

Our Ocean Conference, 5.-6. October 2017
Remarks by Norwegian Minister of Climate and Environment, Mr Vidar Helgesen

Excellencies. Ladies and gentlemen. Friends of Our Ocean.

In the distant past, the oceans gave rise to life as we know it. And oceans hold an important key to our future.

The oceans are a source of immense wealth: it is estimated that the ocean economy could more than double its contribution to global value added by 2030, if we manage them wisely.

In other words: if we want the oceans to produce the resources we need in the future, we have to ensure their good health.

Just to give one example: According to the World Bank, the global fisheries sector is losing a staggering 83 billion USD each year, largely because of overfishing.

Dear friends,

Climate change and the impact of increasing carbon dioxide emissions on the oceans have been largely overshadowed in the climate change debate until recently. We know that most of the heat that has been added to the planet the last few decades has been absorbed by the oceans.

However, it has come with a price: Rising ocean temperatures and increased acidification are now becoming apparent in melting Arctic sea ice, coral bleaching and changed distribution of fish stocks. Tropical hurricanes such as Harvey and Irma are getting stronger when the ocean surface is getting warmer.

Science tells us that further warming will likely cause tropical storms to become more frequent and more intense in the future. Combined with sea-level rise and even more people living in vulnerable coastal zones around the world, the future impacts could be devastating.

In short, full and swift implementation of the Paris Agreement is of crucial importance for the oceans.

At the same time, pollution of the oceans still has to be addressed in an effective manner, and in particular we see alarming amounts of plastics in our oceans.

But thanks to Our Ocean and other initiatives, we have seen a new interest – a whole new momentum – to protect the worlds' oceans.

The UN Oceans Conference in June was a milestone. For the first time the United Nations spearheaded a global conference exclusively focusing on the health of the worlds' seas. It paved the way for a stronger focus on sustainable oceans in the UN in the years to come.

An increasing number of companies see the great opportunities offered by sustainable managed oceans. They are working hard to improve the environmental performance of existing ocean industries and develop new industries with less environmental impact.

The Our Ocean Conferences is much about mobilizing support for the oceans. This fits perfectly with Norwegian priorities.

This year our Government presented a new strategy for sustainable growth in the ocean industries, we launched a white paper on the role of the oceans in Norway's foreign and development policy, and a white paper on the update of the integrated management plan for the Norwegian Sea.

Furthermore, Norway has assigned two new marine national parks since last year's conference.

Dear friends,

Norway has given priority to place the issue of marine litter and plastic pollution on the global Ocean agenda, in particular at the two first United Nations Environment Assemblies in 2014 and 2016. Norway intends to follow up by putting forward a new resolution on stronger international

commitment to combat marine litter at the UNEA-3 in Nairobi in December this year.

Norway is also significantly stepping up its efforts to help combat marine litter and plastic pollution in developing countries. In 2018, we will launch a program of 150 million Norwegian kroner – about 16.2 million euro – for this purpose. The funds will be targeted towards regions that are most affected by marine litter and plastic pollution to reduce waste, improve waste management systems and other cost-effective measures to combat marine litter. Norway will collaborate with other countries and international organisations to ensure results.

I am happy to announce a brand new, innovative initiative by Norwegian retailers launched last week, to establish the "Norwegian Retailers Environment Fund". The fund is expected to mobilise substantial funds for the combat against marine litter at the national and international level. The source of funding is a charge on lightweight plastic carrier bags to consumers. This way Norway has found a innovative solution that is aimed at reducing total consumption of plastic carrier bags in Norway, while at the same time mobilising funds for the broader issue of marine litter and microplastics.

I am also happy to announce that Norway is strengthening its efforts against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. In May, we were the proud hosts of the first meeting of the parties to the FAO Port State Measures Agreement. We have committed to support the implementation of the agreement with up to 10 million Norwegian kroner – approximately 1.1 million euro.

Norway takes active part in the fight against transnational organized fisheries crime. Last week, Norway co-organised the Third International Symposium on Fisheries Crime together with the United Nation's Office for Drugs and Crime, Indonesia, the Nordic Council of Ministers and PescaDOLUS. Since last year we have entered into an agreement with the United Nation's Office for Drugs and Crime of 39.6 million Norwegian kroner – about 4.3 million euro. This represents a significant enhancement of the global efforts against this severe problem.

Norway is furthermore renewing our commitment to support FAO's work for small-scale fisheries in developing countries. Up to 23 million Norwegian kroner – approximately 2.5 million euro – has been set aside for this.

We are also launching “Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Ocean for Food Security and Nutrition”, an initiative in the context of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2015-2025. The objective is to give fish and seafood the position it deserves in food security and nutrition strategies, policies and programmes.

Dear Friends,

Our Ocean has grown to become a global arena for dealing with one of the most pressing issues of our time: How to conserve and sustainably use the oceans. We need continuous political attention. Norway is proud to be the host of Our Ocean in 2019, in Oslo. I can assure you that we will continue also in other ways to do our part in the years to come.

Thank you.