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Oceans and the law of the sea: oceans and the law of the sea

Report on the work of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea at its twenty-first meeting

Letter dated 13 July 2021 from the Co-Chairs of the Informal Consultative Process addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [74/19](#) and [75/239](#), we were appointed as Co-Chairs of the twenty-first meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

We have the honour to submit to you the attached report on the work of the Informal Consultative Process at its twenty first meeting, which was held virtually from 14 to 18 June 2021. The outcome of the meeting consists of our summary of issues and ideas raised during the meeting, in particular with regard to the topic of focus “Sea level rise and its impacts”.

In line with past practice, we kindly request that the present letter and the report be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 79 (a) of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Isabelle F. Picco
Viliani Va'inga Tone
Co-Chairs

* [A/76/150](#).



Twenty-first meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea

(14–18 June 2021)

Co-Chairs' summary

1. The United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea held its twenty-first meeting in a virtual format from 14 to 18 June 2021. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/19, and as confirmed in Assembly resolution 75/239, the meeting focused its discussions on the topic “Sea level rise and its impacts”. Originally scheduled to take place in 2020, the twenty-first meeting of the Informal Consultative Process was postponed to 2021 owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As a result of the continuing impacts of the pandemic in 2021, it was proposed and agreed in consultation with States that the meeting be held virtually.

2. Up to 210 daily connections were registered on the Interprefy meeting platform, representing delegations from States, intergovernmental organizations and other bodies and entities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3. The following supporting documentation was made available to the meeting: (a) the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea on the topic of focus of the twenty-first meeting of the Informal Consultative Process (A/75/70); and (b) the format and annotated provisional agenda of the meeting (A/AC.259/L.21/Rev.1).

4. The panellists' pre-recorded video presentations were made available on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the Secretariat.¹ Recordings of the twenty-first meeting of the Informal Consultative Process have been made available to all delegations on the Division's web page for the Informal Consultative Process.

Agenda items 1 and 2

Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

5. The Co-Chairs, Isabelle Picco, Permanent Representative of Monaco to the United Nations, and Viliami Va'inga Tone, Permanent Representative of Tonga to the United Nations, appointed by Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, opened the meeting.

6. Written opening statements on behalf of the Secretary-General by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, João Miguel de Serpa Soares, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin, and the Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, were shared on the website of the Division in advance of the meeting.²

7. Delegations adopted the format and annotated provisional agenda and approved the organization of work.

¹ www.un.org/Depts/los/consultative_process/icp21/ICP21PanelistsSchedule_PostingVideos_.pdf.

² https://www.un.org/Depts/los/consultative_process/icp21/statement21.htm.

Agenda item 3

General exchange of views

8. Due to the virtual nature of the meeting, and with a view to maximizing the use of simultaneous interpretation during the two hours allocated to each session of the meeting, delegations were invited to submit statements in writing under the item “General exchange of views”. Twenty-three general statements from States Members of the United Nations, a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and non-governmental organizations were received by the Secretariat and, in accordance with the format and provisional annotated agenda, made available on the website of the Division.

9. Several delegations highlighted the importance of the Informal Consultative Process, which they considered to be a useful forum for discussing key issues related to oceans and the law of the sea. Several delegations expressed their gratitude to the Co-Chairs and to the Division for organizing the twenty-first session of the Informal Consultative Process under the challenging conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Several delegations also expressed their appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on oceans and the law of the sea on the topic of focus, which was considered to be comprehensive and to provide a solid basis for discussions.

10. Many delegations welcomed the decision to focus the discussions of the twenty-first meeting of the Informal Consultative Process on the topic “Sea level rise and its impacts” and considered it as a timely and extremely important opportunity to deepen their knowledge on the matter and to exchange experiences and best practices from different regions. A view was expressed that the discussions on the topic would boost the international community’s efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 14, to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

11. Many delegations highlighted the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, as also reaffirmed in the annual General Assembly resolution on oceans and the law of the sea. Some delegations further noted that the integrity of the Convention must be preserved.

12. Some delegations welcomed the 2019 Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the Second World Ocean Assessment.

13. Several delegations expressed concern over the expected acceleration of global mean sea level rise. Several delegations cited the Special Report in noting the causes for this acceleration, including ocean thermal expansion and increasing rates of ice loss from the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, as well as continued glacier mass loss. In that regard, some delegations highlighted with concern the expected increases, including regional variations, in sea level rise predicted by the Special Report to occur by 2100 and 2300, including under both low- and high-emissions scenarios. Several delegations noted that global mean sea level was already at its highest since high-precision altimetry records began. A delegation warned of the critical stage the world had reached with respect to sea level rise, citing the latest assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

14. Several delegations expressed concern about other impacts of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, including increased frequency and intensity of storms and storm surges, increased precipitation, higher sea and ocean temperatures, variations in the migratory patterns of fish stocks and ocean acidification and deoxygenation, some of which would combine with sea level rise to create additional adverse impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems and the people who relied on them.

Some delegations also expressed concern over the loss of biodiversity caused by the impacts of climate change and sea level rise and the depletion of natural resources.

15. Many delegations expressed concern over the disproportionate impacts of sea level rise and other threats caused by climate change on coastal regions, low lying areas and developing countries, in particular small island developing States, and their ecosystems. Ocean warming, acidification and deoxygenation, as well as extreme weather events, were highlighted as other threats caused by climate change and greenhouse gas emissions that would have a disproportionate impact on those areas. Several delegations noted that, combined with sea level rise, these threats could have numerous impacts on these vulnerable areas, including flooding, coastal erosion, salinization of aquifers, river mouths and agricultural land, increased risks to food security and livelihoods, displacement of peoples and the destruction of important coastal infrastructure, ecosystems and habitats of important flora and fauna. Some delegations emphasized that sea level rise posed a threat to the very existence of vulnerable island States. An observer delegation called attention on the impacts of sea level rise on submarine cables and digital data and communications.

16. Several delegations noted that coastal flooding posed a particular threat to large cities that had grown along coastlines and deltas all over the world, which by 2050 were expected to be home to 800 million people. The view was also expressed that, while sea level rise posed particular challenges to island and archipelagic nations, many challenges must be dealt with by all nations.

17. Some delegations noted that certain regions would experience faster and higher rates of sea level rise than others. The Pacific was highlighted as such a region. A delegation recalled that scientists contributing to the fifth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel had found that the Western Pacific had already experienced three times more sea level rise than the global mean between 1993 and 2012. Another delegation warned that the low-lying small island States and atolls in the Pacific would have a shorter period to adapt to the impacts of sea level rise.

18. Some delegations noted that sea level rise could hinder efforts of States to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A delegation expressed hope that the second 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, would highlight the urgent need to increase the resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems and vulnerable communities.

19. Several delegations welcomed the decision of the International Law Commission to include the topic “Sea level rise in relation to international law” in its programme of work. Some delegations also welcomed the progress made so far by the Commission, and in particular the issuance of the first issues paper prepared by two of the Co-Chairs of the Commission’s study group on this topic. They highlighted certain preliminary observations made by the Co-Chairs in the first issues paper, including that the Convention did not expressly provide that new maritime baselines or outer limits of maritime zones must be drawn by a coastal State when relevant coastal conditions change, and that one of the key goals of the Convention was to ensure and maintain stability, in particular when conditions arose that could have an impact on legal stability, security, certainty and predictability.

20. A delegation expressed the view that, before considering the possible legal implications of sea level rise upon them, maritime zones must be established in accordance with the Convention. Some delegations stated that any solution to this issue must be taken in accordance with the Convention and international law. In that regard, a delegation expressed concern over deviations from or novel interpretations of the Convention.

21. Some delegations expressed the view that baselines and outer limits of maritime zones of a State that have been established in accordance with the Convention, and ensuing rights and entitlements, would remain unaltered, notwithstanding physical changes connected to climate change-related sea level rise. In that regard, a delegation noted its efforts to complete the technical and legal work necessary to secure its maritime zones and the rights and entitlements that flowed from them, including by compiling geographical coordinates of points of its maritime baselines and the outer limits of its maritime zones, completing all required maritime delimitation agreements, and depositing all relevant information with the Secretary-General, in accordance with the Convention and the Charter of the United Nations.

22. A delegation expressed optimism that, through continued cooperation, a common approach regarding how the Convention should operate in the context of sea level rise could be reached. Another delegation noted that discussions about the legal consequences of sea level rise must be seen in tandem with, and not overshadow, political determination to address climate change and its impacts. Gaps in international law to deal with other important concerns relating to sea level rise, including the displacement, migration, relocation and evacuation of people within and beyond national boundaries, were also underscored.

23. Many delegations called for increased international coordination and cooperation at the local, regional and international levels to tackle sea level rise and its impacts. In that regard, some delegations pointed to the need for the elaboration of policy frameworks, the development of scientific, technical and technological responses, the enhancement of sea level rise scenarios, as well as forecasting and warning systems, adaptation and resilience-building, fostering capacity-building and the exchange of scientific data and technological information. A delegation welcomed international and regional cooperation on the management of marine protected areas, the blue economy and access to relevant technologies.

24. A delegation stressed that the international community must tackle the root causes of sea level rise, noting ongoing efforts to address the ocean-climate nexus under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In that regard, some delegations called for an effective implementation of the various relevant provisions of the Convention, the Framework Convention and the Paris Agreement, in a coordinated manner to tackle sea level rise, as well as the coordination with other international and regional efforts. Some delegations highlighted their support for the vital goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and efforts to keep it within reach. A delegation pointed to the need for the active participation of all stakeholders addressing all aspects of the issue, including biodiversity, oceans and climate change, among others. Another delegation cited the Special Report in underscoring the urgency of prioritizing timely, ambitious and coordinated action to address the unprecedented and enduring changes taking place in the ocean and cryosphere.

25. Some delegations highlighted the importance of national efforts to tackle climate change and sea level rise, noting their adoption of public policies, regulations and strategies to do so. Several delegations underscored their efforts aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including by implementing new emission reduction targets in accordance with the Paris Agreement and the Framework Convention. Some delegations shared specific national efforts aimed at addressing climate change and sea level rise, inter alia, investment in climate science, increased ocean observation and data collection infrastructure and capacity, sea level modelling and projection, nature-based approaches, such as ecosystem restoration, and building partnerships between local and international scientific experts to assess the effects of climate change and identify data gaps, including for assisting in the design of adaptation measures. A delegation shared its national adaptation efforts aimed at protecting buildings and critical infrastructure against sea level rise. Another

delegation expressed concern about the lack of knowledge on actual climate change adaptation practices, legislation and strategies, including related investments being made by different States around the world to protect and adapt their coastal areas against the effects of climate change, in particular sea level rise. A delegation noted it was increasing climate- and green-related official development assistance (ODA) to help developing countries in need of a green recovery. An observer delegation highlighted some measures that could be considered bearing in mind the relationship between sea level rise and anthropogenic greenhouse gases.

26. The important role of marine scientific research was highlighted by some delegations, in particular in promoting and supporting action on sea level rise. In that regard, a view was expressed that a better understanding of ocean climate and ecosystems, as well as human impacts and vulnerabilities, required coordinated scientific research and a continuous and long-term system of ocean observations. A delegation noted its concern that knowledge concerning coastal sea level changes was still lacking, citing the Second World Ocean Assessment. Traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities was recognized as complimentary to marine scientific research. The importance of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development was noted by some delegations and its role was underscored in fostering capacity-building, the better understanding of the impacts of sea level rise and the responses needed to deal with its impacts. Several delegations highlighted some funded research projects at the regional level to address climate adaptation concerns.

Topic of focus: sea level rise and its impacts

27. In accordance with the format and annotated provisional agenda, the discussion panel on the topic of focus was organized in two segments structured around the following: (a) understanding the issue of sea level rise, its impacts and related challenges; and (b) international cooperation and coordination in addressing the impacts and challenges related to sea level rise. The panellists provided pre-recorded presentations, which were made available to delegations on the Division's website. Before discussions were held, panellists were invited by the Co-Chairs to give brief summaries of their presentations.

1. Sea level rise: understanding the issue, its impacts and related challenges

Panel presentations

28. In the first segment, the Director of the Joint Global Change Unit (Spanish National Research Council, University of the Basque Country, Spain) and the Joint Coordinator of the Group of Experts for the third cycle of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, Carlos Garcia-Soto, introduced the key findings on sea level rise contained in both World Ocean Assessments and other United Nations assessments and provided recommendations relating to sea level rise mitigation, adaptation and monitoring. The Director of the Institute of Coastal Systems – Analysis and Modelling, Helmholtz-Zentrum Hereon, and the Professor at the University of Hamburg, Germany, Corinna Schrum, provided an overview of the concepts, causes, uncertainties, impacts and challenges associated with past and future sea level rise and discussed the sustainability of various adaptation responses. The Deputy Director and Head of the Environmental Vulnerability and Ecosystem Services Section at the Institute for Environment and Human Security of United Nations University and lead author of the sea level rise chapter in the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, Zita Sebesvari, shared the key findings of the Report's chapter focusing on low-lying coasts, highlighting the irreversibility of sea level rise, the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events due to climate change, and the impact of future

greenhouse gas emission scenarios on nature-based adaptation measures, as well as the importance of early mitigation and adaptation action. A senior oceanographer at the United States of America National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, William Sweet, outlined the impacts and related challenges of sea level rise along the coastlines of the United States, as well as needs related to improved understanding of present day and future coastal risks, such as data, observation networks, satellite measurements, localized information, as well as global coordination and cooperation, needed to mitigate and adapt to sea level rise. A research scientist at the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Scientific Director for the Argo Canada programme, Blair Greenan, gave a Canadian perspective on sea level rise, including its impacts, challenges in relation to science-based adaptation plans and tools for managing coastal infrastructure and ecosystems, and approaches to the integration of various levels of government with overlapping mandates, the private sector and NGOs. A member of the Ocean Engineering Group at Universidad de Valparaiso, Chile, Patricio Winckler, provided an overview of climate-driven impacts for the tectonically active Chilean coast and highlighted the need for locally driven multi-hazard analysis when modelling and monitoring sea level rise along unique coastlines. The Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and co-chair of the World Climate Research Programme grand challenge on regional sea level change and coastal impacts, Robert Nicholls, said that sea level rise is certain, while its exact rate is uncertain, stressed the need for strong mitigation measures and addressed the range of adaptation options available to protect coastal communities while highlighting that adaptation needs to be a continuous cycle requiring reassessment of information and risks. The Managing Director of the Consorzio per il coordinamento delle ricerche inerenti al sistema lagunare di Venezia, Italy, an association of universities and public research bodies managing research on the Venetian lagoon, Pierpaolo Campostrini, introduced the case study of Venice as an example of the impacts of sea level rise on cultural heritage and a success story for adaptation measures, also stressing that those measures should evolve as sea level rise increases. A Protection Officer in the Legal Unit of the Protection Policy and Legal Advice Section, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameron Shilton, summarized the presentation by the Chief of the Protection Policy and Legal Advice Section, UNHCR, Madeline Garlick, on human mobility and international protection for displaced persons in the face of sea level rise. A professor at the Marine Science Institute of the University of the Philippines, Fernando Siringan, provided an overview of the actions required to address sea level rise, its impacts and compounding factors in the Philippines, noting that the country had yet to develop policies to address the consequences of sea level rise. A legal adviser on maritime boundaries in the Trade, Oceans and Natural Resources Directorate of the Commonwealth, Rosemarie Cadogan, highlighted the importance of the issue of sea level rise for some of its “small State” member countries and presented a range of initiatives being undertaken to promote sea level rise adaptation in those countries. Finally, the Deputy Director for the Ocean and Maritime Programme within the Pacific Community, Jens Kruger, outlined the linkages between sea level rise impacts, including erosion and water salinization, and the sustainable development of Pacific nations and the impact of data inadequacies on adaptation responses and financing, as illustrated by recent findings on the true elevation of the low-lying reef islands of Tuvalu.

Panel discussions

29. The discussions held after the summaries of presentations focused on, inter alia, the characterization and extent of sea level rise, including regional variability, and its environmental, social and economic impacts; the various mitigation and adaptation responses available to address sea level rise; and the need for global, regional and local responses to sea level rise. Discussions were also held on the following: the urgency

of sea level rise and the impacts of the increasing frequency of extreme weather events for small island developing States and coastal States, including low-lying coastal areas; the need for international cooperation and coordination, capacity-building and financing in order to assist small island developing States, coastal States and coastal communities to respond to sea level rise; the use of traditional and local knowledge in formulating responses to sea level rise; the need for coordination between bodies and processes with mandates related to sea level rise; the importance of national planning processes, data gaps and challenges to modelling and monitoring sea level rise; and international protection of persons displaced as a result of sea level rise.

30. In response to a question on the meaning of the term “sea level budget”, Mr. Garcia-Soto explained that the term referred to the analysis of the different factors contributing to sea level change, either through the change of the sea water mass (melting ice from glaciers and polar ice sheets and the inputs of land water storage) or through the change of the sea water volume (temperature). He noted that the total sea level could be measured directly by using, inter alia, altimeters from satellites or analytically through the sea level budget. The comparison of these type of measurements allowed scientists to identify missing contributions to the total sea level in order to be confident in the data they provide, he concluded. Ms. Schrum, Mr. Garcia-Soto, Mr. Greenan and Mr. Winckler also discussed the difference between global mean sea level, and relative and regional sea level. While global mean sea level was the average height of all the world’s oceans, relative sea level referred to the height of the ocean relative to the land at a particular location. Concerning regional sea level, Mr Garcia-Soto noted that, in some areas, the rate of increase of the regional sea level was two to three times higher than that of the global mean sea level, reflecting, among others, factors of natural variability such as el Niño Southern Oscillation and the pattern of oceanic currents. Mr. Winckler noted that relative sea level was affected by local and regional dynamics, including tectonics and land movement, erosion, wind changes, ocean currents and extreme weather events. Ms. Schrum added that the scientific community could consider focusing on areas where urgent adaptation action was necessary. Ms. Schrum and Mr. Garcia-Soto commented that the amount of global mean sea level rise could in large part be determined in the future by the extent of the melt of the Antarctic Ice Sheet. However, they emphasized that the contribution of the Antarctic Ice Sheet was currently the greatest unknown factor in projecting sea level rise and further research efforts were required to increase knowledge in this area. Several delegations provided examples of regions particularly affected by sea level rise, such as the Mediterranean and the Pacific. Mr. Garcia-Soto noted that, in addition to sea level rise, other stressors were aggravating the health of the Mediterranean Sea, including invasive species and coastal tourism.

31. In addition to gradual changes in sea levels, some delegations pointed to rapid-onset hazards associated with sea level rise and climate change more generally, including an increase in the intensity of tidal flooding, storm surges and other extreme weather events. Whereas these phenomena were historically centennial events, Mr. Garcia-Soto and Ms. Sebesvari noted that they were projected to become annual occurrences in some locations, such as in the Mediterranean and the tropics. Mr. Sweet stated that the national rate of high-tide flooding had already doubled in the United States owing to sea level rise since 2000, and that the impacts were worse along many United States eastern and Gulf coastal areas that are flat, low-lying and heavily populated. Mr. Garcia-Soto noted that many low-lying cities and islands could experience extreme weather events annually by 2050. This would lead to freshwater contamination and coastal erosion, he added.

32. Several delegations, including from small island developing States noted that the process of sea level rise was no longer reversible and that it posed an existential threat to island nations. Ms. Sebesvari agreed that sea level rise could no longer be avoided

under any future greenhouse gas emissions scenario and added that the rate of rise had increased in recent decades. She stressed, however, that radically different future scenarios were still possible and that, if the international community could achieve a low emissions scenario, sea level rise could be limited to one metre by the end of the century, and a range of adaptation measures, including nature-based adaptation, would remain viable. An observer delegation stressed that mitigating climate change through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions should therefore be prioritized in order for coastal areas around the world to remain habitable and to allow for the full range of adaptation measures to be utilized. Mr. Garcia-Soto concurred that mitigation action is a priority to achieve the 1.5 degrees Celsius target under the Paris Agreement, in order to avoid the worst consequences of sea level rise. Mr. Winckler added that the cost of mitigation and adaptation actions must be measured against the cost of inaction, and that multiple methodologies were available to calculate such costs.

33. A delegation asked the panellists to outline how nature-based approaches to adaptation could be strengthened to address sea level rise. Mr. Garcia-Soto, Ms. Schrum and Ms. Sebesvari pointed to mangrove restoration and coral-based solutions as being highly effective tools for coastal protection, while warning that they would not be viable in the long term under a high emissions scenario, owing to these ecosystems' own vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification. They therefore urged that these measures should be implemented urgently, in combination with other effective mitigation and adaptation responses.

34. While nature-based solutions were deemed to be important, a delegation observed that, for many small island developing States, time is not in their favour, and successful adaptation would require hard infrastructural responses, such as island raising and barriers, which could represent a very significant investment, up to several points of gross domestic product for a single project, as in an example provided in a presentation. On the range of hard, soft and nature-based adaptation solutions available, Mr. Nicholls noted that, although the range of available solutions was not likely to expand, they needed to be adapted to different contexts as part of flexible adaptation pathways. He added that adaptation would need to be pursued differently in urban and rural areas, with cities having more scope for adaptation given their concentration of economic activity. Noting that there was reason to be optimistic about the adaptation possibilities available to cities, especially up to 2050, he recommended that long-term adaptation planning should be tied to the development aspirations of particular cities. Citing Venice as a case study, Mr. Campostrini stressed that timescales were an important consideration, and adaptation measures needed to be continuously adjusted as sea levels rose, land movement occurred and societal needs changed. He pointed to the important role that adaptation measures could play in protecting against the loss of cultural heritage, which was often irreplaceable and less resilient than nature. In that regard, he highlighted that the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 could guide States' efforts to protect and increase resilience against the loss of cultural heritage. Mr. Sweet emphasized that adaptation occurred mainly at the local and regional levels, making localized up-to-date data and capacity-building at the local level key to strengthening adaptation responses. Since adaptation was site specific, it was often difficult to import solutions from other regions, and therefore existing technology must be adapted to new contexts, he added. He also referred to the importance of humanizing the impacts of sea level rise, so that communities could understand what projections mean and respond accordingly. In response to a question from a delegation on the benefits of cross-border marine spatial planning, Mr. Campostrini noted that that was a useful tool to help Governments address sea level rise and raise public awareness on the sustainable use of the ocean as well as the impacts of climate change.

35. Mr. Greenan noted that it is important that traditional and local knowledge also be incorporated into adaptation planning in order to design locally appropriate

responses and ensure community awareness, involvement and ownership of measures. Several delegations agreed that coastal communities should be informed and empowered to become part of the solution to sea level rise, while ensuring their livelihood and more generally economic development needs were not neglected. Citing the example of pebble-picking in the Philippines, Mr. Siringan noted that adaptation responses should be designed to support local livelihoods in order to ensure community uptake and the sustainability of such measures, and public awareness of the impacts of sea level rise should be increased. Mr. Kruger highlighted the importance of giving a voice to traditional knowledge holders, noting that their insights could be combined with science to develop novel, transformative approaches to sea level rise adaptation.

36. Pointing out that some coastal communities were already retreating to inland areas as a result of sea level rise, a delegation underscored that local adaptation responses should be urgently pursued with the international community's support. Mr. Nicholls stated that, while developing local resilience and maintaining people in their places of origin should remain a priority, it was almost certain that some communities would need to move within and beyond countries in the medium to long term. In many regions nevertheless, communities might not want to retreat and leave their homes. Several delegations noted that issues of statehood and statelessness loomed large for island nations less than two metres above sea level. They suggested that the international community needed to improve its knowledge on how climate change-related sea level rise interacted with migration and displacement and develop policies and frameworks that built local resilience and created safe migration pathways. Mr. Shilton emphasized the importance of measures to reduce the vulnerability and to avoid the displacement of coastal communities through climate change mitigation and disaster risk reduction, and, where this is not possible, adaptation measures would be needed, including legal migration pathways and, in some circumstances, planned relocation. He noted that there was a need to clarify the ways in which international refugee protection instruments were likely to apply to cross-border displacement in the context of climate change and disasters, recalling that, while "climate refugees" were not a distinct category under international law, some of those displaced in such contexts would be given due protection as refugees under existing international refugee law. In response to a question on statelessness and refugee protection in the context of existential threats to small-island States, he stressed that the need for migration pathways and access to international protection by persons displaced by sea level rise would arise much earlier than the complete inundation and loss of territory of some States. Therefore, the issue should be given added urgency. He drew attention to the ongoing work of the International Law Commission on sea level rise in relation to international law and to other areas, such as human rights law, in particular the decision of the Human Rights Committee in the *Teitiota* case in 2020.³

37. Several delegations also emphasized that sea level rise posed a threat to baselines from which their maritime zones were measured. In that regard, those delegations noted that, in 2019, the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum committed to a collective effort, including through the development of international law, to ensure that once a Forum member's maritime zones were delineated in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, that Member's maritime zones could not be challenged or reduced as a result of sea level rise and climate change. They noted that work was ongoing in their region to document coordinates of maritime zones and conclude outstanding maritime boundary agreements.

38. Several delegations requested information from the panellists on the current data and information gaps in the monitoring and modelling of sea level rise. Mr. Garcia-

³ See www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25482.

Soto and Ms. Schrum noted that the Antarctic Ice Sheet remained the largest data gap and therefore a large source of uncertainty in projections of future sea level rise. Mr. Kruger added that the elevation of low-lying reef islands was often overestimated, and that a lack of data, including on topography, bathymetry and coastal hazards, prevented informed adaptation planning and financing. He pointed to a recent study showing that Tuvalu was on average only 2.2 metres above sea level, whereas it was previously believed to be between 5 and 10 metres above the sea surface. He also indicated that his organization is working towards closing the data and information gap, by developing necessary policies, making science available to decision-makers and including traditional knowledge holders in the process.

39. Mr. Greenan emphasized that, since adaptation measures were site-specific and there was significant regional variability in sea levels, monitoring relative sea level was key to successful adaptation planning. Ms. Schrum stated that modelling capacities needed to be enhanced in order to incorporate all aspects of local scenarios. In a similar vein, Mr. Winckler noted the need for multi-hazard analysis, including high-resolution global positioning systems, in coastal areas where there was a combination of hazards. He cited the examples of Chile and Japan, where seismic activity could lead to land movement and tsunami risk, compounding the challenge of sea level rise. In addition, he noted that localized information should also include data on human processes (e.g., extraction activities) and local community knowledge. Mr. Siringan, addressing the level of confidence in modelling capacity to reproduce extreme events, noted that although using geologic records to reconstruct extreme events is not 100 per cent accurate, it provides guidance at the very least. Several delegations enquired about the budgetary implications of sea level research. In that regard, Mr. Greenan noted that most global ocean research was funded by short-term research grants, whereas national commitments to sustained funding were required in order to ensure that scientists could create long-term data to inform actions. Mr. Sweet also noted the need for appropriate budget planning and federal and State-level guidance on the financing of adaptation responses.

40. In response to a question from an observer delegation on whether a country-by-country vulnerability index for sea level rise existed, Mr. Nicholls noted that, given the ways in which sea level rise affected particular coasts depended on multiple factors and local contexts, producing such indices was quite complex and existing attempts at doing so were incomplete.

41. A delegation highlighted a range of initiatives and tools used to create satellite data and model sea level change around the world, links to which could be found in its statement posted on the website of the Division. One example given was the funding of the Antarctic Ice Sheet Large Ensemble Project, which will assess the role of climate variability in past and future ice sheet mass loss. Another delegation noted various national actions it had taken to address sea level rise, including a research programme focused on flood protection and freshwater supply, and highlighted the significant loss of its territory that could result from further sea level rise.

42. Several delegations expressed the need to foster and maintain opportunities for open and transparent knowledge-sharing and other forms of collaboration on sea level rise at the local, regional and global levels. Mr. Kruger highlighted the need to turn the best available science into knowledge products that could be used by decision-makers. Mr. Sweet, Mr. Winckler, Ms. Sebesvari and Mr. Greenan had the same sentiment and highlighted that scientists should consider the needs of policymakers and incorporate them into their research, and that conversations should be fostered not only between scientists and policymakers, but also with local stakeholders, including those working on physical infrastructure. Mr. Sweet noted that forums such as the current meeting enabled inter-agency cooperation and collaboration at the international level. Similarly, Mr. Winckler added that the twenty-fifth session of the

Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, hosted by Chile, provided the impetus for Chilean scientists and policymakers to work together to bridge the science/policy interface on climate change impacts. In response to a question posed by several delegations on how the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development could be utilized to increase knowledge on sea level rise, Mr. Campostrini highlighted the importance of raising awareness among the public and communities through knowledge-sharing, which would in turn lead to increased awareness among policymakers.

43. Many delegations noted that international collaboration on sea level rise was especially important in the areas of capacity-building and financing for countries affected by sea level rise, in particular small island developing States. A delegation appealed to the international community to work with small island developing States to coordinate and finance actions to mitigate sea level rise while these islands still had time to avoid inundation. Another delegation emphasized that small island developing States did not have the resources and capacity to deal with sea level rise alone, noting that effective adaptation responses may require many times their gross domestic product. Mr. Kruger stated that, since the Pacific region had the least ability to conduct marine scientific research and Pacific small island developing States did not have the capacity to gain full access to and utilize relevant data, there was a need for methodologies and data to be shared with the Pacific region as well as capacity-building for evidence-based decision-making.

44. Ms. Cadogan emphasized the interlinkages between tackling sea level rise and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She noted that several of the Sustainable Development Goals were interrelated and that sea level rise, if not urgently addressed, would threaten the attainment of many of them. In response to a question from a delegation on the possible outcomes at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, expected to be held in Lisbon in 2022, Ms. Cadogan noted that the Commonwealth would support its members in placing sea level rise on the agenda at the Conference, because the issue of sea level rise was of particular importance to its developing country members, especially small island developing States. Mr. Kruger stated that genuine partnerships were needed to provide solutions to the threats that small island developing States face. An observer delegation asked how the various ocean-related processes and mechanisms could be linked to ensure coherence of measures, science and financing and to avoid silos. Mr. Garcia-Soto, speaking from his experience as Joint Coordinator of the Group of Experts of the Regular Process, introduced various efforts under the Regular Process to ensure that outputs of those processes were coordinated to serve the needs of scientists and policymakers and in particular noted the production of technical abstracts and brief documents based on the first and second World Ocean Assessments.

2. International cooperation and coordination in addressing the impacts and challenges related to sea level rise

Panel presentations

45. In the second segment, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Filimon Manoni, shared perspectives on how countries in the Pacific region have worked collectively to explore responses to sea level rise, given the particular threat it poses to Pacific peoples and the countries' maritime entitlements. A research scientist at the Geological Survey of Canada, Thomas James, outlined research into ice-sheet dynamics and possible additional Antarctic contributions to projected sea level rise and provided an overview of processes for developing sea level guidance for planning purposes in Canada. A barrister, international lawyer and Honorary Professor at the University of Auckland, New

Zealand, Penelope Ridings, drew on examples from the Pacific region to identify key elements for effective cooperation and coordination in response to sea level rise, including appropriate political and policy frameworks, scientific and technical knowledge as a basis for driving practical responses, including adaptation and building resilience, the alignment of resources and development of innovative financial mechanisms and the articulation of legal principles that can guide responses to legal challenges. A lecturer at Reykjavik University, Snjólaug Árnadóttir, gave an overview of the possible legal implications of sea level rise and changing coastlines to the drawing of baselines from which States measure the extent of their maritime entitlements, and ways in which coordinated efforts might, if desired, lead to possible changes in the international legal framework under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. A counsellor at the Office of the Legal Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina, Erica Lucero, also considered the legal dimensions of sea level rise, giving consideration to international law instruments, documents, jurisprudence and principles as tools that may assist in responding to the challenges posed by sea level rise and changing coastlines. A programme officer at the Intergovernmental Support and Collective Progress Division of the secretariat of the Framework Convention, Joanna Post, shared actions being undertaken under the Framework Convention to address the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, including mitigation and adaptation commitments and actions under the Paris Agreement, including nationally determined contributions, and the recent Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue focused on strengthening the link between ocean and climate change processes, concluding on the need for greater ambition to ameliorate the worst consequences of sea level rise. The Climate Science Lead of the Green Climate Fund, Kevin Horsburgh, gave a presentation on financing for adaptation actions, focusing on the Fund's funding mechanism and four Fund projects being implemented to address sea level rise impacts. The Founding President and Chief Executive Officer of the World Ocean Council, Paul Holthus, gave a presentation on the different ways in which the private sector could be engaged in developing and implementing a "grey/green/blue" approach to advance port and coastal infrastructure adaptation, stressing the importance of partnerships at a global scale between the private sector, Governments and intergovernmental organizations. The members of the International Law Commission and co-chairs of the Commission's study group on sea level rise in relation to international law, Bogdan Aurescu and Nilufer Oral, provided an overview of the mandate and work of the study group and highlighted certain parts of the first issues paper produced by the study group. A principal lecturer at Hanoi University, Vu Thanh Ca, shared experiences from East Asia in relation to international cooperation and coordination, including at the regional level, for adaptation and mitigation, highlighting the effectiveness of regional mechanisms in helping States to implement adaptation measures, restore marine ecosystems, develop sustainable ocean economies and improve human livelihoods. The Coordinator of the Sustainable Ocean for All Initiative of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Piera Tortora, discussed trends and opportunities in relation ODA for sustainable ocean economies and addressing the impacts of sea level rise. The President of the Ocean Policy Research Institute of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Hide Sakaguchi, introduced efforts in addressing sea level rise challenges, including through the development of the Climate and Ocean Risk Vulnerability Index relating to climate change impacts, highlighting the importance of capacity-building, innovation and international partnerships.

Panel discussions

46. The discussions held focused on the science-policy interface, cooperation at all levels and with various stakeholders, including the private sector, nature-based

solutions, the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus, legal dimensions, ODA and other financing mechanisms, and capacity-building.

47. In terms of the science-policy interface, several delegations underscored the importance of partnerships between practitioners and scientists in developing sea level rise guidance and the need for a science-based platform to guide practical responses and funding, in particular after the pandemic, when budgets are likely to be strained. They noted particular challenges relating to a lack of appropriate guidance for decision-makers for coastal planning processes, including for long-term action beyond 2200, and highlighted the importance of being prepared and using planning tools, such as environmental and strategic impact assessments and marine spatial planning, in developing sustainable ocean economies.

48. In response to a question regarding those challenges, Mr. James noted the important role of international guidance and different ways of responding to risks posed by sea level rise, taking into account in particular the different possible impacts across a continuum, the time frame across which impacts are likely to be felt, latest research and risk tolerance. He spoke to the process for incorporating science into decision-making and in particular to guide spending, highlighting the importance of information at various levels and from different sectors, including scientific, academic, government and professional. He also elaborated on the degree to which sea level rise had been incorporated into planning processes in Canada and the reasons for divergences in practice.

49. Several delegations highlighted the importance of ocean observation, measurements and further research into the impacts of sea level rise on populations. Ms. Tortora stressed the need to enhance the availability and accessibility of data on climate risks and benefits from marine and coastal ecosystems, as well as the need to incorporate these into policymaking.

50. The importance of cooperation and coordination at all levels and avoiding fragmentation between and within the local, national and regional levels was discussed. A delegation introduced a number of opportunities for international cooperation in the context of sea level rise, links to which could be found in its statement posted on the website of the Division. In response to questions on this issue, Mr. Manoni highlighted various collaborative efforts under way in the Pacific region on both the technical and legal areas, and with the involvement of various bodies, agencies and regional mechanisms. He emphasised the key contribution of traditional knowledge to finding solutions to sea level rise, in particular in the Pacific, given the intrinsic links between the ocean and the peoples of the region. He suggested that a balanced approach could be found in responding to sea level rise, incorporating science, traditional knowledge, international law and physical and technical options, while also underlining the need for capacity in the region. In turn, Mr. James spoke to the cooperation and coordination between different levels of government, drawing on the experience of Canada, and also highlighted the importance of engaging appropriately with local and indigenous communities, many of whom are vulnerable to climate change impacts.

51. In response to a question regarding lessons from the Pacific that could be applied to regions without well-established mechanisms for regional cooperation, Ms. Ridings noted that regional collaboration was certainly easier where there are strong pre-existing regional mechanisms, but highlighted that the lessons from the Pacific experience could be translated both nationally and internationally. Both she and Ms. Lucero highlighted governance mechanisms existing in other regions and at the global level.

52. Responding to a comment regarding the importance of regional cooperation in addressing broader impacts that could not be tackled by individual States, Mr. Vu

noted that the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia was effective in providing guidance for States in that region to implement integrated coastal management. Several delegations noted the importance of taking adaptation action through regional fisheries management organizations.

53. Several delegations also emphasised the importance of vertical cooperation within a State, as well as regional cooperation. One of those delegations noted its national multi-agency platform to assist coastal managers in enhancing resilience, and programmes to involve coastal stakeholders and communities in developing solutions. Addressing a comment concerning the importance of wide consultation to avoid conflicts, Mr. Vu shared the practice from Viet Nam, whereby conflicting interests from different sectors in the coastal area were addressed under a framework for cooperation and coordination, including through a steering committee chaired by provincial leaders and involving all sectors. He also underlined the importance of considering relevant human, economic and political aspects and of integrated inland and coastal management, in order to identify sustainable solutions to sea level rise.

54. Regarding the role of the private sector in addressing sea level rise challenges, a delegation asked about the ambitions of the private sector in this field in the context of relevant intergovernmental processes, in particular the upcoming Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention, to be held in Glasgow, United Kingdom; the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Kunming, China; and the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, to be held in Lisbon. Mr. Holthus highlighted the determination of the private sector to create a leadership group bringing together a coherent community of practice, composed of companies that utilize, manage and invest in port and coastal infrastructures, to understand and realize the potential of carbon dioxide removal and to create a coalition in support of movements to protect at least 30 per cent of the ocean by 2030. Ms. Post remarked on the need for a framework of research to better understand options for carbon dioxide removal, including the benefits and trade-offs of these.

55. Addressing a comment on regional cooperation, Mr. Holthus stressed the importance of a regional approach for engaging the private sector, noting that there was significant interest from companies across sectors in cooperating at a regional scale, in particular in semi-enclosed seas such as the Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

56. Several delegations stated their understanding that the meeting would not focus on discussions of legal matters related to sea level rise, underlining that this was outside of the mandate of the Informal Consultative Process. These delegations highlighted that they presently had no position on such matters and looked forward to engaging in, and did not want to prejudge, the work of appropriate forums in that respect, in particular that of the International Law Commission. One delegation noted that any solution to the legal challenges of sea level rise must uphold the integrity of the Convention and added that there was a range of perspectives on the legal questions, including whether baselines were ambulatory under the Convention. This delegation underlined that a common theme across presentations was the importance of cooperation, dialogue and engagement on this issue.

57. A delegation highlighted that sea level rise should not have an impact on boundary agreements and asked what the panellists thought of the establishment of permanent baselines despite ongoing negotiations, and the potential role of General Assembly resolutions vis-à-vis the stability of maritime limits. In response, Ms. Ridings pointed to State practice relating to the permanence of delimitation agreements in the interests of stability and peaceful relations, while Ms. Lucero also underscored the importance of security and stability in boundaries between neighbouring States from

the perspective of the law of treaties. Ms. Árnadóttir emphasised differences between outer limits determined unilaterally, which may be ambulatory, and boundary agreements not subject to change due to fundamental change of circumstances. She also noted the possibility of a General Assembly resolution indicating States' understanding regarding the interpretation of the Convention in that regard, as well as noting the possibility for seeking an advisory opinion from the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea or the International Court of Justice.

58. In response to a question concerning the relationship between legal stability and adaptation processes, Mr. Manoni highlighted the priority accorded to legal stability in the Pacific, while underlining the linkages with issues of adaptation. In response to a separate question regarding immediate challenges that developing States could address under the Convention regime, Ms. Árnadóttir explored the possibilities under the Convention to enhance the stability of maritime limits, while Ms. Lucero added that it may be necessary to develop tailor-made solutions for specific situations. In response to a question concerning challenges for developing States, Ms. Ridings noted the importance of obtaining information on baselines and potential changes to these.

59. Several delegations stressed the importance of nature-based solutions in addressing sea level rise challenges, as well as the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus as an integral part of their policies, outlining various examples in their countries, including through policies, laws, targets and initiatives. A delegation highlighted that in its recently adopted 2030 Nature Compact, the Group of Seven had recognized links between climate change, oceans and biodiversity and the importance of nature-based solutions as part of mitigation and adaptation action, including relating to sea level rise. A delegation expressed its commitment to advancing nature-based solutions and approaches to coastal resilience with international communities of practice, outlining its various initiatives and tools related to adaptation and resilience.

60. Several delegations referred to their efforts under relevant climate laws to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve neutrality by 2050, including through ocean sectors and the use of marine protected areas. A delegation highlighted actions it was taking to reduce emissions in the maritime transport and fisheries sectors. An observer expressed the view that additional measures could be taken to reduce emissions from offshore oil and gas exploration and exploitation, as well as from shipping. Attention was also called to the challenges posed by sea level rise to submarine cables, in particular to landing stations often located in coastal areas with increased risk of flooding due to sea level rise. Mr. Horsburgh noted that such landing stations could also be vulnerable to natural hazards, such as storm surges, and suggested that the submarine cable industry consider such hazards when choosing sites.

61. Several delegations welcomed the ocean and climate change dialogue, under the Framework Convention, to consider how to strengthen adaptation and mitigation action in this context and hoped for an ambitious outcome on ocean and climate change at the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention. In response to a question about an upcoming informal meeting on oceans and climate under this process, Ms. Post provided further details on the event, noting that it would be hosted by the previous and the new Presidents of the Conference of the Parties, and would discuss outcomes of the dialogue and ways forward.

62. Addressing concerns over the low level of ODA in support of sustainable ocean economies and for addressing sea level rise challenges, Ms. Tortora noted that the OECD Sustainable Ocean for All Initiative would increase data on the overall financial flows towards the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, develop guidance to enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation in this area, scope how ODA could help reorient private investment towards sustainability, and enhance the evidence base to support efforts at the national level, including

through sustainable ocean economy country diagnostics and the establishment of “blue recovery hubs”. With respect to ODA and other financing tools to support adaptation and mitigation, a delegation drew attention to its recently announced national coastal resilience fund, which would provide \$34 million for nature-based approaches to coastal resilience. Another delegation announced the launch of the Blue Planet Fund, a £500 million development aid fund targeted at ocean issues.

63. A delegation asked for more information on the work of the OECD Development Assistance Committee relating to sea level rise. Ms. Tortora noted that the Committee had been focusing on sea level rise as part of a broader agenda on climate change adaptation and mitigation. She further drew attention to the ongoing efforts towards incorporating some climate resilience requirements in concessional finance provided by OECD members and multilateral development banks.

64. In response to a query about funding assistance projects at the regional level, Ms. Tortora noted that OECD worked primarily with States, but also closely with regional institutions. She further noted that the establishment of the “blue recovery hubs” would connect participating States to foster mutual learning and multi-State solutions.

65. On emerging opportunities for private investment, Mr. Horsburgh noted that sea level rise challenges presented investment opportunities, including for insurance and reinsurance, livelihood preservation and tourism. He drew attention to the emergence of resilience bonds, as a subset of green bonds, and noted that there were opportunities for entrepreneurs from the emergence of new businesses in response to sea level rise that could be exploited, in particular by small and medium enterprises. In response to follow-up questions on the use of resilience bonds and the availability of systematic information on financial tools relevant to sea level rise, Mr. Horsburgh noted that there were a number of programmatic approaches under which bonds would be issued for small and medium enterprises to address a diverse array of resilience issues. He also indicated that the Green Climate Fund website provides a wealth of information on these topics. Mr. Sakaguchi noted that the Climate and Ocean Risk Vulnerability Index could be a tool for Governments to quantify the threat posed by climate change, prioritize actions and attract international funding to build resilience. He further noted that, for private investors and the insurance industry, the Index provided a detailed risk assessment designed to improve investment decisions on resilience-building actions in coastal cities.

66. In response to a request for more information on the Climate and Ocean Risk Vulnerability Index, Mr. Sakaguchi noted that it focused on coastal cities in developing countries and provided city-level details on the nature and impacts of climate and ocean risks, including sea level rise. He further noted that the Index examined a broad set of risk factors connected to the security of cities and their residents and adopted the approach of “structured expert judgement”.

67. With regard to capacity-building, a question was raised concerning how to ensure that developing States have the necessary financial and human resources to deal with sea level rise challenges. In response, Mr. Sakaguchi stressed the importance of multi-stakeholder partnership across sectors, highlighting the utmost importance of capacity-building and in particular of human resource development. Ms. Ridings underscored that the acquisition of necessary knowledge and information by developing States may require capacity-building, which in turn requires financial and other resources, while noting that much can also be learned and achieved by working with other entities, including States, organizations and the private sector.

68. In response to a question on regional experiences with respect to capacity-building, Mr. Vu offered the example of the regional centres of excellence for integrated coastal management established in different States across East Asia. He noted that such centres trained government officials, including those at the provincial

and local levels, who trained others while implementing integrated coastal management at the provincial level.

Agenda item 4

Inter-agency cooperation and coordination

69. The Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, Mr. de Serpa Soares, in his capacity as focal point of UN-Oceans provided a written statement, which was made available in advance of the consideration of the agenda item.⁴ In his statement, he informed delegations of the activities of UN-Oceans since the twentieth meeting of the Informal Consultative Process, including in relation to the topic of focus, as well as in the light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

70. Mr. de Serpa Soares also highlighted a few of the achievements during the COVID-19 pandemic. He called attention to a virtual high-level event of UN-Oceans held on 10 December 2020, which aimed at taking stock of ongoing ocean-related initiatives in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and at reflecting on how inter-agency coordination and cooperation on ocean and coastal issues could be enhanced beyond 2020. Presentations at the event emphasized the importance of leveraging opportunities for cooperation, including through strategic partnerships in ocean affairs, and the role that science and innovation could play, now more than ever, in ensuring a greater understanding of the ocean ecosystem services and functions.⁵ Reference was made to the effective collaboration between UN-Oceans and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which resulted in the timely finalization of the implementation plan of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, launched on 1 January 2021. In addition, in support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14, UN-Oceans members concluded their work on the development of a methodology that has enabled the first collection of data and information from nearly fifty States against the indicator of target 14.c, of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

71. In his statement, Mr. de Serpa Soares also noted that, despite constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, UN-Oceans and its members had held a number of productive teleconferences, including to adopt its 2021 work programme,⁶ identify thematic webinars that could be held by UN-Oceans in 2021 and initiate the organization of a successful UN-Oceans segment as part of the celebration of World Oceans Day 2021.⁷ He also noted the ongoing application for membership of UN-Oceans from the United Nations Global Compact.

72. No statements were made under the item.

Agenda item 5

Process for the selection of topics and panellists so as to facilitate the work of the General Assembly

73. Referring to paragraph 352 of General Assembly resolution [73/124](#), the Co-Chairs invited views and proposals on ways to devise a transparent, objective and inclusive process for the selection of topics and panellists so as to facilitate the work

⁴ Available at www.un.org/Depts/los/consultative_process/icp21/statement21.htm.

⁵ A recording of the meeting is available at www.unoceans.org/activities/en/.

⁶ Available from www.unoceans.org/documents/en/.

⁷ The full video recording of World Oceans Day 2021 is available at <https://unworldoceansday.org>. The video recording of the UN-Oceans segment can also be found at www.unoceans.org/activities/en/.

of the Assembly during informal consultations concerning the annual resolution on oceans and the law of the sea.

74. No statements were made under the item.

Agenda item 6

Issues that could benefit from attention in the future work of the General Assembly on oceans and the law of the sea

75. The Co-Chairs drew attention to a composite streamlined list of issues that could benefit from the attention of the General Assembly and invited comments from representatives.

76. The Co-Chairs also invited representatives wishing to propose additional issues for inclusion in the list to submit them to the Co-Chairs or to the Secretariat in writing before the end of the meeting.

77. A delegation suggested that, at its next meeting, the Informal Consultative Process could consider the role of sustainable use of marine resources in respect to food security. An observer delegation proposed the topic of deep-sea mining.
