat with guidance on the recommendations proposed herein.

* ESCAP/76/L.1/Rev.1.

I. Introduction

1. The oceans and its resources are the lifelines of Asia and the Pacific. While being the resource for key economic sectors such as seaborne trade, fisheries and tourism, oceans are also the source of well-being, culture and identity of thousands of coastal communities. The conditions of the oceans are inextricably linked to the pathways to sustainable development for Asia and the Pacific.

2. However, various indicators are suggesting that the oceans are becoming more fragile. Contributing to the deterioration are the pressing effects of climate change and marine pollution. Unsustainable economic practices such as overfishing are pushing fish stock to reach a biologically unsustainable level.

3. The ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has led to a temporary shutdown of industrial activities, and the closing of schools and public institutions, significantly reducing transport and human mobility worldwide. This has resulted in a substantial reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide and reduced air pollution, especially in Asia and the Pacific. The outbreak is providing opportunities to promote more resilient and sustainable practices. It is likely that in China carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by at least 25 per cent during February 2020, potentially saving thousands of lives by curbing air pollution from factories and vehicles.¹ Such estimates show that decisive action taken by governments can have an immediate positive effect on global challenges, such as the climate crisis and the plight of the oceans.

4. Many of the challenges in the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and marine resources lie in the transboundary and highly complex nature of ocean management. This is coupled with the fragmented understanding of the interaction between oceans and human activities. In this context, multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships are key for addressing the current fragmentation in actions for the oceans.

II. Strengthening data and statistics for Sustainable Development Goal 14

5. Asia and the Pacific have yet to meet the data demands of the globally agreed follow-up and review mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 14. Among the 10 globally agreed indicators for Goal 14, sufficient data only exists for target 14.5 on the conservation of coastal areas and a proxy indicator for target 14.1 on marine pollution. The limited data available suggest that the region is not on track to achieve Goal 14 by 2030. Significant knowledge gaps remain in terms of ocean acidification, fisheries and fishing-related activities, and economic benefits for small island developing States and the least developed countries. Existing analyses in these areas are hence reliant on non-official data sources.

6. The lack of data for Goal 14 can be attributed to the lack of global methodological development, limited country-level experience in collecting ocean data and the high cost of collecting data across the exclusive economic zones. Many of the national statistical systems in the region are not well-

¹ Marshall Burke, "COVID-19 reduces economic activity, which reduces pollution, which saves lives", Global Food, Environment and Economic Dynamics, 8 March 2020. Available at www.g-feed.com/2020/03/covid-19-reduces-economic-activity.html.

equipped to address the challenge of coordinating the production and use of ocean data across different national sectors. At the same time, the data gaps are uneven, often being the largest where they are needed the most and where there is limited institutional capacity for data collection and analysis. This calls for regional collaboration to extend support for countries where data and institutional capacity gaps are the largest and further efforts in harmonizing data across stakeholders.

III. Transitioning towards inclusive and sustainable maritime shipping

7. The exponential growth of seaborne trade and maritime connectivity in Asia and the Pacific has been coupled with persistent gaps in connectivity and concerns over the industry's safety and efficiency. Despite the burgeoning growth of shipping services in Asia, the Pacific remains isolated from global and regional maritime trade. The maritime shipping industry in Asia and the Pacific is also faced with a growing demand for reducing marine-related casualties and accidents and optimizing operations. Regional dialogue is the necessary avenue to engage the global and regional shipping industry in addressing the connectivity needs of the Pacific island countries and territories and developing concrete solutions towards more inclusive, safe and efficient maritime connectivity.

8. The sustainability of the maritime transport sector is intrinsically linked to addressing the safety issues and environmental impacts of shipping on the oceans. It was estimated that carbon dioxide emissions from international shipping could grow by between 50 and 250 per cent by 2050 depending on future economic growth and energy development.² While the impact of recent curbs in maritime transport stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic are still unknown, carbon dioxide emissions from international shipping may bounce back to pre-pandemic levels and then climb to higher levels if additional measures to mitigate environmental impacts are not implemented. In this regard, it is noted that a number of international conventions, norms and standards have been put in place to guide the promotion of safer and more sustainable shipping, such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004,³ and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974,⁴ of IMO. The enforcement of such international instruments will be key to drive the sector towards green and sustainable maritime shipping.

IV. Strengthening sustainable fisheries

9. Coastal and offshore fisheries play a key role in socioeconomic development and in the cultures of many countries in the region. Fisheries and aquaculture production generated a total value of \$3.2 million in the Pacific in 2014⁵ while 85 per cent of employment in the sector worldwide was located in

² International Maritime Organization (IMO), *Third IMO Greenhouse Gas Study 2014* (London, 2015).

³ IMO, document BWM/CONF/36, annex.

⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1184, No. 18961.

⁵ Robert Gillett, *Fisheries in the Economies of Pacific Island Countries and Territories* (Noumea, Pacific Community, 2016).

Asia in 2016.⁶ However, the world's fish stock is showing signs of deterioration. Coastal fishery resources are under the dual pressure of habitat degradation and overexploitation, especially in areas close to population centres in order to meet the demand by growing Asian economies.

10. The scientific monitoring and management of capture fisheries are modest and characterized by incomplete understanding of fish stocks and fishery activities. While transboundary industrial scale fisheries are constrained by restrictions on data-sharing, coastal fisheries suffer from an absence of information. Limited data-sharing reduces the opportunity for integrated and nuanced analysis of fisheries. More open systems for sharing and harmonizing data across national statistical systems offers a much-needed solution to the current data gaps.

11. The challenges of managing marine capture fisheries also lie in governance and regulatory constraints to enforce fisheries legislations. A number of multilateral agreements and voluntary instruments have been put in place, including the Convention on Biological Diversity,⁷ the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries⁸ and the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing⁹ of FAO. The implementation of these agreements in national jurisdiction is critical for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans by closing the potential loopholes for destructive fishing practices, overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. This requires the translation of multilateral agreements into national fisheries laws and policies and regional cooperation to build the institutional capacity for enforcement where it is needed the most.

V. Curbing the marine plastic pollution

12. Marine plastic pollution has become an urgent sustainable challenge for Asia and the Pacific. It is driven by growing production of plastic, increasing dependence on single-use plastic in daily lives and weak national systems for waste management. Responding to the growing threat of marine plastic pollution has become an imperative.

13. The level of ambition for curbing plastic waste has been raised in international conventions and multilateral agreements on marine pollution such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal¹⁰ of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Framework of Action on Marine Debris of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹¹ Transformative actions will depend on the development and enforcement of effective national policies and frameworks in accordance with such international instruments.

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture: Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals* (Rome, 2018).

⁷ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1760, No. 30619.

⁸ *International Fisheries Instruments with Index* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.V.11), sect. III.

⁹ FAO, *Report of the Conference of FAO, Thirty-sixth Session, Rome, 18–23 November 2009* (C 2009/REP and Corr.1–3), appendix E.

¹⁰ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1673, No. 28911.

¹¹ Available at <https://environment.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ASEAN-Framework-of-Action-on-Marine-Debris-FINAL.pdf>.

14. Regional dialogues and partnerships are essential to share and scale up innovative national policies and new scientific and technological advancements for curbing the growing pressure of plastic waste. The region is home to pioneer countries in banning single-use plastics such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Mongolia and Papua New Guinea. Regional platforms such as the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean present potential avenues for regional exchange of information, good practices, data and statistics, and technical assistance to accelerate progress and delivery of Goal 14.

VI. Towards transformative actions for the oceans

15. In transforming actions for the oceans across the areas of examination, the theme study offers two strategic entry points for national-level actions. Firstly, investment in enhancing national statistical systems and more transparent sharing of ocean data is key to resolving the existing blind spots in our understanding of and actions for the oceans. Secondly, the consistent enforcement of existing international conventions, frameworks, norms and standards is fundamental to the overall protection and sustainable use of the oceans.

16. To support national efforts, there are two points for stronger regional cooperation: firstly, regional cooperation supports the enforcement and monitoring of international conventions, frameworks, norms and standards by providing necessary technical support where needed; and secondly, strengthening inclusive and action-oriented regional platforms such as the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean is the avenue for meaningful partnerships, effective follow-up and review and inclusive sharing of experiences across stakeholders and countries.

VII. Issues for consideration by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

17. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific may wish to review the issues and recommendations summarized in the present document from the full study and provide the secretariat with guidance on its future work in relation to the oceans, in particular on marine pollution, sustainable maritime connectivity, and data and statistics.
