

POLICY PAPERS

Papua New Guinea Statement to the Plenary Session of the Second United Nations Oceans Conference (Lisbon, Portugal, 2022)

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Introduction

I am honoured to deliver these remarks, on behalf of my Prime Minister, Hon. James Marape, who is in the midst of our National General Election and extends his regrets for being unable to join this important global dialogue but also conveys Papua New Guinea's confidence and trust that this Conference, under its well chosen theme, will deliver meaningful and practical outcomes that will help all of our countries and communities become better owners, leaders and drivers in successfully taking forward the strong foundations laid by SDG 14, in particular, and also the other inter-related SDGs, in support of our national development aspirations and wellbeing.

May I thank Portugal and Kenya for their tremendous efforts and leadership to co-host this Conference despite the serious global challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The impressive turnout and the range of activities is indeed most pleasing.

Let me also align Papua New Guinea with those remarks made by the respective Chairs of the Group of 77 and China (Pakistan), the Pacific Islands Forum (Fiji) and the Alliance of Small Island States (Antigua and Barbuda) and also by the President of Palau on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS).

The Importance of Oceans

Our humanity and our future are intertwined with the health of our ocean. For Papua New Guinea, the ocean is central to our people's identity, culture and sustainable development. It plays a fundamental role in providing food and livelihood for our people; a mainstay for economic growth and jobs linked to fisheries and other marine resources; a carbon sink; and home to diverse marine resources found in our waters.

We are, however, seriously concerned with the declining health of our ocean and the impact of multiple stressors on it, which is projected to increase further as the world's population continues to grow.

Our island and coastal communities and peoples continue to be at the mercy of the rising sea-levels and their arable land and sources of fresh water are disappearing, the warming ocean is threatening our ecosystem and climate change impacts are worsening it and our porous maritime boundaries continue to be exploited wantonly by foreigners and our marine resources plundered, including through illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

It is therefore high time for everyone to take seriously these growing concerns and act now and together to reverse and stop this deterioration. Our Conference theme 'United Nations

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Conference to Support the Implementation of Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development' is indeed apt and timely. We must harness this Conference to find sustainable long-term solutions that will address the root causes of the decline in the health of our ocean and to protect it better to save ourselves.

This should not only be based on best available science and innovation but to also better harness our traditional and indigenous knowledge about the ocean. It must also involve access to affordable transfer of marine technology, adequate and sustained ocean activities financing.

Focused, practical and sustained multistakeholder partnerships are also crucial and, at the heart of this, must not be the parochial interests of a few but rather for the greater good of our shared global commons and common humanity.

On Papua New Guinea's part, we are strongly committed and taking significant actions in key areas to ensure protection of our ocean's health within our areas of national jurisdiction.

The following are such actions:

National Ocean Policy

I am pleased to inform this Conference that Papua New Guinea established its first-ever National Ocean Policy in July 2020. It is an integrated framework that addresses ocean governance and management in the country.

This also accounts for Papua New Guinea's commitment to implement Sustainable Development Goals 14 and addresses adaptation and mitigation measures to the challenges facing the ocean.

To fully implement this policy, the appropriate institutional arrangements, regulatory reforms and infrastructure platforms are a work in progress. A key aspect is the establishment of a national Marine Scientific Research (MSR) monitoring and Database System. This will facilitate collection, analysis and exchange of MSR data in a transparent and inclusive way, which will also strengthen marine data credibility and integrity.

The Government also established in 2021 the country's Territorial Waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Marine Scientific Research Committee (MSRC). This provides a simplified procedure to access marine resources in our waters for academic and scientific purposes and also contribute to advancing marine science and technology.

Papua New Guinea would welcome technical and other support under the auspices of the Decade of Ocean Science from our global and regional development partners in our efforts to set up and operationalize the national marine scientific research database system and related issues.

Fisheries

In the context of SDG 14.4 with respect to combating IUU fishing and 14.6 on fisheries subsidies, Papua New Guinea has been working with likeminded countries for a framework under the WTO arrangements to stamp out harmful fisheries subsidies and combat IUU fishing.

The Papua New Guinea Government is pleased to welcome the recent (17 June 2022) successful 12th WTO Ministerial Meeting that partially delivered on SDG 14.6 and look forward to its effective implementation. However, we urge for speedy conclusion to the outstanding work on addressing subsidies for overcapacity and overfishing and special differential treatment for developing countries.

The Government has also launched in August 2021 our first-ever Fisheries Strategic Plan 2021-2030, a roadmap that intends to sustainably manage our fisheries resources for the country's economic development, including working with our neighbours and development partners to combat IUU fishing within our waters and foster sustainable artisanal and small-scale fisheries and aquaculture for the benefit of our local communities.

These are in addition to measures the Government is taking at the sub-regional level through the Parties to the Nauru Agreement and at the regional level through the Forum Fisheries Agency.

The Papua New Guinea Government therefore welcomes bona fide development partners to work with us in this important sector, bearing in mind the importance of ocean-health.

Biodiversity

Another important progress Papua New Guinea has made is on the Protected Areas National Policy, which was recently adopted. A key aspect of it relates to SDG 14.5 on conservation of at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas.

With the welcome and valued support of development partners such as United Nations Development Program, Japan International Cooperation Agency and Wildlife Conservation for Nature, we are working towards the declaration, this year, of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the country, covering a total area of over 17,000 square kilometers. Once concluded, this will be included in the UN Oceans Voluntary Commitments register.

Additionally, for marine biodiversity conservation, Papua New Guinea has been granted its first ever Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) designation in the country's North East region² by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). This has been declared as a pilotage area and covers the important international shipping route that links the South Pacific region with Asia. National efforts are underway to address the issues involved.

Our efforts to protect our rich biodiversity have also resulted in forty-four (44) existing terrestrial protected areas.

Our major challenge in ensuring the effective and sustained implementation of these marine and terrestrial biodiversity areas is adequate, sustained and predictable financing and technical assistance. The Government calls on the international community to assist and support us in this important area that will be a pivot for a healthy ocean.

Ocean-Climate Nexus

For the health of the ocean, we must also account better for the ocean-climate nexus, as recognized by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) Glasgow Pact that established an annual oceans-climate change dialogue.

A healthy ocean ecosystem can be a lever for offshore marine renewable energy, blue carbon, adaptation of vulnerable coastal communities and decarbonisation of ocean-based sectors such as shipping.

Marine Pollution

Addressing marine pollution is another key area deserving focused attention from all of us. In Papua New Guinea, we have the necessary national legislations³ in place that addresses marine pollution from ships and installations. I will not spell these out except to note that these are in our full statement.

The Government has also under our *Environment Act 2000* banned single-use plastic shopping bags since June 2020 paving the way for its total ban in the country.

In this spirit, the Government of Papua New Guinea therefore, welcomes the March 2022 UNEA agreement, including for a negotiated international legally binding instrument by 2024 to end plastic pollution, which remains a serious threat to marine ecosystems.

Another serious concern Papua New Guinea has, relates to the discharge of nuclear waste into the ocean, including in the Pacific region. This is harmful to marine ecosystems and human health. All efforts must be made to prevent this under existing relevant multilateral frameworks. Those responsible for such discharges must be held accountable.

Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)

The tragedy of the commons, particularly in the high seas, cannot and must not be allowed to continue unabated. We are therefore strongly supportive of the conclusion in August this year the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) instrument being negotiated multilaterally to conserve and

¹ Bootless Bay, Central Province, approximately 13,867.6 hectares (138.67 km²), Lovongai Local-level Government with approximately 5,814 km² of marine and coastal waters and Murat LLG MPA covering approximately 11,071 km² of marine and coastal waters in New Ireland Province.

² Jomard Passage, Milne Bay Province. A natural sea lane of a width of 5 kilometers.

³ *Ships and Installations Act 2013* and its Regulation, *Sea Dumping Act 2013* and its Regulation, *Liability and Cost Recovery Act 2013* and its Regulation, *Ballast Water Control Act 2013* and its Regulation and *Preparedness and Response Act 2013*.

sustainably use marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

As a small island developing state, Papua New Guinea needs capacity building and transfer of marine technology for us to contribute meaningfully to the implementation of this new treaty once adopted, in support of a healthy, productive and resilient ocean.

Conclusion

In closing, Papua New Guinea recognizes the pivotal role that multistakeholder partnerships from governments, the private sector, civil society organizations to individuals, can play in galvanizing the needed support for the effective implementation of SDG 14 at all levels.

This rings true especially for developing countries, particularly SIDS, such as Papua New Guinea, which continues to face multiple challenges, including resources and capacity constraints, gaps in marine science and knowledge and marine technology shortcomings, compounded further by the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change.

Let us not allow this opportunity to be yet another talkfest with an Ocean Political Declaration merely on paper but rather one we can all be proud of, where genuine, practical and transformative actions and solutions can be delivered in a timely, predictable and sustained manner for the ocean we want, now and for the generations to come. At the heart of this, must not be the interests of a few but rather the greater good of our shared global commons and common humanity. Going forward, as a maritime and archipelagic nation, Papua New Guinea's commitment to doing our part for a healthy ocean remains steadfast.