

Speech for Our Oceans Conference. Malta, October 5-6 2017

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Our Oceans cover 70% of our planet, contain 90% of living biomass; produce more oxygen than all the world's forests; absorb around 30% of global carbon dioxide.

Hundreds of millions of people depend directly on our oceans for food, employment & income.

As others here have said, they are the blue beating heart of our planet. Trouble for the oceans, means trouble for us.

And the ecological and economic security of our oceans is under serious threat.

They are becoming warmer, more acidic and more polluted.

And, crucially, we are witness to the fact that most fisheries across the world are in a parlous state, under a relentless pressure of utilization that is all too often simply unsustainable.

So it is that some estimates claim 90% of the world's large ocean fish, species like cod, halibut and swordfish have been lost since the 1950s. The FAO makes clear that around 90% of the world's fish stocks are fully fished or over-fished.

And as fish stocks decline, we have growing demand and increasing capacity as the world's human population will reach around 9.7 billion people by 2050.

Yet at the same time, illegal fishing operators continue to plunder our fisheries, fishing unsustainably, using illegal, damaging gears, fishing in prohibited and protected areas, fishing without licence or limit to steal from others, often among the poorest on our planet, all while they undermine and dis-incentivise law abiding fishers and degrade and diminish our wild fish populations.

Some estimates suggest these illegal operators take 1 in every 4 fish, others have made even more worrying claims. Local communities suffer from this, as both food security and economic development is undermined; legitimate fishers and seafood businesses are put at a harsh disadvantage and governments lose vital revenue from tax and trade.

And it is these same "pirate" fishing vessels, illegal operators that we see time and time again engaged in other crimes, such as the use of trafficked human beings, and forced, bonded and slave labour to crew their boats.

But it does not have to be this way.

It is within our grasp to create sustainable, legal and ethical fisheries, where the growing global population has an equitable share and we take a bold, precautionary approach to the use and management of ocean resources.

And among our first priorities is the eradication of illegal fishing, both on our high-seas and in our coastal waters.

As a global community, we already understand these challenges and, crucially, have the tools to solve them.

Simple cost effective, changes to the basic architecture of national, regional and global fisheries management regimes to deliver *transparency* and through this a greatly enhanced ability to take action against illegal fishing can be delivered right now.

A call to governments to ratify and implement the FAO Port State Measures Agreement is clear and simple in its compelling rationale.

The rapid, near-term delivery of a global record of fishing vessels and along with this the adoption by Governments, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and businesses to make Unique Vessel Identifiers mandatory would prove transformative and have minimal costs.

Coordinated and concerted action to eradicate flags of convenience, working together to ensure a few open vessel registries take responsibility for the harm created by boats flying their flags, that help them escape detection and sanction.

The introduction of mandatory Vessel Monitoring Systems for all fishing vessels over 12 meters would transform our ability to track and manage them effectively.

Likewise, the roll out of new digital systems – falling in cost almost daily – to provide digital catch, licence and landing documentation, ships log and crew manifest, to provide actionable data, would not only greatly empower fisheries management officials to drive out illegal fishing, it would help eradicate the trafficking, slavery and violent human rights abuses on board fishing vessels that have been so prominently reported in recent years.

This technology would make it possible for information to be made open and transparent, giving confidence to industry and the consumers they supply that the seafood they are buying is legal, sustainable and slave-free.

Even the simple publication of vessel licence lists – a cost free action – would prove to be a game-changer.

By taking these actions together; we can protect national resources and enhance and secure the greater well-being of the High Seas that cover nearly half the surface of our planet and to-date which remain almost entirely unprotected.

By taking these actions together we can underwrite our ambition to continue to benefit from our oceans fisheries resources, and with determination we can secure these resources for future generations.

Today we have the technical and logistical tools, what is needed now is the political will and leadership to put these tools to work and build the regional and global collaborations that are so pressingly needed.

And that is why this meeting can prove profoundly important – giving voice to these ambitions; giving substance to shared actions and giving leadership to secure our goals.

To conclude, I believe it is a simple truth that action today can save our oceans for our tomorrow.

Thank you.