



**Ocean's Day**  
**Executive Secretary – Opening Remarks**

**Friday 8 November 2019**

Excellency Mr. Semi Koroilavesau Minister for Fisheries and Oceans Champion of the Republic of Fiji,

Excellency Mr. Francisco de Assis Morais e Cunha Vaz Patto, Ambassador of Portugal,

Ambassador Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Ocean

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Second Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean.

It is my great honor to host you today at ESCAP for this event. We are all gathered here because we have a shared understanding of the importance of the ocean in our region and our lives, and we have a commitment to preserve it and protect it for our future generations.

A few weeks ago, in September, the world leaders adopted a political declaration at the UNGA74 session in New York. This declaration recognized the importance of gearing up for a decade of action 2020-2030, providing a great opportunity for the decade of ocean science and the overall delivery of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

At least 200 million people in Asia and the Pacific depend on the ocean for their livelihood. Our ocean is fundamental to harness economic development opportunities and to bring harmony between people and planet.

Today, land-based pollutants and marine debris threaten coastal habitats and marine ecosystems. Increasing acidification is damaging marine life and hampering the ocean's role in moderating climate change. Extreme sea level rises that used to happen once per century could occur every year by mid-century in many regions. Recent studies show this will continue to happen faster than expected and with more catastrophic consequences than previously estimated.

The implementation of SDG14 and its targets can have a pivotal and multiplier effect on many other SDGs, resulting in economic well-being and reducing socio-economic inequalities. To reap these effects, we must accelerate action. Our current rate of progress is too slow to reach the targets due in 2020: to protect and restore ecosystems, reach sustainable fishing and the elimination of some subsidies, and to conserve coastal and marine areas.

At ESCAP's 76th session of the Commission in May 2020, we will deliberate on the 2020 theme study of "Promoting Economic, Social and Environmental Cooperation on Oceans for Sustainable Development". We will focus on three priority areas: (i) sustainable fisheries; (ii) maritime connectivity.; and (iii) marine pollution and plastic debris.

Let me highlight some facts about these three priorities.

First, fisheries are a fundamental source of economic development in the region, while also being crucial to the food security, nutrition and health of our populations, including the most vulnerable communities. In order to promote sustainable fishing, our governments must promote policies in the management of fisheries activities, including better enforcement and elimination of “Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported” fishing. The incorporation of newer satellite and monitoring technologies can be one of the solutions, along with enhanced regulatory frameworks.

Second, the role of oceans in connecting economies through global trade, must be fully acknowledged and addressed from the sustainability perspective. Scientific developments can offer the solution modernizing current fleets with new ship designs relying on electric, hybrid or bio-fuel operated vessels, thus decarbonizing the shipping industry and reducing the CO2 footprint of our maritime connectivity. This could further be enhanced with more efficient routes and infrastructure linking land and maritime shipping, optimizing the overall footprint of value chains.

Third, marine pollution is more than a problem in our region, it is a crisis. Asia-Pacific is responsible for most of the litter that is funneled into the oceans through its rivers. Annually, rivers dump up to 2.75 million metric tons of plastic into the seas. Implementing interventions to reduce plastic waste leakage in the top-five ocean-polluting Asian countries could reduce global plastic leakage by up to 45 per cent over the next ten years. Banning single-use plastics and developing new packaging and products made of biodegradable materials can be one of the solutions.



This Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean offers parallel sessions with content reflecting these priority areas. You will be able to participate, voice your concerns, showcase your government's progress and developments towards delivering voluntary commitments from the 2017 Ocean Conference – as well as academic work, scientific innovations and initiatives from the private sector and civil society. Let us join forces to build momentum ahead of the COP 25, UN ESCAP Commission session and the 2020 UN Oceans Conference in Lisbon to accelerate progress towards SDG 14 across the region. We are counting on your continued leadership.

Thank you for joining us today. Thank you for your commitment to the protection of the ocean.