

United Nations Environment Assembly
“Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development”
Nairobi, 23 to 27 May 2016,

Statement by Ms. Vita Onwuasoanya
Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea

[Item 4. (d) Marine plastic, debris and microplastics; draft res. L.12]

Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,

I speak on behalf of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations. The Division serves as the secretariat of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, as well as of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. The Convention also dedicates an entire section (XII) to the protection and preservation of the marine environment. I note that the draft resolution under consideration makes reference to the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment (“the World Ocean Assessment”), as well as to General Assembly resolution 70/235 of 23 December 2015 on “Oceans and the Law of the sea”.

The Division serves as the secretariat for the Regular Process for global assessment of the state of the marine environment including socioeconomic aspects, and also services the informal consultations of the General Assembly on its draft resolutions on oceans and law of the sea as well as on sustainable fisheries.

Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,

The World Ocean Assessment considered the impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity. In particular, it dedicated one chapter to the issue

of marine debris, assessing, inter alia, its environmental impacts, the status of marine litter, its prevention and clean-up, and gaps in scientific research and information (chapter 25). The Summary of the Assessment noted, inter alia, that the growing use of plastics that degrade very slowly result in increased quantities reaching the ocean and have many adverse effects, including the creation of large quantities of marine debris in the ocean, and negative impacts on marine life and on the aesthetic aspects of many ocean areas, and thus consequent socioeconomic effects (pages 8 & 9).

I wish to note that the General Assembly has made a number of calls for action with regard to marine debris in its annual resolutions on oceans and the law of the sea and on sustainable fisheries (e.g., paragraphs 25, 170, 171, 312 of resolution 70/235, and paragraph 175). In particular, pursuant to resolutions 69/245 and 70/235, the issue of marine debris, plastics and microplastics will be the topic of focus of the 17th meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which will take place in New York from 13 to 17 June 2016.

The report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on "Marine debris, plastics and microplastics" (A/71/74), which will inform this meeting, provides an alarming assessment of how marine debris, including plastics and microplastics, are affecting the world oceans and hindering sustainable development. In conclusion, it states that it will be of critical importance to step up efforts in order to achieve internationally-agreed upon commitments, including those reflected in Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris, by 2025, and in other ocean-related goals. The report is currently available on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

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