

Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States at the Preparatory Meeting, 15-16 February

1. We would like to start by thanking the UN Secretary General for the extremely interesting and well researched Background Note which rightly identifies major challenges which hamper the implementation of agreed commitments. Before turning to these specific issues, we would like to refer to some horizontal cross-cutting issues of relevance to our discussion.
2. The EU and its Member States support the view that the Call for Action should be short and concise and should focus on concrete elements and identify ways forward to address identified challenges particularly in relation to the specific targets of Goal 14 and other relevant targets, in order to achieve a holistic approach to oceans, while recalling the integrity and indivisibility of the 2030 Agenda.
3. As beautifully described in the preamble to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea: the problems of ocean space are closely inter-related and need to be considered as a whole. Never were words more apt than in relation to the challenges we face. The corollary to this is the importance of cooperation between States, also recognised in UNCLOS, at both global and regional levels. We hold that collaboration at regional level can make a significant contribution to the achievement of SDG 14 and ocean-related targets of 2030 Agenda. Regional seas conventions, Regional Fisheries Management organisations and other forms of regional cooperation are important vehicles that can facilitate coordination for SDG 14 implementation through regionally coordinated activities on issues such as land-based sources (LBS) of pollution, marine litter, area based management tools and the management of shared fisheries resources. We consider the cooperation and coordination at regional level of horizontal importance for all the targets of this SDG.
4. Secondly, following on what has been agreed in previous conferences related to sustainable development, particularly Rio+20 and its outcome document "The Future We Want", the EU and its Member States consider that the participation of all stakeholders is of crucial importance to achieving the ocean-related aspects of Agenda 2030. States and stakeholders, including industry, academia and NGOs should work together on the shared ambitions in ocean-related SDGs.
5. For the EU and its Member States, healthy and productive oceans are prerequisites to ensure long-term sustainable development. We believe that actions should tackle the social, economic and environmental aspects of the challenges identified in the UN Secretary General's background note in order that oceans, seas and their resources can

continue to provide for future generations, including for coastal populations. In this context we would like to highlight the following:

6. Pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine litter, plastic and micro plastics and nutrient pollution are among the priorities which should be addressed. We believe that the Call for Action should include a request for urgent action, both preventative and reparative, in this respect, at national, regional and global levels, to enable the meeting of agreed targets. One particular additional aspect we wish to highlight is the promotion of Circular Economy approaches – in view of closing the loop of product lifecycles through greater recycling and re-use, and which bring benefits for both the environment and the economy.
7. The increasing pressures faced by marine ecosystems have been recognised. We believe that sustainable management, conservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems require proper implementation of an ecosystem – based approach which incorporates consideration of and prevention of specific pressures and impacts including addressing cumulative impacts. For this purpose, we propose that the Call for Action makes reference to the use of integrative management and decision-making tools like integrated water resource management, integrated coastal zone management and maritime spatial planning and should be based on the best available science.
8. The EU and its Member States stress that human-induced climate change is one of the major threats to life on earth. Thus, we call for States to take urgent action to fully implement commitments under the Paris Agreement to tackle the root cause of this, i.e. emissions of greenhouse gasses including carbon dioxide which is responsible for ocean acidification. We also stress the need for more research to understand this complex phenomenon and its impacts as well as to identify possible adaptation and mitigation strategies. We stress that ocean acidification, which is not only responsible for the destruction of coral reefs, also, prevents the formation of calciferous plankton which are at the base of the oceanic food web, may have drastic impacts on the upper levels of marine species on which we all depend as sources of food and employment.
9. We also believe in the importance of enhancing the resilience of marine ecosystems as this can also ensure that they are better placed to overcome the challenges posed by climate change while themselves contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation. One fundamental tool in this respect is the use of area-based management tools, inter alia through designation and management of marine protected areas, based on the best available scientific information. The Call for Action should stress this as well as the need for urgent actions to meet the globally agreed 10% target by 2020 to achieve effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of such areas. It should further recognize the need for a comprehensive and participatory process to develop proposals for the follow-up to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 under the CBD.

10. We continue to support the development of a new instrument under the UNCLOS for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which would also include a mechanism to enable the identification, establishment and management of marine protected areas, as it could contribute substantially to achieve this target.

11. Biodiversity, a healthy environment and resilient ecosystems underpin sustainable fisheries and food security, while the ecosystem approach to fisheries contributes to sustained environmental functions and the provisioning of ecosystem services. The importance of fisheries as a source of nutritious food, as well as a provider of employment thereby contributing to poverty alleviation has been recognised by the UN. Despite commitments to achieve maximum sustainable yield, it is acknowledged that in many areas fish stocks continue to be overfished and in less than optimal shape. We believe that urgent action, at national and regional levels, should be taken to rectify this, and particularly to maintain or restore stocks at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield. Such actions should include the implementation of science-based management measures, the application of a precautionary approach when scientific knowledge is limited, stepping up the fight against illegal unreported and unregulated fishing, including through the use of catch document schemes and port State measures and managing by-catch and discards.

12. In addition, the EU and its Member States also recognise that harmful subsidies continue to promote overcapacity and overfishing and contribute to IUU fishing. Thus, we stress that in the Call for Action we should urge States to honour their commitment under Agenda 2030 to swiftly conclude a multilateral WTO agreement on the prohibition of such subsidies.

13. The EU and its Member States recognise the importance of a well-managed sustainable blue economy which aims at reconciling ocean-related sustainable economic growth with improved livelihoods and social equity and the strengthening of transparent, reliable and more secure food systems based on the conservation of marine ecosystems and biodiversity and on the sustainable use of resources. Such a blue economy should ensure that Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries may achieve their sustainable development objectives. In addition, particular attention should be given to small scale artisanal fishers particularly because they represent a crucial source of economic wealth in many countries and regions.

14. We have already referred to the need for management measures based on sound science but acknowledge that many important knowledge gaps remain as highlighted in the UN Secretary General's Note. For the EU and its Member States, increasing scientific knowledge and developing research capacity, including through appropriate capacity building measures, is crucial if we are really to achieve the objectives of SDG14. We also stress the need for good baseline assessments of the status of the marine environment. These are important for measuring progress. In this respect we would like to highlight the work carried out at the UN through the World Ocean Assessment and the regional and

global assessments of IPBES. Improving the science-knowledge base of the oceans is necessary for an efficient implementation of SDG 14. In addition, we also hold that regional assessments should also give an important contribution to this process. We consider that ensuring an appropriate science-policy interface and a holistic assessment are among the prerequisites for achieving sustainable management of oceans.

15. The EU and its Member States reiterate the crucial importance of UNCLOS as the legal framework within which all activities in oceans and seas must be carried out. As parties to, and firm supporters of this Convention, the EU and its Member States, also emphasize its universal and unified character. We would like the Call for Action to call for effective implementation of obligations as this is fundamental to ensure proper conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources. In addition, we support a call for ratification of important instruments such as the new FAO Port State Measures Agreement as well as the UN Fish Stocks Agreement as well as a call for the rapid conclusion of the negotiations of the new agreement under the Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.
16. The EU and its Member States looks forward to hearing the views of partners and to work together to draft a strong and strategic Call for Action which can spur all of us to ensure that we can achieve the agreed targets for oceans. In addition, we would also appreciate obtaining information from the co-facilitators with regard to the process of negotiation of the Call for Action.
17. We look forward to contribute constructively to the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by providing an input to High Level Political Forum on sustainable development on the implementation of SDG 14, including on opportunities to strengthen progress in the future.