

OCTA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

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OCTA OCEANS WORKSHOP

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Excellences, Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentleman, good morning.

I would like to talk a bit about OCTs and Oceans in the context of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly from a BVI perspective.

Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN, SDG14 calls for us to conserve and sustainably use our oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

There are 14 accompanying targets and indicators and the Call to Action outcome document of the UN Oceans Conference in New York in June 2017 provides a broad framework for implementation of this global goal that is viewed as critical to the future of humanity and life on our planet.

The OCTs which occupy a great deal of marine space and are ocean-based economies, are obviously keen to make Ocean sustainability an integral part of our agenda, which must be linked to the global 2030 Agenda.

The key question for us is: How can OCTs influence and participate in the sustainability of the Oceans as a part of the new international framework on sustainable development, particularly given our non-sovereign constitutional status? Is there a role for OCTs in the process?

Well at the international level, action on the sustainability of oceans is meant to be universal in scope. This is specifically because the stewardship and health of the Ocean which we rely on for our very survival is understood to be a collective responsibility of humanity that should not be limited by constitutional status.

Thus the UN Oceans Conference in New York was open to a wide range of stakeholders, including sovereign states, territories, NGOs, businesses and others, without whom the ill-health of the marine environment cannot be addressed.

Furthermore, in the Conference's outcome document, A Call to Action, there is special recognition of Small Island Developing States and a call for them to benefit more from their marine resources for their own sustainable development, but on the basis of sustainable tourism and fisheries.

On this particular point, a number of OCTs are designated by the UN as Small Island Developing States and are able to participate in UN forums and activities on Oceans.

The BVI participates in UN fora as an Associate Member of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The implementation of SDG14, and the 2030 Agenda as whole, will be supported by the UN at a regional level. This includes technical assistance on the integration of the SDGs into national plans.

Other OCTs are also Associate Members of a UN regional commission and do have the opportunity to participate in international fora by virtue of their status and to also benefit from technical assistance.

So at least from a sustainable development perspective, OCTs do have a seat at the table and do have a voice? But do we have anything meaningful to say? Do we have anything to contribute?

Well certainly. At the Oceans Conference in New York, the BVI, like other delegations, made a statement to the conference. In that statement we indicated our commitment as a Territory to implementing SDG14, particularly since under our constitution we have full responsibility for the overall management of the environment.

In particular, we highlighted that as a tourist destination we have imposed an environmental levy on all visitors to the islands to cover the cost of preserving our marine environment, among other environmental activities. This is our sustainable financing mechanism, an issue which has been much talked about in these circles.

The levy is based on the principle that the user of our territorial waters and marine resources, particularly for leisure purposes such as yachting, must pay for their use. The proceeds will pay for projects geared toward the sustainability of our marine and nearshore environment, such as coral replanting which will in turn preserve a key component of our tourism product. Our goal is to create a virtuous cycle where the marine environment is continuously replenished and renewed after use.

We also made a statement in the conference's partnership dialogue on sustainable fisheries. There we committed to ensuring that sports fishing is done more sustainably to ensure that species such as marlins and sword fish are returned to the Ocean with as little harm as possible to ensure they are not overly weakened and succumb to other predators.

We also highlighted the risks presented to Small Island Developing States by climate change which can make the ocean a highly destructive force. This was well before the hurricanes of 2017 devastated us.

Our contributions were very well received and a number of partners want to work with us on follow-up.

So OCTs do have something to contribute to the sustainability of oceans and can and should share our experiences with the rest of the world.

The 2030 Agenda provides a framework for this and it can be the starting point for our Ocean agenda.

In terms of the OCTs'

partnership with the EU, the essential question is whether the EU's commitment to the implementation of SDG14 moves OCTs up on the EU agenda?

If so, what exactly does this mean? In the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework will the EU dedicate a greater proportion of resources to OCTs specifically targeting Ocean sustainability? This would certainly be helpful in terms of building on the Caribbean's 11th EDF regional programming exercise which will focus in part on marine biodiversity.

Or will the potential absence of a number of OCTs after 2020 diminish the importance of OCTs to the EU with respect to Oceans? This remains to be seen.

What is clear is that as it stands now, the OCTs, along with ORs, are the EU's bridge into the oceans and seas beyond Europe.

The EU will have greater reach and influence on the sustainability of the oceans because of OCTs.

Thus the 2030 Agenda and SDG 14 gives OCTs greater strategic value to the EU in terms of its ocean agenda.

OCTs must be conscious of this shift in their value proposition to the EU as we engage in post-2020 discussions.

There is leverage to be exercised here.

Also, will the EU help OCTs to mobilise non-governmental resources to support their efforts to sustain their own territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones.

In conclusion, the OCTs can begin setting an ocean agenda by starting with SDG14 under the 2030 Agenda. In doing so they must participate in international fora on Oceans, which also help them to strike partnerships.

We must share our best practices with others in the world.

The EU is an essential partner who must see OCTs as strategic partners on oceans that amplify their global position and influence. The EU must move OCTs up on their ocean agenda for the mutual benefit of all.

I thank you for your attention.