



PALAU



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Statement by
H.E. Mr. Stuart Beck
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to
the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas
of national jurisdiction

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New York

Five years ago, at the first UN conference on biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions, Palau observed that this issue presents us with a choice: will we "build the force of common will for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources," or will we allow these resources to be exploited for the short-term benefit of a few? The signs these past five years are not encouraging.

First, countries continue to allow shark finning in the high seas, putting many shark species on a path to extinction. It is unfortunate that it took hunting sharks to the point of oblivion to appreciate that removing a 300 million year old top predator has adverse effects all the way down the marine ecosystem. This practice must stop.

Second, countries also continue to allow and even subsidize bottom trawling in the high seas. Deep sea coral reefs and sponge beds house unimaginable and largely unexplored biological potential. Before our scientists have had a chance to study them, however, bottom trawls reduce them to rubble for the sake of catching a few fish to be sold in niche markets. This must stop.

Third, countries also continue to emit greenhouse gasses at toxic levels. Carbon dioxide is acidifying our oceans, warming the seas, and endangering marine life as we know it. Countries know this, but they continue to emit at toxic levels. This too must stop.

Co-chairs,

These reckless activities are already prohibited by international law, which requires States to "protect and preserve the marine environment" (UNCLOS article 192) by "tak[ing], or . . . cooperat[ing] with other States in taking, such measures for their respective nationals as may be necessary for the conservation of the living resources of the high seas" (UNCLOS article 117). The focus of this conference should be on how States can meet these basic obligations.

Co-chairs,

Proposals are being made to begin negotiations on a new implementing agreement for high seas biodiversity. Palau supports this idea, so long as we do not get distracted from the overriding need to ensure that States meet their existing obligations towards the marine environment.

Co-chairs,

In 1967, Ambassador Pardo of Malta noted that the world faced a familiar choice about the promise and perils of our exploitation of the ocean. He remarked that, quote, "[our] penetration of the deep could mark the beginning of the end for man, and indeed for life as we know it on this earth: [but] it could also be a unique opportunity to lay solid foundations for a peaceful and increasingly prosperous future for all peoples." His call resulted in an agreement on the modern law of the sea. Let us embrace that example and choose to move forward together.

Thank you.