



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

Opening Remarks

By

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Co-Chairpersons,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Good morning. On behalf of the Secretary-General, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Headquarters for the sixth 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.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ms. Fernanda Millicay of Argentina and Mr. João Madureira of Portugal on their re-appointment by the President of the General Assembly as Co-Chairs. I am confident that their experience and leadership will continue to contribute to the success of this very important meeting. I also wish to thank both Co-Chairs for steering the inter-sessional work of the Bureau. At the same time, I wish to thank all members of the Bureau for their valuable contribution to the advancement of the Regular Process since the last meeting of the Working Group in March 2014.

Distinguished delegates,

The Working Group has had an important role in assisting the General Assembly in guiding the Regular Process through its first cycle, which has resulted in the first global integrated marine assessment.

I am pleased to note that the Working Group will consider this first Assessment, sometimes referred to as the first “World Ocean Assessment”, this week.

In this regard, allow me to use this opportunity to congratulate the members of the Group of Experts, a number of whom are in the meeting today, on this significant achievement.

In particular, I would like to thank the Joint Coordinators, Mr. Alan Simcock and Ms. Lorna Inniss, for their invaluable work in steering the first World Ocean Assessment towards its completion. We all know that the completion of this monumental task has been at great personal cost and sacrifice for the members of the Group of Experts.

I also wish to acknowledge the work of those members of the Pool of Experts who actively contributed to the preparation of the World Ocean Assessment.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the significant scientific, technical and financial assistance to the Regular Process provided by the United Nations Environment Programme, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO and other relevant intergovernmental organizations.

Distinguished delegates,

The first World Ocean Assessment is of crucial importance and forms the basis for future assessments. It can support informed decision-making and therefore contribute to managing in a sustainable manner human activities that affect the oceans and seas.

More specifically, this and future assessments will constitute an important source of information for policymakers when implementing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the related Agreements and other legal instruments. The importance of such assessments, and of the Regular Process more generally, to the future 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly its ocean-related goals, cannot be emphasized enough.

Moreover, the first World Ocean Assessment will provide an important scientific basis for future considerations of and decisions on ocean issues in intergovernmental forums, such as the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea. It is also essential that current and planned scientific assessments take into account the first World Ocean Assessment.

This meeting of the Working Group has an ambitious and important agenda. For example, you will need to recommend to the General Assembly:

- how the first World Ocean Assessment could support decision-making at the global, regional and national level;
- what new or further assessments need to be carried out; and , critically,
- how gaps in knowledge and capacity can be addressed. The recommendations on such issues emanating from this meeting are of fundamental importance, as they will inform the General Assembly's work in this regard at a time when the international community is increasingly focusing its attention on oceans.

Distinguished delegates,

As part of your agenda this week, you will also have the opportunity to consider lessons learned from the first cycle and the way forward. While a first World Ocean Assessment was produced, there are important lessons to be learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process.

In this regard, allow me to highlight two issues.

Firstly, and with respect to the level of participation and the representation of regions in the Process, more than 300 of the more than 600 experts in the Pool of Experts participated in the writing teams of the 55 chapters of the first World Ocean Assessment. While this appears to be an impressive level of participation, it needs to be put in perspective, as, initially, it was expected that the Pool of Experts would be at least 1,500 strong. In addition, certain regions have been considerably under-represented in these efforts, due to, among other things, lack of capacity.

Secondly, as regards the available resources to support the Regular Process, I would like to begin by expressing deep appreciation to all those who contributed to the Voluntary Trust Fund for the Regular Process. Such contributions facilitated the provision of financial assistance to members of the Group of Experts from developing countries.

However, it has become clear that the activities under the Regular Process cannot be carried out without predictable and sustained financing. I note that this is also confirmed by the Group of Experts. In addition, the experience of my Office has demonstrated that it would be unrealistic to expect that adequate support can be provided to the next phase of the Regular Process without additional resources.

Therefore, when the lessons learned and the way forward are considered this week, both the issues of wider participation and financing will require your attention.

Distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, Member States have emphasized in various forums, including the General Assembly, how oceans are essential to the long-term survival and prosperity of humankind. Ensuring their health and capacity to support life on earth is therefore critical. A Regular Process, supported by Member States, and provided with adequate resources, can play a vital role in achieving that objective.

As you embark on your important discussions, I would like to wish you a very successful meeting. As always, the Secretariat is committed to providing the meeting with its full assistance and support.

Thank you.