



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

Opening Remarks by Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares Under Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel

Conference Room 2, Conference Building
17 April 2017, 10:00 am

Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Good morning.

I am pleased to welcome you to the United Nations Headquarters for the eighth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects. I would also like to convey to the Working Group the greetings of the Secretary-General who could not be present here due to other pressing commitments.

Allow me to begin by thanking the Co-Chairs, Ms. Juliette Rosita Babb-Riley of Barbados and Ambassador Carolyn Schwalger of New Zealand for their able leadership of the Bureau during the intersessional period.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Bureau for continuing to put the decisions and guidance of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole into practice during the intersessional period.

By way of introduction, I would like to briefly recapitulate the key relevant elements of General Assembly resolution 71/257 of 23 December 2016 on "Oceans and the law of the sea". In that resolution, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendations adopted by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process at its seventh meeting, convened from 3 to 9 August 2016, including the programme of work for the period 2017-2020 for the second cycle.



In doing so, the Assembly noted with concern the findings of the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment – the so-called “World Ocean Assessment I”, which was released in January 2016. The General Assembly noted that the world’s ocean is facing major pressures simultaneously with such great impacts that the limits of its carrying capacity are being, or, in some cases, have been reached, and that delays in implementing solutions to the problems that have already been identified as threatening to degrade the world’s oceans will lead, unnecessarily, to incurring greater environmental, social and economic costs.

Referring to its decision to launch the second cycle of the Regular Process, the General Assembly stressed the importance of its successful implementation and decided that the second cycle will cover five years, from 2016 to 2020. The Assembly also decided that while in the first cycle the scope of the Regular Process focused on establishing a baseline, the scope of the second cycle would extend to evaluating trends and identifying gaps.

Further, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to secure the necessary resources, including the option of the regular budget of the Organization, for the programme of work for the period 2017-2020, as adopted by the seventh meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, in accordance with established procedures and within the respective purview of relevant bodies. In that regard, I note that the General Assembly approved the allocation of resources for the activities to be carried out in 2017 as outlined in the programme of work.

The programme of work sets out the two Outputs of the second cycle, namely, the second World Ocean Assessment or Assessments, and Regular Process support for other ocean-related intergovernmental processes, including the preparation of Technical Abstracts specifically tailored to the requests and needs of the processes.

It also outlines the activities in support of making the second cycle operational, including outreach and awareness-raising initiatives and capacity-building activities.

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With regard to the second Output, the Group of Experts has already produced three Technical Abstracts, tailored respectively to the requests and needs of the following:

- the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, General Assembly resolution 69/292:

- Development of 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,
- and a third one with a focus on oceans and climate change, to cover both the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change process and the topic of focus for the eighteenth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process to be held from 15 to 19 May here in New York (“The effects of climate change on oceans”).

It is important to note that these Technical Abstracts are based upon the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment and, in particular, upon its Summary which the General Assembly approved in December 2015. The Technical Abstracts are intended to provide a synthesis of the information and findings in the Assessment for the benefit of policy-makers in a concise and accessible format, as part of our efforts to facilitate the science-policy interface.

This brings me to the significance of the work before you during this eighth meeting which has been mandated by the General Assembly to consider the Technical Abstracts. By considering these Technical Abstracts, this Working Group has an opportunity to significantly build on the achievements of the first cycle of the Regular Process, including the relevance of the Assessment as a tool to guide policy-making.

I am pleased to note that the Technical Abstracts will be formally launched during the 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, to be held in New York from 5 to 9 June 2017, and look forward to your support in this regard. We also expect that at the same event, the publication of World Ocean Assessment I prepared in collaboration with Cambridge University Press will be released.

At this point, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the Group of Experts of the Regular Process for the valuable time and effort devoted to the preparation of the Technical Abstracts, as well as to the members of the Pool of Experts of the first cycle of the Regular Process that contributed to this exercise.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the work of the Bureau in reviewing the Abstracts as well as that of the secretariat, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, in reviewing and assisting in their finalization.



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Given the mandate of the Bureau to provide oversight of the delivery of the programme of work, this meeting will also consider a number of issues that will be instrumental to the success of the second cycle of the Regular Process, including the consideration of the following: the revised terms of reference and working methods of the Group of Experts; and the elements of guidelines for workshops to assist the Regular Process.

You may recall in this regard that, according to the programme of work, the holding of workshops and their follow-up, are envisaged to play a central role in raising the awareness of stakeholders to the Regular Process, the identification and collection of data, the identification/scoping of regional priorities and the wider dissemination of the outcome of the first cycle of the Regular Process – the Assessment. They will also foster a wider geographical representation in the appointment of experts to the Pool of Experts. The hosting of and participation in such workshops is therefore very important.

I would therefore welcome any initiative from members of the Working Group to host workshops or to contribute to their preparation in any other way.

This brings me to another key factor that will be instrumental to the achievement of the outputs in the programme of work, that is, the realization of the full membership in the Group of Experts, taking into account the need to ensure geographical distribution and adequate expertise in socioeconomic disciplines.

I wish to take the opportunity to encourage further nominations from the relevant regional groups. Related to this is the establishment of the Pool of Experts of the second cycle, with the overall goal of having as diverse a pool as possible in order to facilitate the preparation of the second world ocean assessment or assessments.

I would like to note that an important aspect of the appointment process is the role of national focal points in, inter alia, identifying experts. Pursuant to paragraph 312 of resolution 71/257, such focal points need to be designated by States no later than 31 May 2017. A communication regarding this will be sent by my office inviting States to do so. I encourage States to fully participate in the appointment process for the Pool of experts as expeditiously as possible.

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It goes without saying that the world ocean constitutes an essential foundation for life and prosperity. In this regard, the Assessment compels us to take action to protect and preserve the marine environment in order for the ocean to sustain its capacity to provide for ecosystem services and its role as the main carbon and heat sink of our planet. The Technical Abstracts reiterate the fact that the greatest threat to the ocean comes from a failure to deal quickly with the manifold problems impacting on the oceans and their ability to sustain human life and livelihoods.

The importance of this meeting within the overall framework of the Regular Process should not be underestimated. For a start, the consideration of the Technical Abstracts by this meeting provides an impetus to the continued implementation of the second cycle.

It is anticipated that this meeting will adopt recommendations to the seventy-second session of the General Assembly and that the General Assembly will give due consideration to the recommendations of the Working Group emanating from this meeting regarding the Technical Abstracts and other building blocks that are fundamental to fulfilling the programme of work, in particular the steps towards the preparation of the assessment or assessments of the second cycle.

As you embark on your important discussions today and tomorrow, I would like to wish you a very successful meeting, and assure you that the Secretariat remains committed to providing the Regular Process with its full assistance and support.

Thank you.