

## The spoken word applies

### The Resource Efficiency Challenge in the Marine Environment

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#### Introduction

1. We live in times where it is easy to forget a major pillar and achievement of the European Union - its strong commitment and progress in protecting the natural wealth we all depend on. Overshadowed by the financial crisis and ever-growing pressure to achieve economic growth in the EU, many think that we cannot afford being a front-runner in sustainable development any more. Such short-term thinking puts our future at risk.
2. If we want to continue to enjoy our standard of living we need a significant transformation of our ways of life, with the goal that each country can achieve economic development while preserving the environment. Especially in the marine there is a great potential for a shift towards more sustainable patterns. "Blue growth" that tap into the potential of our natural environment - from generating renewable energy and sustainable fisheries, to promoting environmentally sound tourism and transportation.
3. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our societies are facing unparalleled challenges as the accumulated impacts of human activities are irreversibly shaping the face of our planet. Many scientists have therefore begun to refer to our epoch as the Anthropocene era. A term coined for the first time by Nobel

Prize laureate Paul Crutzen in 2001. Humankind has entered a new geological era where humanity has emerged as a geological force, capable of planetary-scale changes in the Earth system.

4. The Anthropocene represents both a challenge and an ethical call to action. We are experiencing rapid population growth – Earth soon at 9 billion inhabitants – increasing pressure on ecosystems and biodiversity, few ecosystems left on Earth that are unexploited, and rapid development of technologies to intensify the exploitation of natural resources.

5. Any attempt to achieve sustainable development in the Anthropocene requires appropriate attention to central issues such as sustainable energy for all and food security. Ultimately a fundamental transformation of our economic approaches towards circular economy and closing resource cycles will be needed.

6. Putting forward Sustainable Development Goals in the post-2015 development Agenda now holds critical potential for transforming global sustainability governance. But we have to make sure that we move beyond the approach of the Millennium Development Goals. They were goals mainly for the developing south. This time we need to make sure that the SDGs are truly global. Their targets and indicators also need to cover unsustainable resource use patterns of the developed north.

7. For the oceans and coasts, there are already established global targets that should be built upon. Drawing upon national and regional experience with regard to setting indicators and targets the SDGs would integrate oceans and coasts in a set of measureable and clearly defined global objectives. They will guide future transitions towards sustainability and help to find the right balance between the use and protection of marine resources.

8. The oceans – covering more than two-thirds of the Earth – are vital for many countries in their development and fight to tackle poverty, but the wide range of marine ecosystem services, including food security and climate regulation, are under threat.

9. The vast majority of commercial fish stocks are exploited well beyond sustainable levels. Land-based activities are leading to marine litter, eutrophication; exploration for resources causing significant levels of underwater noise, climate change is leaving us with an ocean that is warming up, rising high and turning sour.

10. At the same time, human uses of the oceans continue to expand:

- deep-sea mining to extract ever more mineral resources (when we fail to recover more than 1% of the materials already in circulation);
- fisheries and aquaculture (when we fail to sustainably manage wild fish stocks);
- offshore oil and gas exploitation (when we fail to make use of the full potentials of renewable energies);
- proposals for marine climate engineering (when we fail to achieve the emissions targets we have committed ourselves to).

11. If we want to achieve “a decent life for all” in post-2015 we need to change this state of affairs and find ways that unlock the potentials of our ocean without compromising future generation’s perspectives. This is possible! Estimates of the FAO and World Bank show for example that the world economy could gain up to USD 50 billion annually by restoring fish stocks and reducing fishing capacity to an optimal level.

12. Particularly given the fundamental importance of sustainable development and environmental protection policies set out in the founding treaties of the European Union. We have not just a moral responsibility to address this dire situation; we also have a legal responsibility to do so. Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states clearly that

“Union policy on the environment shall contribute to pursuit of the following objective – preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment”.

### **“Healthy Oceans and Productive Ecosystems”: Where We Stand in Europe**

13. According to the upcoming 2014 Marine Baseline Assessment, the European Environmental Agency has made very clear that marine ecosystems are in a poor state of health in many areas. The cumulative impacts of fisheries, shipping and pollution are profound, yet difficult to assess and regulate.

14. There is good news, however: we have policies and legal instruments in place that can guide a transformation toward sustainability - if implemented fully and courageously.

15. For the first time, Member States have reported under the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** on the state of the environment in their waters, on how they define “good environmental status” and the objectives and targets they have set for themselves for 2020. The results show, however, that much more effort will be necessary to actually reach these goals. It is also very clear from the report that the European seas face very different challenges. Eutrophication in the Baltic and Black Seas is creating oxygen-free “dead zones”. Trawling is destroying the seabed in the North Sea. The Mediterranean is experiencing ever-growing human pressure related to fishing and tourism.

16. Member States must implement the Marine Strategy Framework Directive more consistently and coherently in order to achieve real improvement in our marine environment. However, in the longer term, this alone won’t be enough. We must reduce pressure on the marine environment by transforming our economies and identifying more sustainable ways of living, producing and consuming, in particular on land.

17. After years of preparation, the EU has finally managed a comprehensive reform of the **Common Fisheries Policy**. The EU now has regulations in place to ensure multi-annual management and a discard ban requiring that all catches are landed. The EU has also begun applying maximum sustainable yield standards to fish catches, irrespectively of where they are caught.

18. Finally, the Commission presented a proposal for a **Maritime Spatial Planning Directive** in 2013, which could make a fundamental contribution to the integrated approach as put forward by the **Maritime Policy of European Union**.

### **The Global Challenge for EU policy on the marine environment**

19. These efforts at the EU level clearly deserve our support and commitment. As we all know, ecosystems do not respect legal boundaries. European waters are an integral part of the global ocean, not a separate part, and are ecologically fundamentally interconnected.

20. Europe's responsibility for the marine environment reaches well beyond the limits of national and supranational jurisdiction. It reaches into the areas of the oceans deemed Global Commons. UNCLOS sets out an integration imperative in its preamble "that the problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole". Sustainability is also fundamentally anchored in this concept of integration.

21. Since the Earth Summit Rio+20 in 2012 more attention is being given to the oceans and coasts at the international level. Momentum is gaining on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the high seas. The EU has been at the forefront of efforts to achieve a new legal instrument under UNCLOS to protect biological diversity in high seas areas.

22. The EU has consistently called for an "**Implementing Agreement**" in order to give UNCLOS the legal tools it needs to better implement the general

obligation to protect and conserve the marine environment. Discussions are on-going in the General Assembly's "Ad hoc open-ended informal Working Group on Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction" (the correct title is even longer). A decision will be made by August 2015 whether negotiations can begin on the more substantive content of the Implementing Agreement.

23. It has been proposed that essential elements of an Implementing Agreement would include mechanisms for:

- the establishment of marine protected areas in high seas areas,
- access and benefit-sharing regarding marine genetic resources,
- procedures for environmental impacts assessments, as well as
- capacity-building and technology transfer measures.

24. The Implementing Agreement would indeed be a tremendous step forward in international environmental and marine policy. However, we should avoid escalating the process into a "yes or no" decision with the potential for derailing the concerted effort to protect ABNJ, should states fail to agree to begin negotiations. Europe should continue to build consensus on the protection and sustainable use of biological diversity in high seas areas that we share as global Commons.

25. In parallel, complementary pathways towards sustainable ocean governance in ABNJ should also be taken. Already today, a large number of institutions have mandates to regulate activities in ABNJ. However, this is done sector by sector. These competent authorities operate largely independent, still failing to make use of their full collective potential. It is certainly not unfair to call the current institutional arrangements in ocean governance an "Alphabet bouillabaisse" as last week's Economist has done in its leader.

26. Nevertheless, these institutions already exist and ultimately, we must remain realistic that any new agreement might take many years to negotiate

and enter into force. The EU should therefore intensify its support for promising initiatives in ABNJ that take place e.g. at the regional level. 2014 represents the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. If we look back at 1974 in the history of Europe and compare it to what we have reached today in 2014 we see powerful evidence of how important regional processes are in transforming global affairs.

27. There are good examples in our own seas that could be role models and best practice for other parts of the world. The OSPAR Commission e.g. has established the world's first network of marine protected areas in the high seas. These areas are complemented by fisheries exclusion zones established through the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. This European success story demonstrates how regional cooperation can bring about globally relevant protection measures in the marine environment. We can also highlight important accomplishments in the Mediterranean and Baltic seas and increasing support for European cooperative action in the Black Sea region, still one of the world's most degraded marine environments.

28. In Europe the Regional Seas also play a central role in the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. We should build on this positive experience and also be promoting an active role of regional seas conventions beyond our own waters; for example through interregional cooperation with Western or Eastern Africa.

### **Concluding remarks**

29. Greece has chosen maritime policy and the marine environment as one of four priority areas. This provides an excellent opportunity to invigorate our efforts to achieve a transformation towards sustainability for our oceans.

30. 2014 is a critical year for global ocean governance with discussions on the SDGs and the UNCLOS Implementing Agreement. The HOPE conference

marks the moment in Europe when we are halfway between the adoption of the MSFD in 2008 and the 2020 deadline. There is little time left to reach our goal of healthy oceans and seas by 2020. We should use this opportunity to discuss the main challenges ahead and potential solutions to address them.