

**General Assembly Ad Hoc Open-ended Informal Working
Group to study issues relating to the conservation and
sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas
of national jurisdiction**

**Opening remarks by Ms. Patricia O'Brien
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs,
The Legal Counsel**

**19 August 2013, 10:00am
(Conference Room 1)**

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I have the pleasure of welcoming you to New York to continue your important discussions on the vital issue of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate H.E. Ambassador Kohona of Sri Lanka and Ms. Lijnzaad of the Netherlands on their re-appointment as Co-Chairs of this Working Group. Since 2010, they have demonstrated their unfailing commitment to the issues tackled by the Working Group. They have led the Working Group to successful

outcomes at its last three meetings and I am confident that this year's meeting will be no exception.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nearly ten years ago, in 2004, based on the outcome of the Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea at its fifth meeting, the General Assembly assessed the need for a process to consider the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. As a result, it established this Working Group.

Since then, the Working Group has met five times and, as testimony to the importance of its discussions, has been requested by the General Assembly, since 2010, to provide it with recommendations. In 2012, following a decision of the General Assembly, the Working Group embarked on a new journey, focused on ensuring that the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction effectively addresses those issues.

In that context, with a view to improving understanding of the issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and to clarifying key questions as an input to the work of the Working Group, two Workshops were held in May this year. These related to marine genetic resources, and conservation and management tools, including area-based management and environmental impact assessments. The Workshops also considered issues related to international cooperation, as well as capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. The summary of proceedings of the Workshops prepared by the Co-Chairs is available as document *A/AC.276/6*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Workshops have shed light on many critical issues at the centre of your discussions. The scientific and technical information provided at the Workshops has showed that the sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction provides opportunities for sustainable development. At the same time, that information has also highlighted that, while efforts have been undertaken, marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction continues to be lost at rates which threaten the very basis upon which millions of people around the world rely for food, employment and an optimal climate.

At the Rio+20 Conference last year, Member States made a commitment, building on the work of the Working Group and before the end of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, to address, on an urgent basis, the issue of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, including by taking a decision on the development of an international instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Yet, as also showed at the Workshops, different views continue to be held on the ways in which the critical situation that our oceans and their biodiversity face today may be addressed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Needless to say, you have an important task ahead of you, namely advising the General Assembly on a consensual way forward towards achieving our common goal. The eyes of the international community are upon you. Our future and that of our children depend on healthy, productive oceans.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As many of you know, this will be the last year in which I have the privilege to address the Working Group in my capacity as Legal Counsel of the United Nations. Over the past five years, I have had the pleasure of working directly with you, or through the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, on key issues relating to the law of the sea and ocean affairs. It has been a truly rewarding experience and I am very grateful to you for the role you play.

I wish you every success in fulfilling the challenging mandate of the Working Group and I assure you of the continued full support of my Office.

Thank you.