



General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 September 2023

Original: English

Seventy-eighth session

Item 77 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Oceans and the law of the sea

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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which covers the period from 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023, is submitted pursuant to paragraph 389 of General Assembly resolution [77/248](#). It is also being submitted to States parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, pursuant to article 319 of the Convention. The report provides information on major developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, in particular at the United Nations and its specialized agencies, funds and programmes, as well as within the bodies established under the Convention.

* [A/78/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. The ocean remains under significant threat from human activities. Marine biodiversity is under attack from overexploitation and ocean acidification, over one third of fish stocks are being harvested at unsustainable levels and coastal waters are polluted with chemicals, plastics and human waste. In addition, human-induced climate change is warming the oceans, disrupting weather patterns and ocean currents and altering marine ecosystems and species.

2. Against this backdrop, the present report highlights key developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, including those undertaken by the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/248, and should be read together with other reports relevant to oceans and the law of the sea issued by the United Nations during the period under review,¹ as well as the detailed contributions provided by the specialized agencies, funds, programmes and bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations.²

II. Legal and policy framework

3. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out and is of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector.

4. Following ratification of the Convention by Rwanda on 18 May 2023, the number of parties to the Convention increased to 169. Rwanda thereby became a party to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982, to which there are currently 152 parties. Following the accession of Saudi Arabia to the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks on 22 June 2023, the number of parties to that Agreement increased to 93.

5. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction³ was adopted on 19 June 2023 at a further resumed fifth session of the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which concluded its work on 20 June 2023.⁴ On the occasion of its adoption, the Secretary-General lauded the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity as a historic achievement which was vital to addressing threats to the ocean and demonstrated the strength of multilateralism. The Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity will be open for signature by all States and regional economic integration organizations from 20 September 2023 to 20 September 2025 at United Nations Headquarters in New

¹ The advance and unedited version of the report, with comprehensive footnotes, and other, relevant reports are available at

www.un.org/depts/los/general_assembly/general_assembly_reports.htm.

² For the detailed contributions, see www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/contributions78.htm.

³ A/CONF.232/2023/4.

⁴ See A/CONF.232/2023/5.

York. The Agreement will enter into force 120 days after the date of deposit of the sixtieth instrument of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession.⁵

6. The Council of the International Seabed Authority continued to develop draft regulations on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area and agreed on a road map to advance that work through July 2024. The Council adopted a decision setting out steps to be taken if an application for a plan of work for exploitation was submitted before the completion of those regulations. The Assembly of the Authority included the periodic review of the international regime of the Area pursuant to article 154 of the Convention in the provisional agenda for the twenty-ninth session of the Assembly in 2024. The Assembly also extended the current Strategic Plan of the Authority 2019–2023 to 2025 and requested the Secretary-General of the Authority to review and update the High-level Action Plan 2019–2023 as necessary for the same period. Moreover, the Assembly agreed that an item on the role of the Assembly with respect to the conservation and protection of the marine environment could be proposed for inclusion in the provisional agenda of the twenty-ninth session of the Assembly pursuant to rule 10 (e) of the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

7. At the thirty-third Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in June 2023, several delegations welcomed progress in relation to the work of the Authority and called for the timely adoption of a robust and comprehensive regulatory framework. Several delegations called for a moratorium or “precautionary pause” on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, citing concerns over potential impacts on the marine environment. Some delegations called for practical steps towards the full establishment of the Enterprise.

8. The year 2023 marked the halfway point for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit will be held on 18 and 19 September in New York to secure high-level political guidance on transformative and accelerated actions leading up to 2030.⁶

III. Maritime spaces

9. International institutions, including the bodies established under the Convention, namely, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, the Authority and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, continued to contribute to the implementation of the law of the sea, including by enhancing legal certainty concerning maritime zones. States also continued to deposit charts and/or lists of geographical coordinates of points under the Convention.⁷

10. Among other developments, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf approved five sets of recommendations, bringing the total number of approved recommendations to 40 and commenced consideration of five submissions. The Commission modified its working methods to advance the queue, limiting to three the number of revised submissions under active consideration at any one time. At the fifty-eighth session, 19 members of the Commission commenced their term of office.

11. In addition to its work on the formulation of draft exploitation regulations, the International Seabed Authority developed formulas for equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits and initiated the preparation of draft proposals for the establishment of a seabed sustainability fund. The Authority made progress on a study

⁵ See [CN.203.2023-Eng.pdf](#) (un.org).

⁶ See www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023.

⁷ See www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/depositpublicity.htm.

on options for the distribution of funds received under article 82 (4) of the Convention.

12. The Tribunal issued initial orders in the proceedings concerning a *Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law* (Case No. 31). The special chamber constituted to hear the *Dispute Concerning Delimitation of the Maritime Boundary Between Mauritius and Maldives in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius/Maldives)* (Case No. 28) delivered a judgment; and after discontinuance of the prompt release proceedings in the *M/T “Heroic Idun” Case (Marshall Islands v. Equatorial Guinea)*, *Prompt Release* (Case No. 30), a special chamber is currently hearing the *M/T “Heroic Idun” (No. 2) Case (Marshall Islands/Equatorial Guinea)* (Case No. 32).

13. The International Court of Justice delivered a judgment in the case concerning the *Question of the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf between Nicaragua and Colombia beyond 200 nautical miles from the Nicaraguan Coast (Nicaragua v. Colombia)*. The Permanent Court of Arbitration continued to administer two arbitrations brought under the Convention, namely, the *Dispute Concerning Coastal State Rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Kerch Strait (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)* and the *Dispute Concerning the Detention of Ukrainian Naval Vessels and Servicemen (Ukraine v. the Russian Federation)*. The Permanent Court of Arbitration is also administering a *Review Panel established under the Convention on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fishery Resources in the South Pacific Ocean* (PCA Case No. 2023-33).

IV. Importance of the human dimension

14. Millions of people, including coastal communities, fishers and seafarers and other people working in ocean sectors, depend on the ocean for their lives, nutrition and livelihoods. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the armed conflict in Ukraine continued to hold back labour markets, with negative impacts on incomes and livelihoods, especially in developing countries.⁸ The pandemic has negatively affected the safety and well-being of fishers and seafarers and exacerbated inequalities for migrant workers and women and girls. Vulnerable populations, in particular those in small island developing States and least developed countries with low adaptive capacities, are facing severe threats from climate change, including from sea level rise and extreme weather events. The existential threat for some low-lying coastal States has driven migration and led to forced displacement. People-centred, inclusive responses to both the pandemic and the triple planetary crisis are essential to building fairer, sustainable and resilient societies.

Gender equality and ocean issues

15. Despite their vital presence in many ocean sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture and shipping, women continue to experience unstable employment, low pay and underrecognition of their contributions. Efforts to identify the needs of women and improve their access to employment included capacity development by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the issuance of information materials regarding small-scale fishery organizations for women and publication by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of a report on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the fishing and seafood processing sectors in

⁸ See International Labour Organization, “A global employment divide: low-income countries will be left further behind without action on jobs and social protection”, ILO Monitor on the world of work, 11th ed, 31 May 2023. Available at www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_883341/lang--en/index.htm.

South-East Asia.⁹ Amendments to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 will help to ensure that an increasing number of women seafarers have appropriately sized personal protective equipment.

16. The importance of gender equality in ocean sectors was recognized as a cross-cutting issue in some ocean strategies and projects. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in cooperation with Sweden, implemented case studies on gender and poverty perspectives in marine spatial planning in Kenya, Madagascar and the United Republic of Tanzania. In commemoration of the International Day for Women in Maritime 2023, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) developed a global strategy to improve gender balance in the shipping industry. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia helped strengthen maritime capacity in that country, including through the women in the maritime sector initiative. Initiatives undertaken to promote the empowerment of women in ocean science included the Women in Deep-Sea Research project of the International Seabed Authority and a joint project of Canada and the International Hydrographic Organization, entitled “Empowering Women in Hydrography”.

A. Labour at sea

17. While there was a continuation of efforts to address difficult working conditions faced by seafarers, including through ensuring protection during public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing organizations reported on their work on tackling other priorities, such as forced fishing labour, safety at sea, bullying and harassment, seafarer abandonment and the fair treatment of detained seafarers, as well as adaptation to the effects of climate change and natural hazards.

18. A joint action group, including ILO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and IMO, adopted a set of recommendations for intergovernmental organizations and Governments for addressing challenges faced by transport workers resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and protecting them during future public health emergencies, including on the sharing of information and coordination of actions.

19. ILO continued to deliver online training courses on systems for inspection of labour conditions on board fishing vessels and the training of inspectors. ILO addressed unacceptable forms of work in regional fishing and seafood processing sectors and collaborated with regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements on the intersection of overfishing and forced labour. In a follow-up on recommendations adopted by a FAO, ILO and IMO ad hoc joint working group on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and related matters, efforts to tackle forced labour in fishing were being redoubled.

20. To promote a culture of safety at sea, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee considered a proposal for the comprehensive review of the International Management Code for the Safe Operation of Ships and for Pollution Prevention and its related guidelines. It also approved a comprehensive review of the 1978 International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, giving priority to provisions addressing bullying and harassment in the maritime sector, including sexual assault and sexual harassment.

21. At its first meeting, the Joint ILO-IMO Tripartite Working Group to identify and address seafarers’ issues and the human element adopted guidelines for States on seafarer abandonment. The ILO-IMO database recorded 119 such cases in 2022, more than in any previous year. The IMO Legal Committee prepared guidelines on the fair

⁹ See www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_847927/lang--en/index.html.

treatment of seafarers detained on suspicion of committing maritime crimes for consideration by the Tripartite Working Group in 2024. A database for recording detention of seafarers and designating contact points for coordination in such cases remains under consideration.

22. FAO continued to advance social protections in the fisheries sector, including through capacity-building initiatives to address, for example, the effects of climate change and natural hazards in the fisheries sector. FAO implemented capacity-building activities on safety at sea, including on technical assistance to promote insurance services for small-scale fishers.

B. Migration by sea

23. Thousands of migrants and refugees resorted to perilous journeys by sea in many parts of the world. In addition to confronting the danger of being lost at sea, these individuals risked being trafficked, kidnapped or subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. In some regions, lack of State-led search and rescue exacerbated the dangers, with non-governmental organizations and merchant vessels taking on this responsibility when possible. Safe disembarkation of persons rescued at sea continued to be of an ad hoc and unpredictable nature owing to lengthy delays or non-responses from States approached with disembarking requests. Following the capsizing of a boat in the Mediterranean Sea in June 2023, as a result of which approximately 500 people, including 100 children, were presumed drowned, the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called on States and regional organizations to establish safe and regular migration routes and ensure the rescue and safe disembarkation of all people in distress at sea.

24. Initiatives to increase engagement and build capacity for the protection of life at sea continued at national and regional levels. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) promoted effective, cooperative and protection-sensitive approaches to search and rescue and disembarkation with relevant coastal States and organizations, including through regional forums such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) worked at national and regional levels to strengthen mechanisms and institutional frameworks relating to migration by sea, including through capacity development and technical assistance initiatives. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) implemented projects to counter migrant smuggling across multiple migration routes, including the Strengthening Transregional Action and Responses Against the Smuggling of Migrants initiative and the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants initiative, in respect of the Andaman Sea. UNODC supported coastal States in the Western Indian Ocean region in the prosecution of migrant smugglers.

25. Efforts were undertaken to promote the effective implementation of relevant international instruments and strengthen international cooperation on the provision of assistance to persons in distress at sea. UNHCR released guidelines on legal considerations regarding the roles and responsibilities of States in relation to rescue at sea, non-refoulement and access to asylum, underlining that persons rescued at sea must be disembarked to a place of safety. The UNHCR-led inter-agency group on protection of refugees and migrants moving by sea continued to advance protection of life at sea, consistent with international law, including by analysing search and rescue practices and identifying gaps in existing responses to protection concerns in the context of movements by sea in different regional settings. The United Nations Network on Migration prepared actionable recommendations on strengthening

cooperation on the issue of missing migrants and providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in distress, as mandated by the Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum, including in respect of migrants rescued at sea.

V. Maritime safety and security

26. Efforts to address challenges faced by seafarers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic continued, including through the adoption of recommendations to review the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world's transport workers and the global supply chain.

27. The IMO Maritime Safety Committee urged the continuation of humanitarian efforts to evacuate stranded ships and seafarers in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The IMO Maritime Safety Committee adopted a resolution on the obligations of IMO member States in connection with search and rescue services under the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea and the 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue in the context of armed conflicts.

28. IMO continued to consider how the subject of maritime autonomous surface ships operations should be addressed in the IMO regulatory framework and began development of a non-mandatory goal-based code, to take effect in 2025, which will form the basis for a mandatory goal-based code, expected to enter into force in 2028. The IMO Facilitation Committee approved a road map on addressing issues concerning maritime autonomous surface ships related to the 1965 Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic.

29. IMO adopted a first set of amendments to the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, together with associated amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, in order to incorporate new requirements for certain non-Convention ships concerning safety of navigation and voyage planning. IMO approved revised interim guidelines on life-saving appliances and arrangements for ships operating in polar waters.

30. Work continued on measures to prevent unlawful practices associated with the fraudulent registration and registries of ships. A correspondence group was established to define and develop the elements of due diligence to be exercised in the process of registration of ships under the flag of a State when involving vessels in the IMO unique company and registered owner identification number schemes.

31. The International Hydrographic Organization continued to develop standards and guidance on hydrographic information and to encourage full implementation of e-navigation in support of the work of IMO. The International Whaling Commission continued to develop a global database of ship strikes, including through adding historic and new records to the database. UNODC continued to aid individual States in the Indian Ocean region with their national submarine cables protection and resilience plans.

32. In the fisheries sector, IMO completed the revision of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel, 1995 and developed a new associated code. IMO continued to take steps to promote the entry into force of the Cape Town Agreement 2012 on fishing vessel safety and assisted individual member States in the acceptance process.

33. Global efforts continued to tackle a wide range of crimes at sea, including piracy and armed robbery against ships; human trafficking; drug and weapon smuggling, including of nuclear materials and firearms; terrorism; illegal traffic in hazardous wastes and other wastes and illegal traffic in hazardous chemicals; fisheries offences,

including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and intentional damage to submarine cables.

34. Piracy and armed robbery against ships continued to decrease globally in 2022. In the first quarter of 2023, the International Maritime Bureau received the lowest number of reported first-quarter incidents since 1993. South-East Asia saw a decline compared with the same period in 2022, including in the Singapore Straits. The Gulf of Guinea witnessed a steady decline in incidents and no reports were made of piracy attacks off the coast of Somalia. The International Law Commission published the first report of the Special Rapporteur on prevention and repression of piracy and armed robbery at sea. The first draft articles on this topic were provisionally adopted by the Drafting Committee of the International Law Commission.

35. International cooperation on addressing maritime crimes continued. UNODC provided training, capacity-building and technical assistance globally in relation to the prevention of threats to maritime safety and security. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs supported maritime safety and security efforts in various regions, such as East Africa including Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa, including through capacity-building. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate contributed to the Counter Maritime Terrorism and Enhance Maritime Security initiatives under the Global Counterterrorism Forum. In the context of the tenth anniversary of the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa (Yaoundé Code of Conduct), efforts were undertaken to further its operationalization, including an assessment expected to be conducted by the Interregional Coordination Centre for the Implementation of the Regional Strategy for Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel jointly developed an interregional project in support of regional stakeholders with respect to carrying out the review, in close collaboration with UNODC.

VI. Climate change and the ocean

36. The past eight years have been the warmest on record. As concentrations of greenhouse gases continued to increase, ocean heat content and sea levels reached record highs and ocean acidification reached unprecedented levels.¹⁰

37. In its *Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report*, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that climate change had already caused substantial damages and increasingly irreversible losses to coastal and ocean ecosystems.¹¹ Hundreds of local losses of species have been driven by increases in the magnitude of heat extremes, with mass mortality events recorded in the ocean. Ocean warming and ocean acidification adversely affected food production from fisheries and shellfish aquaculture in some regions. Increased impacts were projected, including water-borne diseases, flooding in coastal and other low-lying cities and regions, biodiversity loss and loss of ecosystems and their services, with long-term impacts on people, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities directly dependent on those ecosystems. As warming levels continue to increase, the risks of species extinction or irreversible loss of biodiversity, including in coral reefs and Arctic regions, will escalate.

¹⁰ See World Meteorological Organization, “State of the global climate in 2022”. Available at public.wmo.int/en/our-mandate/climate/wmo-statement-state-of-global-climate.

¹¹ See www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/.

38. The important links between climate change and the ocean continued to be recognized in multilateral processes. At the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the integration of ocean-based actions into national climate goals and into the implementation of those goals was encouraged. The 2023 Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change highlighted the need to build resilience and cut emissions, with a focus on coastal ecosystem restoration, including blue carbon ecosystems, and fisheries and food security.

39. In terms of mitigation, an increasing number of parties to the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change targeted ocean-based climate actions, targets, policies and measures. Scientific advancements were made on nature-based solutions to the challenge of improving the carbon sequestration capacity of coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, saltmarshes and seagrasses. Following the launch of the Blue Ambition Loop report, the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action focused, in the area of oceans and coastal zones, on identifying breakthroughs in marine conservation, ocean-based transport, marine renewable energy, aquatic food and coastal tourism. Work continued on potential mitigation interventions, including on the challenges and possibilities of marine geoengineering.

40. With respect to adaptation, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Nairobi Work Programme expert group on the ocean produced reports on coastal adaptation, including a policy brief on innovative approaches for strengthening coastal and ocean adaptation. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) engaged in work on the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on coastal transport infrastructure, in particular to assist small island developing States with adaptation measures. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) addressed the vulnerability of small island developing States to climate change and launched its global programme for integrated urban resilience in small island developing States and coastal cities. Actions were taken by FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization to strengthen resilience, including through restoration of coral reefs, the use of integrated coastal zone management and addressing the climate change and poverty nexus. Regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements reported on incorporating climate change and ocean acidification in their work.

41. Regarding financing, historic decisions were taken at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change highlighting the need to transform the global financial system and establish a fund to assist developing countries, particularly those vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, in responding to loss and damage. With estimated adaptation costs for developing countries far greater than current finance flows, major collaborative efforts by policymakers and development partners and shifts in focus were still required.

42. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continued to organize capacity-building activities on ocean acidification. Research was ongoing under the Ocean Decade-endorsed programme on ocean acidification research for sustainability.

43. The Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law requested an advisory opinion from the Tribunal on the obligations of States parties under the Convention with respect to the effects of climate change. The General Assembly requested an advisory opinion from the International Court of

Justice on the obligations of States in respect of climate change, including under the law of the sea.

44. The Climate Ambition Summit in September 2023 and the first global stocktake of progress under the Paris Agreement, scheduled to conclude at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 12 December 2023, will provide opportunities to accelerate action, including in maritime spaces, to avert the worst consequences of climate change.

45. At its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted four goals and 23 targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including a target (No. 8) to minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and increase its resilience through mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction actions, including through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches, while minimizing negative and fostering positive impacts of climate action on biodiversity.

VII. Ocean sustainability

46. Significant social, economic and environmental benefits to humanity and the planet are provided by the ocean, which sustains economic activities with an estimated value lying between \$3 trillion and \$6 trillion and at least 150 million direct jobs and provides habitats for species and invaluable ecosystem services, such as absorption of significant amounts of heat and carbon dioxide.¹² Destructive trends in ocean health have not abated, however.¹³ The cumulative impacts of, inter alia, ocean warming and acidification, eutrophication, deoxygenation, unsustainable practices such as subsidies for harmful ocean-based economic activities, and plastic pollution continue to threaten the capacity of the ocean to provide essential services, including mitigation of climate change. Unsustainable use of marine resources poses an imminent threat to communities that are heavily dependent on the ocean, in particular in small island developing States.

47. Ocean sustainability remained a focus in global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14, with some progress made in limited areas, including expanding marine protected areas and combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. On indicator 14.c.1,¹⁴ the vast majority of reporting States indicated high levels of implementation of the Convention and its implementing agreements.¹⁵ More concerted efforts and acceleration were urgently needed. At the halfway point for the 2030 Agenda, the path for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals remained far off track. Funding in support of Goal 14 remained lower than funding for any other Goals.¹⁶ Corresponding indicators for Goal 14 targets that had matured in 2020 indicated that most States had made very little progress, owing to a lack of capacity, funding and commitment.

¹² See UNCTAD, *Trade and Environment Review 2023: Building a Sustainable and Resilient Ocean Economy beyond 2030* (Geneva, 2023). Available at www.unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditcted2023d1_en.pdf.

¹³ See *The Sustainable Development Goals Report: Special Edition* (United Nations publication, 2023), p. 41. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>.

¹⁴ See United States of America, Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sdg.data.gov/14-c-1/>).

¹⁵ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database>.

¹⁶ See *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023* (advance, unedited version), 14 June 2023. Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Advance%20unedited%20GSDR%2014June2023.pdf>.

48. Further commitments to ocean sustainability provide a reason for optimism, however. The central role of ocean sustainability in climate change mitigation and adaptation was further recognized, with the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including the ocean, being noted in the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan.¹⁷ The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction are positioned to make critical contributions to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. Progress was made on the entry into force of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, with 40 members of WTO submitting instruments of acceptance in 2023. In June 2023, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council recommended to the GEF Assembly an amendment to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environmental Facility for preparing GEF to serve as part of the financial mechanism of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, which was expected to be approved by the Seventh Assembly of GEF, held in Vancouver, Canada, from 22 to 26 August 2023. Furthermore, the GEF Council authorized the use of up to \$34 million for the funding of ratification support and early action activities for the Agreement during the current GEF eighth funding cycle.

49. The GEF Council approved a work programme providing \$1.4 billion to support efforts of developing countries to tackle the triple planetary crisis, with a significant focus on actions to address the loss of biodiversity, including marine biodiversity, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Moreover, in response to a request by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its fifteenth meeting, the GEF Council decided to establish a new trust fund to support the Framework and invited the World Bank to act as its trustee. This decision is expected to be endorsed by the seventh GEF Assembly in August.

50. In a related development, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023 will be a pivotal point for renewing commitment and accelerating progress towards achieving the Goals, including Goal 14. The Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goal Stimulus to deliver Agenda 2030 aims at putting the world back on track towards achieving the 2030 Agenda by offsetting challenging financial conditions faced by developing countries.¹⁸ In addition to major ocean-related events and preparatory meetings being held in 2024, the high-level 2025 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 will be held in France in June 2025¹⁹ and will offer another important opportunity to advance actions towards achieving ocean sustainability and evaluate progress since 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, held in Lisbon in 2022.

51. In other developments, efforts continued at all levels to support sustainable ocean-based economies, highlighting the importance of effective underlying ocean governance frameworks. Such efforts included development and implementation of initiatives, strategies, policies and action plans; promoting sustainable trade in ocean-

¹⁷ See [FCCC/CP/2022/10/Add.1](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/stories/fcccp202210add1), decision 1/CP.27.

¹⁸ See the document entitled "United Nations Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus to Deliver Agenda 2030" (February 2023). Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4005810?ln=en>.

¹⁹ See General Assembly resolution [77/242](#).

related goods and services; facilitating the sharing of data and knowledge; building capacity and providing technical assistance; and catalysing investment, as well as mainstreaming gender perspectives. Critical tools, such as marine spatial planning, ecosystem-based management and a circular economy approach, received particular attention. Focus was given to the role of specific economic sectors, such as coastal and marine tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, shipping, marine renewable energy and plastic substitutes. With regard to the last-mentioned sector, the trade value of plastic substitutes in 2020 was reported to have been \$388 billion, representing one third of total global plastics exports, with potential for more growth.

52. UNCTAD launched a flagship report entitled *Trade and Environment Review 2023: Building a Sustainable and Resilient Ocean Economy beyond 2023*, in which challenges and opportunities associated with the development of sustainable ocean-based economies were examined. The report called for diversifying ocean-based exports to build resilience; highlighted the opportunities offered by emerging sectors, such as seaweed farming and plastic substitutes; and stressed the urgency of further reforming fisheries subsidies. Moreover, the report highlighted the need to bridge the ocean funding gap, boost investment in emerging sectors and promote blended finance to enhance cooperation between public and private actors. Work was ongoing to develop a multidimensional vulnerability index, which would help address challenges faced by small island developing States in gaining access to concessional financing.

A. Promoting marine science and technology

53. Building on commitments made at the 2022 Ocean Conference, efforts intensified at all levels to further marine science, develop research capacity and promote the development and transfer of marine technology. These efforts included actions to advance scientific understanding of marine biodiversity and marine ecosystems, including the deep sea, seamount, coral reef, upwelling and coastal vegetated ecosystems, and the impacts of human activities and other stressors, including climate change; ocean acidification; pollution, including marine litter; eutrophication; and deoxygenation and to further research on bathymetry, oceanography and marine meteorology. Efforts continued to promote women's leadership and gender mainstreaming in marine science, increase ocean literacy, empower early-career scientists, integrate indigenous and local knowledge into scientific decision-making and mobilize funding for ocean science.

54. Significant progress was made in implementing the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, with 48 programmes, 276 projects and 84 contributions endorsed as Decade actions. Geographical gaps remained in the Decade actions, however, with very low engagement in small island developing States and least developed countries due to insufficient resources and capacity. Institutional support was provided through, inter alia, 10 Decade coordination offices or collaborative centres assisting the United Nations Ocean Decade Coordination Unit, regular meetings of the Decade Advisory Board and 37 national Decade committees. A Vision 2030 process was launched to identify collective and measurable ambitions for Ocean Decade challenges and will be presented at the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference, to be held in Barcelona, Spain, from 10 to 12 April 2024. Regionally, the Africa Ocean Decade task force was established and new coordination structures were planned, including in the Southern Ocean, South Pacific and Arctic and Caribbean regions.

55. Guided by its 2030 strategy, the Global Ocean Observing System, currently consisting of over 8,600 platforms across 13 global networks, continued to coordinate sustained ocean observing activities and information delivery to support decision-

making. Particular efforts were made to operationalize new essential ocean variables, including regarding marine debris, ocean sound and bottom pressure; promote public-private partnerships; and strengthen the Global Ocean Observing System regional systems and national focal points. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Assembly considered feedback from the Global Ocean Observing System and States on ocean observations in areas under national jurisdiction and established an intersessional working group to review relevant information and identify problems, best practices and potential actions. Progress was made in strengthening early warning as well as mitigation and adaptation capacities regarding tsunami events and other ocean-related hazards, including harmful algal blooms.

56. Activities continued to improve the collection, management and sharing of data and information, with various networks, platforms and systems being strengthened. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Assembly endorsed the Commission's Strategic Plan for Ocean Data and Information Management (2023–2029) and adopted a new data policy and new terms of use.

57. Further progress was made in collecting new data relating to indicators 14.3.1 and 14.a.1. under Sustainable Development Goal 14. The ocean acidification data portal received increased reporting; however, the current global coverage of ocean acidification observations remained inadequate. Efforts were also ongoing to improve data collection and develop an automated exchange of data among relevant databases. Through the Global Ocean Science Report Tracker questionnaire, information will be collected on current ocean science capacity and a basis will be provided for reporting on indicator 14.a.1 under Goal 14 in 2023. Work continued on developing an index for coastal eutrophication potentials under indicator 14.1.1 for Goal 14.

58. During the twenty-third meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, dedicated to “New maritime technologies: challenges and opportunities”, participants shared knowledge, experiences and views concerning new maritime technologies, including uses and contributions to sustainable development, the importance of international cooperation and coordination and associated challenges and opportunities.

59. Efforts continued at all levels to strengthen the ocean science-policy interface. The third cycle (2021–2025) of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects began its second round of regional workshops to support development of the Third World Ocean Assessment, with the scope and annotated outlines approved by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole of the General Assembly on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects in March 2023. The conducting of regional workshops began, aimed at building capacity to strengthen the ocean science-policy interface. Four brief-type documents for policymakers based on the Second World Ocean Assessment were produced, focusing on climate change, Sustainable Development Goal 14, the Ocean Decade and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and marine biodiversity, respectively.

B. Conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources

60. A wide range of actions were taken at global and regional levels to improve fisheries management and the fisheries sector. At the global level, the General Assembly conducted a review of the impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep sea fish stocks, which was preceded by a two-day multi-stakeholder workshop, held on 2 and 3 August 2022.

61. The Review Conference on the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks resumed from 22 to 26 May 2023 to assess the effectiveness of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in securing the conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks by reviewing the adequacy of its provisions and, if necessary, proposing means of strengthening the substance and methods of implementation of those provisions. The resumed Review Conference reaffirmed and built on the recommendations adopted in 2006, 2010 and 2016 by incorporating references to new developments, strengthening existing recommendations and developing recommendations on new issues, such as conservation of seabird by-catch and improving administration in regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements.

62. At its thirty-fifth session, the Committee on Fisheries of FAO established a new subcommittee on fisheries management to serve as a forum for consultation and discussion. The Voluntary Guidelines for Trans-shipment were endorsed as a new instrument within the framework of the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. At the meeting, there was a call for implementation of the guidelines, including through regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements. FAO organized a series of regional workshops throughout 2023 to support promotion of the guidelines and provide guidance on concerns over trans-shipment. FAO launched a legal and policy database on small-scale fisheries which will contribute to the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.

63. The conclusion of the FAO 2022 International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture, during which 260 events took place at global, regional and national levels focusing on small-scale fisheries in a specific region or on specific topics, resulted in recommendations covering environmental, economic and social sustainability, governance, gender equality and equity, food security and nutrition, resilience and strengthened integration of youth in small-scale artisanal fisheries and aquaculture.

64. At the regional level, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements took important steps with respect to management of fisheries, including through adoption of ecosystem reference points to complement stock assessments and inform management decisions, non-setting of quotas for specific stocks, banning of discards in regulatory areas, expansion of vulnerable marine ecosystem closures, tagging protocols for specific stocks, adoption and amendment of conservation and management measures and decisions to prioritize climate change as a standing item in the work of the organization.

C. Protection and preservation of the marine environment and conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity

65. Besides the adoption of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, important developments took place during the reporting period with a view to halting and reversing marine biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and restoring ocean health.

66. At its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which contains a new set of global goals and targets for biodiversity, including marine and coastal biodiversity, in particular targets for effectively conserving and managing at least 30 per cent of the world's marine and coastal areas, with emphasis on areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and for ensuring effective restoration of at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems. The Conference included new entries in the repository for the description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas in the North-East Atlantic Ocean and requested further work on the process. The secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre co-produced a study analysing the marine and coastal content of existing national biodiversity strategies and action plans to support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Framework.

67. At the regional level, progress was made in the ratification of regional seas conventions and protocols. Amendments were made to the Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Wild Fauna and Flora in the Eastern African Region of the Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea published several ecosystem, fisheries and aquaculture overviews for various ecoregions. The Commission under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic delivered its Quality Status Report 2023, providing scientific knowledge on marine biodiversity and pressures to guide actions. Implementation commenced of a GEF-funded project aimed at strengthening stewardship of the Sargasso Sea.

68. The intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, held its first and second sessions in 2022 and 2023, respectively. The international negotiating committee adopted a resolution on marine plastic pollution, recognizing it as, *inter alia*, a major global threat to cetaceans. Various measures to tackle plastic pollution were ongoing, including UNCTAD-led research on plastic substitutes. The United Nations Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection commenced further work relating to sea-based sources of marine litter, including fishing gear- and shipping-related litter.

69. In terms of hazardous chemicals and wastes, Part I of Annex A to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was amended to list three additional organic pollutants. Technical guidelines were adopted for the environmentally sound management of waste under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. Activities continued with respect to plastic, household and e-waste and emergency prevention and response relating to hazardous chemicals and waste. The UNODC South-East Asia waste project aimed towards deterring the trafficking of plastic and hazardous waste in several countries. Amendments to Annex A of the Minamata Convention on Mercury relating to the phasing out of eight mercury-added products by 2025 will enter into force in September 2023.

70. The IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee adopted amendments to designate the Mediterranean Sea as an emission control area and impose stricter limits on ship-based sulphur oxide emissions, which are expected to enter into force on 1 May 2024, with the new limit taking effect from 1 May 2025. Amendments to Annexes 1 and 2 of the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter, 1972 (London Protocol) to remove sewage sludge from the list of permissible wastes entered into force in January 2023. At the forty-fourth Consultative Meeting of Contracting Parties to the Convention on

the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter, 1972 (London Convention) and the seventeenth Meeting of Contracting Parties to the 1996 Protocol to the London Convention, a statement on marine geoengineering was adopted which identified four techniques needing priority evaluation, involving either carbon dioxide removal or solar radiation modification.²⁰

71. The IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee approved revised guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life and agreed, in principle, to develop a review plan for the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004 (Ballast Water Management Convention).

72. In terms of other issues related to marine pollution, a United Nations-coordinated operation to prevent environmental damage from oil stored on board the floating storage and offloading unit (FSO) *Safer* off the coast of Yemen commenced in May 2023. The vessel was stabilized and oil was transferred onto a replacement vessel, although further funds are required for the project's completion. The International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds provided compensation for oil pollution damage resulting from tanker spills and warned of the growing problem of unreliable insurers and tankers operating with little or no insurance. IAEA reported that planned discharges of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear power station were consistent with its safety standards. The discharges commenced in late August.

73. Activities continued on the implementation of tools, including ecosystem-based approaches, notably in respect of fisheries and vis-à-vis harmful algal blooms, seamounts, coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, kelp forests, marine invasive species and eutrophication. Projects for marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management were ongoing. Measures were taken to protect particular marine species, including by regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements.

74. Work continued on area-based management tools, including marine protected areas. The IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee agreed in principle to the designation of a particularly sensitive sea area in the North-Western Mediterranean Sea for protection of cetaceans. The Commission under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic expanded the conservation objectives of the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea Basin Marine Protected Area. A fishing area in the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Convention Regulatory Area was expanded and existing closed areas were renewed until 2027. The Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission reviewed its Southern Ocean sanctuary; and the Regional Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas of the South-East Pacific was reactivated under the framework of the Agreement on the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific (Lima Convention). In relation to the Area, collection of scientific information in support of the development of regional environmental management plans in the Indian Ocean has progressed.

VIII. Strengthening international cooperation and coordination

75. UN-Oceans continued to play a critical role in enhancing cooperation and coordination among relevant international organizations, including through joint activities and regular meetings for the sharing of information and best practices. UN-Oceans members organized several side events during the reporting period,

²⁰ See International Maritime Organization, "Marine geoengineering techniques: potential impacts", 10 October 2022. Available at www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/pages/Marine-geoengineering.aspx.

including an event in the margins of the twenty-seventh session of the Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to showcase ambitious science-based initiatives for ocean-climate action which are accessible, replicable, scalable and sustainable; and at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to highlight the critical synergistic role of UN-Oceans in assisting States and civil societies through joint action and cooperation across diverse mandates in the implementation of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (later adopted as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework). At the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (United Nations 2023 Water Conference), UN-Oceans organized an event with UN-Water, instrumental in calling attention to the importance of the ocean and seas in the water cycle and the need for solutions for addressing the linkages between ecosystems from source to sea in a holistic, integrated and cross-sectoral manner.²¹

76. UN-Oceans members continued to support ocean-related processes, such as the Ocean Decade, the twenty-third meeting of the Informal Consultative Process and the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogues under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. UN-Oceans delivered on the voluntary commitment made at the 2022 Ocean Conference in the form of a publication entitled, *The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea at 40: Successes and Future Prospects*” (2023).²²

77. Particular focus was given to issues concerning the safety of migrants and refugees at sea, promoting decent work in the maritime sector, maritime safety and security, climate change research and impacts, sustainable blue economies, sustainable and resilient shipping, ocean science, including through the Ocean Decade, marine resource management, including with respect to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biological diversity, including protection from plastic pollution, area-based management tools, and emergency prevention, preparedness and response. The third meeting of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Dialogue continued to promote cooperation and coordination between regional seas organizations and regional fisheries bodies in supporting the achievement of ocean-related global goals and targets. The working groups of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection continued to provide opportunities for cooperation and coordination among their sponsoring organizations.

78. Areas beyond national jurisdiction were a particular focus of cross-sectoral cooperation, including with respect to marine scientific research and knowledge-sharing on deep sea biodiversity, fisheries, deep sea ecosystems more generally, and area-based management tools. Importantly, a second phase of the Common Oceans programme, a global partnership funded by the Global Environment Facility to promote sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction, in particular through cross-sectoral cooperation, began in mid-2022 and will run until mid-2027.

79. At its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity called for enhancing collaboration and cooperation on thematic issues related to marine and coastal biodiversity in support of the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, requested identifying options for modalities for collaboration and cooperation in the context of the Agreement under the United

²¹ See www.un.org/depts/los/coop_coor/un_oceans.htm.

²² See www.un.org/depts/los/doalos_publications/9789210018036_Unclos40EngWeb.pdf.

Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and established a technical and scientific cooperation mechanism comprising a network of regional and subregional support centres coordinated by a global entity.²³

80. Building on the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023, the Summit of the Future, with the theme of “Multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow”, to be held in September 2024, preceded by a preparatory ministerial meeting on 18 September 2023, presents a critical opportunity to promote more effective international cooperation and coordination to address vital challenges facing global governance, including with respect to the ocean, boosting implementation of existing commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and moving towards a reinvigorated multilateral system.

IX. Capacity-building and technical assistance

81. Many organizations and entities reported on capacity-building initiatives to assist developing States in sustainably managing ocean spaces, resources and activities.

82. The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs provided information, advice and assistance to States and intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders through its capacity-building programmes, including technical assistance projects and fellowships and participation in conferences, meetings, workshops and training events.²⁴

83. The Division continued to assist developing countries in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its implementing agreements and promoting strengthened, sustainable and inclusive ocean economies in the context of a four-year programme of assistance funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.²⁵

84. The Division completed substantive work on a four-year project funded through the United Nations Development Account, which it implemented together with UNCTAD.²⁶ The Division launched a new three-year project in cooperation with FAO to strengthen participation in and implementation of the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, funded by the European Union.²⁷

85. The Division continued to contribute to an ocean governance training programme under the PROBLUE programme of the World Bank. It delivered an in-person training course in Eritrea to build capacity in ocean affairs and the law of the sea, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme country office, the United Nations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

²³ See www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-24-en.pdf and www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-08-en.pdf, respectively.

²⁴ See www.un.org/oceancapacity and www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/documents/DOALOSListActivities1Sep202231Aug2023.pdf.

²⁵ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/norway for additional information, including assistance available through the project activities.

²⁶ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/oets for additional information.

²⁷ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/UNFSAproject for additional information, including assistance available through the project activities.

86. The Division continued to administer nine voluntary trust funds to assist developing States in implementation of the Convention and its implementing agreements, participation in ocean-related meetings and intergovernmental processes and settlement of disputes through the Tribunal.²⁸

87. Alongside its existing capacity development and training programmes on deep-sea issues, the International Seabed Authority established a new trust fund to, inter alia, promote and encourage marine scientific research in the Area. The Authority piloted a mentoring programme for young female researchers. The Tribunal launched a new series of workshops for legal advisers from developing countries.

Fellowships

88. During the reporting period, the Division successfully implemented the United Nations-Nippon Foundation of Japan Fellowship Programme; the Strategic Needs Fellowship; training activities under the United Nations-Nippon Foundation Alumni Programme; and the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship on the Law of the Sea.

89. New cohorts of 13 United Nations-Nippon Foundation and 11 Strategic Needs Fellows were welcomed by the Division for in-person deliveries to support 16 women and 8 men from 21 developing countries. Several virtual sessions were also organized, allowing for the participation of United Nations-Nippon Foundation alumni.

90. A three-day United Nations-Nippon Foundation Alumni Meeting was held in Cascais, Portugal, which specifically targeted lusophone alumni and brought together 14 nationals (seven women and seven men) from Brazil, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe and Timor-Leste.

91. Implementation of the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship was resumed, with Linda Bana (Ghana) as the recipient of the fellowship.

92. The fellowships overall have been characterized by a broad geographical scope, with significant participation in the United Nations-Nippon Foundation fellowship programmes of least developed countries (22 per cent), landlocked developing countries (2 per cent) and small island developing States (24 per cent). Gender parity has been successfully achieved in each of the United Nations-Nippon Foundation fellowship programmes, with the overall proportion of women awarded fellowships at 51 per cent. The Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship has ensured equal representation of men and women throughout its nearly 40 years of existence.

X. Conclusions

93. The ocean remains under threat on multiple fronts, as cumulative human impacts continue to cause deterioration of the health of marine ecosystems and biodiversity. With the arrival of the “era of global boiling”,²⁹ addressing climate change remains an urgent priority. Growing awareness of the ocean-climate-sustainable development nexus will help to ramp up ambition in the ocean space. Ocean-related responses will need to be sustainable and inclusive in order to address the climate emergency and build more resilient societies. The request for an advisory opinion from the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea shows the importance and relevance of

²⁸ See www.un.org/oceancapacity/tf and www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/SGReportTrustFunds1August202231July2023.pdf.

²⁹ See www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-07-27/secretary-generals-opening-remarks-press-conference-climate.

the institutions established by the Convention in addressing challenges such as climate change.

94. The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction demonstrates the continued relevance and flexibility of the Convention in addressing contemporary needs and challenges. Negotiation of a legally binding instrument in 2024 to end plastic pollution represents another opportunity to enhance the resilience of the marine environment and protect marine ecosystems and species. Early entry into force of these new instruments will be essential for ensuring that ocean objectives can be achieved, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 14. Significantly strengthened and enhanced cooperation with and among relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies will be required.

95. In the area of marine science, continued and enhanced support for the Ocean Decade and the Third World Ocean Assessment in order to strengthen the ocean science-policy interface will ensure that ocean actions are informed by the best available science. This is essential for innovation and transformative change to occur in order to address the triple planetary crisis and ensure the sustainable development of the ocean, including within the context of its interface with terrestrial ecosystems.

96. Addressing the difficult working conditions of seafarers remains a priority, in particular seafarer abandonment and sexual assault and harassment. With growing recognition of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in ocean sectors, there is a need to identify further opportunities to promote the empowerment of women and girls and incorporate gender-responsive strategies and approaches at national, regional and global levels.

97. Concerted efforts and collaboration, both globally and regionally, are helping to address ongoing issues of maritime security, as attested, *inter alia*, by the continued decrease of piracy and armed robbery against ships. Greater international cooperation will be needed to ensure the safety of people moving by sea, especially people in vulnerable situations, including victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children, as well as refugees and other people requiring international protection.

98. In the fisheries sector, further coordinated efforts will be urgently needed to strengthen implementation of the international legal framework for fisheries and ensure the long-term sustainability of marine living resources.

99. Many organizations and entities remain actively involved in capacity-building initiatives to assist developing States in sustainable ocean management. The Division continues to play a key role in this regard, striving to provide assistance on a needs basis in close cooperation with States and other stakeholders.

100. While significant progress was made during the reporting period to strengthen the legal order for the seas and oceans, further urgent efforts will be needed to secure a healthier, more resilient and more productive ocean for the benefit of current and future generations. All stakeholders will need to seize the opportunity of the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit to accelerate actions towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 and ocean-related goals and targets. The Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goal Stimulus to deliver the 2030 Agenda could play a crucial role in bridging the funding gap needed to achieve Goal 14, which remains the most underfunded of the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the high-level 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 represents a major opportunity to stimulate transformative actions to conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.