

The Blue Thread for Ocean Action

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A statement from Co-Chairs of Friends of Ocean Action and the World Economic Forum's Ocean Action Agenda

There has never been a greater need for concerted global ocean action, for the ocean's health is under threat and without a healthy and thriving ocean there can be no healthy and thriving planet. Climate and weather regulation, oxygen, food, jobs, livelihoods, coastal defences, biodiversity loss and more – the plethora of reasons why humanity may not survive without a healthy ocean are by now familiar to most.

Climate change represents a top threat to ocean health and thus planetary health. At the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, this November, we must elevate the ocean's major role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. We call upon all Parties to agree to move the needle of climate finance decisively in the direction of the sustainable blue economy. We must further emulate the momentum of the World Economic Forum's One Trillion Trees initiative under the ocean – by advancing global efforts to restore and protect mangrove, seagrass, macroalgae and other blue carbon assets. We note that mangroves, in particular, cover just 0.1% of the planet's surface but store up to 10 times more carbon per hectare than terrestrial forests, and thus are a critical ecosystem in the climate change battle.

So far in 2022, we have witnessed a swell of positive progress in our mission to stop the decline in ocean health. In March, Member States came together at the UN's fifth Environment Assembly and reached an historic decision to forge an international, legally-binding treaty to end plastic pollution. We call for global leaders to step up action to deliver international agreement on a robust treaty to end the scourge of plastic pollution.

In June this year, following more than two decades of negotiations, the World Trade Organization's 12th Ministerial Conference agreed to end harmful fisheries subsidies. This was a major victory for the marine environment, but the agreement does not come into force until a sufficient number of Members have completed their national acceptance processes. We call on all WTO Members to complete the latter with alacrity and deposit their instruments of acceptance with the WTO.

June also saw the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) reach the high levels of output expected of it. Unprecedented commitments in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14 were made across the conference's spectrum, including significant progress in pledges for ocean finance. The conference outcomes covered such areas as strengthening management of fish stocks, ending illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the advancement of ocean science, and protection of marine habitats through the development of markets for blue carbon. UNOC participants underscored the importance of the inextricable connections between the deep sea and other ocean domains and the need to constructively consider how any threats to it might challenge the integrity of these connections. We call for UNOC's voluntary commitments, solutions and innovations to be implemented without delay.

In August, the fifth Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity Beyond Areas of National Jurisdiction (BBNJ IGC5) concluded without achieving consensus agreement. Huge efforts and substantial progress were made at the conference, with the adoption of a High Seas Treaty coming extremely close. We call upon Member States convening at the 77th UN General Assembly to mandate an extension of BBNJ IGC5, with a view to a High Seas Treaty being instituted as soon as possible.

The remainder of 2022 holds two further seminal moments for transformative ocean action at a global scale: the G20 Leaders' Summit in Bali, Indonesia, and the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) COP15 in Montreal, Canada.

At the G20 Summit, we call upon leaders to mainstream the sustainable blue economy as a critical component of blue-green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing the emerging Ocean 20 (O20) stakeholder group as a supporting vehicle. At CBD COP15, we call upon all Parties to bridge differences and agree to the protection of 30% of the planet by 2030.

The success of ocean action measures taken to date this year augers well for the remaining environmental conferences of 2022. If it proves to be the case that they conclude in favour of the ocean's well-being, 2022 may well go down as the super year for the ocean we have hoped it would be, and the drive for SDG14's implementation will go up a gear in 2023.

We therefore entreat all UN Member States to play their part in achieving the positive outcomes of ocean action called for in this statement thereby creating a blue thread of progress, sustainability, equity and hope for us all to follow in fidelity with generations to come.

Ambassador Peter Thomson
Co-Chair, Friends of Ocean Action

Isabella Lövin
Co-Chair, Friends of Ocean Action

Kristian Teleki
Director, Friends of Ocean Action

Marc Benioff
Founding member, Friends of Ocean Action