



## HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### SDG 14 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Life below water

17 July 2025, 10:00 – 13:00

Conference Room 4

#### Secretariat Background Note

In the [World Ocean Assessment II](#), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres recalled that *‘the ocean plays a crucial role in [...] the livelihoods of billions of people’* and that *‘we urgently need to change how we interact with it’*. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 provides the transformative framework needed to deliver on such a change. [SDG 14](#) calls on the international community to *‘conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’* and establishes ten action-oriented targets. Four of the targets were to be achieved by 2020 (targets 14.2., 14.4., 14.5., 14.6.). The deadline for target 14.1. on marine pollution is 2025. Other targets need to be implemented by 2030—only five years from now.

Despite the ambitious action framework set up by SDG 14, the ocean remains in a state of emergency. Issues such as ocean acidification, warming, eutrophication, and deoxygenation are escalating and often interacting, all compounded by climate change. Plastic pollution continues to plague marine and coastal ecosystems, and overfishing remains a significant concern, with over one-third of global fish stocks being exploited at biologically unsustainable levels. These challenges not only threaten the health of the ocean and its ecosystems, but also that of over three billion people who depend on it.

The [2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024](#) confirms that action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet the SDG 14 targets (Fig.1.).





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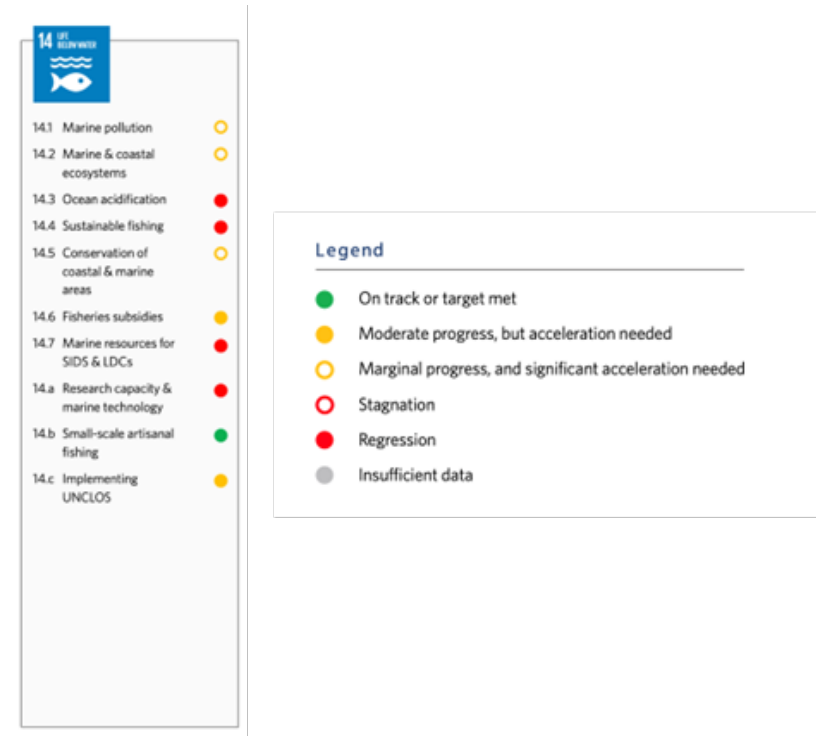


Figure.1. SDG progress by target – SDG 14.

Source : <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

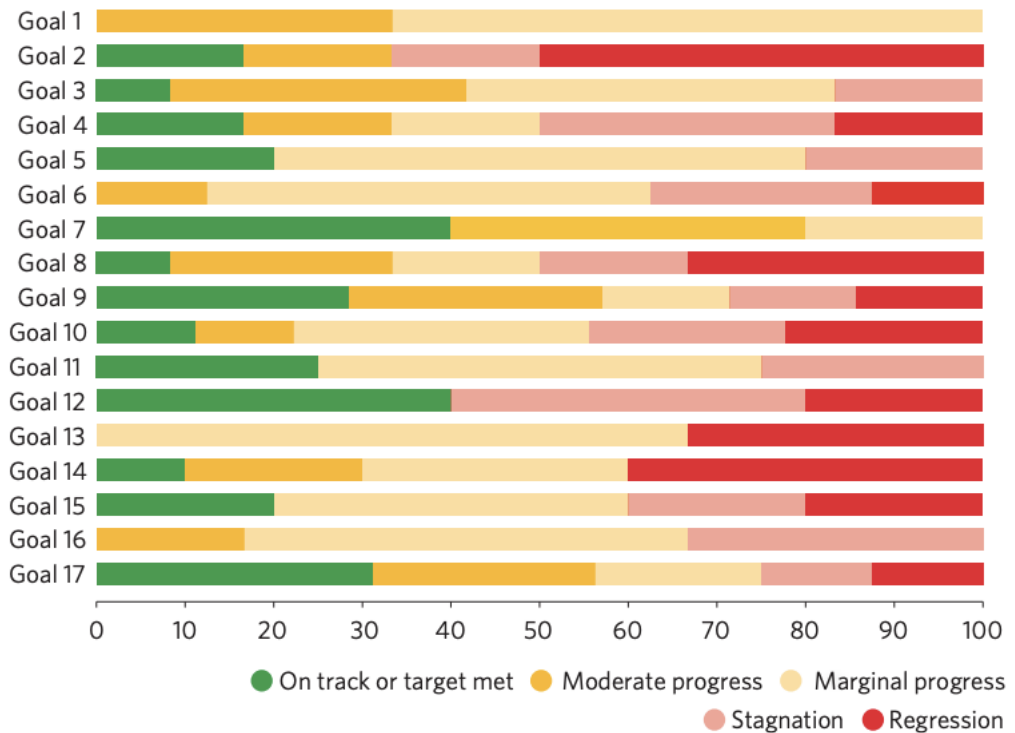
According to the report, only about 10 per cent of the SDG 14 targets are on track or met (Fig.2.). A concerning trend, the report highlights that about 40 per cent of SDG 14 targets are regressing below the 2015 baseline levels (Fig.2.). In addition, as stated in [UN DESA Background Note for UNOC3](#), Goal 14 remains the most underfunded of all Goals. The note reminds that while nearly \$175 billion per year is needed to achieve Goal 14 by 2030, less than \$10 billion was allocated to this goal between 2015 and 2019. More detailed analysis on mobilizing resources for SDG 14 is available in the Concept Paper prepared for Ocean Action Panel 3: [Mobilizing finance for ocean actions in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14.](#)



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**Progress assessment for the 17 Goals based on assessed targets, by Goal (percentage)**



**Figure 2. Progress assessment for the 17 Goals based on assessed targets, by Goal (percentage).** Source: United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

The [2025 SDG Progress Report \(A/80/81-E/2025/62\)](#) provides updates on progresses made in implementing five of the SDG14 targets. For Target 14.2, the report highlights that as of 2024, 126 countries and territories were engaged in marine spatial planning initiatives, a tool for implementing ecosystem-based approaches to managing marine areas—up 20 per cent from 2023. However, the report points out that only 45 have formally approved marine spatial plans. Regarding Target 14.3, the report underscores the ongoing deterioration of ocean acidification conditions, as evidenced by the continued decline in global average surface pH driven by increasing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. Addressing SDG14.4, the report recalls that in 2021, the share of overfished global fishery stocks rose to 37.7 per cent, up from 35.4 per cent in 2019, confirming a continued deterioration despite earlier signs of slowing decline. Looking into SDG14.6, the report flags that



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Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to threaten the sustainability of global fisheries. However, it also notes that countries' average degree of implementation of the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing has remained steady. Lastly, the report provides an update on target 14.6., stating that in 2024, while global adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines for Small-Scale Fisheries continued to grow on their tenth anniversary, the average implementation score dropped from 5 to 4, though overall progress has been positive since 2018 with increased country reporting.

Since the 2022 HLPF SDG 14 Review and the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, several critical milestones have been achieved in global efforts to conserve and sustainably use ocean resources. In March 2022 a historic resolution titled "End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument" was adopted at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. Negotiations for this plastic treaty are ongoing, with the goal of completion in 2025. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted in June 2022, aims to halt harmful fisheries subsidies, and efforts to negotiate the overfishing articles are well underway. Further, the Food and Agriculture Organization unveiled the details of a major update to its methodology for the State of Stocks Index (SOSI) that increases from 500 to 2600 the number of the world's stocks in the Index. It provides a more precise and region-specific picture of the world's maritime fisheries resources.

Similarly, evidence on the impact of small-scale fisheries on food and nutrition security and livelihoods continues to grow. Ocean Action Panel (OAP 9): "[Promoting the role of sustainable food from the ocean for poverty eradication and food security](#)" addresses these issues in more detail. Also, the FAO Illuminating Hidden Harvest report, launched in 2023, demonstrated the need to double efforts to deliver SDG target 14.7.

In December 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the [fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties \(COP 15\)](#) following a four year [consultation and negotiation process](#). This historic Framework, which includes goals and targets relevant to the



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ocean, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. In March 2023, UNEA adopted resolution 6/15 on strengthening ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution.

In June 2023, after nearly 20 years of discussions, the historic Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction was adopted. The UN Ocean Decade Conference was held in April 2024, Barcelona, highlighting the important role of the science-policy interface and science-based innovation in ocean action.

The SIDS4 conference in May 2024 saw unanimous appeals for the protection and sustainable use of ocean resources for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Ocean-based solutions have been incorporated into mainstream discussions under the frameworks of UNFCCC COPs and CBD COPs, addressing the crucial interlinkages of ocean-climate change-biodiversity.

A living repository of concrete actions supporting the implementation of SDG 14, the registry of Voluntary Commitments (VCs) managed by UN DESA currently hosts over 2,100 commitments from Governments, UN entities, philanthropic organizations, NGOs and other stakeholders. Following UNOC3, hundreds of additional commitments have been reviewed and approved by UN DESA. A 2025 publication titled “[Analysis of the voluntary commitments registered at or around the second United Nations Ocean Conference, including their impacts](#)”, commissioned by UN DESA, provides further qualitative and quantitative information on Ocean-related VCs.

The online [Expert Group Meeting on SDG14 in preparation for HLPF 2025](#) organized by UN DESA on 12 and 13 May 2025 reviewed global progress on SDG 14 ahead of the 2025 HLPF. Discussions highlighted ongoing challenges such as overfishing, marine pollution, inadequate marine protected areas, and the vulnerability of coastal and small island states. Despite some advancements—like stronger global instruments, improved fisheries data, and the adoption of the BBNJ Agreement—the EGM showed that implementation gaps remain, particularly in funding, governance, and capacity-building. The meeting emphasized the importance of inclusive,



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science-based, and rights-driven solutions, interlinkages with other SDGs, and the need for transformative partnerships. Strengthening monitoring, local participation, and policy coherence were identified as key to accelerating SDG 14 delivery.

Leveraging interlinkages between SDG 14 and other SDGs is of paramount importance to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This has been acknowledged by the 2025 [UN Ocean Conference outcome document](#), in which Parties ‘*underline the importance of interlinkages between the ocean, climate and biodiversity and call for enhanced and coordinated global action to minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on the health of the ocean, its species and its ecosystems as well as coastal communities, including those who rely on the ocean for their food and livelihoods.*’ Detailed analyses of these interlinkages has already been produced by UN DESA, including in the [Concept paper](#) for the ‘Interactive dialogue 8: Leveraging interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other Goals towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ for UNOC 2, as well in as the 2017 ‘[DESA Working Paper No. 149 Mapping the linkages between oceans and other Sustainable Development Goals: A preliminary exploration](#)’. Further information is also available in the Ocean Action Panel 7: “[Leveraging ocean, climate and biodiversity interlinkages](#)”.

### Proposed questions for discussion

- How might recent crises, new commitments, COP’s discussions on climate and biodiversity, and emerging technologies affect longer term trends and change the landscape for achieving SDG 14?
- What are the key elements of an effective science-policy-society interface, bringing marine science into decision-making in an inclusive and forward-looking manner and advancing the 2030 Agenda as a whole?
- Over the past 10 years, what have been the biggest impediments to implementing SDG 14 in different regions?
- What are the emerging opportunities to accelerate achievement of SDG 14 by 2030?
- What opportunities exist for building on synergies with other policy goals and for managing trade-offs?