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Delegations will find herewith the above-mentioned Council conclusions on Oceans and Seas, as adopted by the Council (General Affairs) on 19 November 2019.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON OCEANS AND SEAS

The Council of the European Union,

RECALLING:

- the Council Conclusions on the Integrated Maritime Policy of December 2008, 16 November 2009, 14 June 2010, 19 December 2011, 11 December 2012, 25 June 2013 and 24 June 2014¹;
- the Council Conclusions on the Arctic of 20 June 2016²;
- the Council Conclusions on 'International ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans' of 3 April 2017³;
- the Council Conclusions on Blue Growth of 26 June 2017⁴;
- the Council Conclusions on the revision of the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) Action Plan of 26 June 2018⁵;

1. STRESSES that climate change is a direct and existential threat to life in oceans and seas globally; EMPHASISES that the principles of sustainability, including the precautionary principle, are at the core of European policies; EMPHASISES the importance of holistic, integrated and science-based ocean policies; STRESSES that issues related to oceans and seas need to be addressed at local, national, regional and global level; STRESSES the importance of fostering the sustainable development of established and emerging economic sectors related to oceans, seas and coasts for Europe's economy and employment through the Union's Integrated Maritime Policy and through Member States' policies.

¹ 16503/1/08 REV 1, 15175/1/09 REV 1, 10300/10, 18279/11, 16553/12 + COR 1, 10790/13 and 11204/14

² 10400/16

³ 8029/17

⁴ 10662/17

⁵ 10494/18

2. ACKNOWLEDGES that reversing the decline in ocean health, conserving its ecosystems and sustainably using marine resources to ensure healthy and resilient oceans will require a profound change, including societal and economic.
3. REAFFIRMS that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.
4. WELCOMES the role of the EU and its Member States in promoting oceans as a global policy priority and in encouraging international cooperation and coordination across scales, jurisdictions and sectors, including through the UN, FAO, IMO and ILO and relevant multilateral agreements to promote ocean sustainability; RECALLS the importance of regional cooperation in this context.
5. EMPHASISES the importance of clean, healthy and productive oceans whose ecosystems are conserved and whose resources are sustainably used for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; UNDERLINES SDG14 (Life Below Water) as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, aiming at the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; STRESSES that additional attention should be given to reaching the targets to be achieved by 2020 and 2025, including through regional seas conventions, regional action plans, regional fisheries management organisations and their follow-up and review mechanism; HIGHLIGHTS that the International Ocean Governance Agenda for the future of our oceans is as an integral part of the EU's response to the 2030 Agenda.
6. NOTES WITH GREAT CONCERN the warming of European regional seas at a higher pace than average.
7. ACKNOWLEDGES that Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States which depend on marine resources for food security and sustainable economic development are particularly affected by declining ocean health and productivity.

8. WELCOMES WITH APPRECIATION the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services approved in May 2019; EXPRESSES ITS DEEP CONCERN at the alarming information on the state of biodiversity, including marine and coastal ecosystems; UNDERLINES that the multiple human drivers of climate change, biodiversity loss and ocean degradation and depletion must be addressed with urgency and in a coherent way.
9. HIGHLIGHTS the designation and effective management of Marine Protected Areas in line with the strategic goals and targets of the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), including the AICHI target 11 under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its follow-up, and other effective area-based conservation measures for marine and coastal biodiversity conservation and restoration and UNDERLINES the importance of the ecosystem-based approach as an efficient method in protecting the biodiversity of vulnerable marine and coastal ecosystems.
10. STRESSES the need for immediate action against increasing threats and their cumulative impacts on our oceans, seas and coastal areas, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, acidification, eutrophication and expanding hypoxic areas, pollution by dangerous and hazardous substances, invasive alien species (IAS), marine litter and micro plastics, underwater noise, over-exploitation of marine resources and illegal activities.
11. RECOGNISES the progress made within the framework of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to ensure that fisheries are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable, and reaffirms the need to continue with the full implementation of the CFP, including the landing obligation, multiannual management plans, and regionalisation of the policy, respecting the Maximum Sustainable Yield as well as effective control and enforcement.
12. REAFFIRMS the need to continue to minimise the negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine environment, including by minimising bycatches such as cetaceans, seabirds, reptiles and other sensitive species, while maintaining the objective of securing sustainable food production from the sea.

13. HIGHLIGHTS the important contribution that EU space activities, programmes and infrastructure offer to the protection of the marine environment, the assessment of the impact of climate change, the promotion of a sustainable EU Blue Economy and the enhancement of maritime security.
14. ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of high-level ocean conferences and events such as the United Nations 2020 Conference in Lisbon to Support the Implementation of SDG 14, the Our Ocean Conference 2019 in Oslo and the Our Ocean Conference 2020 in Palau that seek solutions to ocean issues by combining policy, governance, technology, scientific and technical support and finance, and by creating a platform for governments, organisations and businesses for tangible and measurable commitments and actions that contribute to clean, healthy and productive oceans.
15. STRESSES the importance of enhanced marine and maritime research and knowledge of the impact of activities at sea; REAFFIRMS the strong involvement of the EU and its Member States in the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).
16. REAFFIRMS the need to ensure a level-playing field based on decent work and social sustainability in the Blue Economy, including fisheries, by promoting and effectively applying Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and the relevant international conventions such as the ILO Maritime Labour Convention 2006 and the Work in Fishing Convention 2007.

I. OCEANS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

17. EXPRESSES its appreciation for the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); WELCOMES the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate approved by the IPCC at its 51st Session held in September 2019, which contributes in a concrete way to an understanding and better awareness of how climate change is affecting oceans and their ecosystems; IS DEEPLY CONCERNED by the significant findings of the Special Report; EXPRESSES ITS DEEP CONCERN about the increasing rate of sea-level rise caused by the accelerated melting of ice sheets and ocean thermal expansion; INVITES the Commission to analyse the findings of the report and propose policy response options; CALLS for increased policy action at all governance levels.
18. SUPPORTS the Chilean COP25 Presidency in raising the oceans as one of its specific priorities at COP25; UNDERLINES that climate change, ocean degradation and biodiversity loss are strongly interconnected; CALLS FOR closer cooperation and synergies on ocean- and climate- related issues among relevant UN Conventions and with other international and regional ocean-related processes.
19. STRESSES that a full implementation of the Paris Agreement is the most important action to protect the oceans especially through enhanced greenhouse gas mitigation action, which is crucial for reducing adverse impacts such as warming, acidification, loss of oxygen and sea level rise; NOTES WITH CONCERN that the risk of reaching thresholds of abrupt and irreversible changes in the oceans has increased.
20. To increase the resilience of the oceans in the face of climate change, EMPHASISES the importance of strengthening action to reduce other anthropogenic pressures on the oceans, such as pollution by nutrients, hazardous substances, organic matter and plastic litter, as well as action to restore and conserve marine ecosystems, including nature-based solutions.

21. STRESSES the urgency of making global shipping more sustainable; NOTES WITH CONCERN that greenhouse gas emissions from maritime transport are projected to increase significantly from the current level; SUPPORTS the target of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) of reducing of the CO₂ emissions from international shipping consistent with the Paris Agreement temperature goals; CALLS on the IMO to swiftly implement the Initial Strategy on reduction of GHG emissions from ships; ENCOURAGES a swift finalisation and agreement in the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) on effective short-term measures to reduce GHG emissions in international shipping before 2023.

II. INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE

22. WELCOMES the report on 'Improving International Ocean Governance – Two years of progress' and highlights the significant contribution of the EU to improving the international governance framework, strengthening ocean diplomacy and international cooperation on oceans, reducing pressures on oceans and strengthening international ocean research and data; SUPPORTS the follow-up and further development of the International Ocean Governance Agenda and ENCOURAGES the establishment of an EU stakeholder forum dedicated to oceans and seas worldwide.
23. ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of the work of the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) and UNDERLINES the crucial importance of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the need for ambitious and realistic targets, driving action and allowing progress to be tracked effectively, including as regards marine and coastal biodiversity.
24. STRESSES its commitment to conclude an ambitious international legally binding instrument 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 (BBNJ) by 2020.

25. HIGHLIGHTS the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June 2020 as an important milestone to review progress made in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 14; STRESSES the need to play a prominent role and fully engage in the preparation of the conference and contribute to accelerating progress to ensure the timely delivery of all targets.
26. CALLS ON the EU and its Member States to continue using their international cooperation and development policies, including the EU-ACP Partnership, to promote and build capacity for better ocean governance, conservation and restoration of biodiversity, reduce pressures, including cumulative pressures on oceans, and promote the development of sustainable blue economies and sustainable fisheries in cooperation with international organisations and other relevant partners and stakeholders. WELCOMES the inclusion of the oceans in the post-Cotonou negotiations.
27. STRESSES the importance of reaching, by 2020, an agreement in the WTO to prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies, which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing and eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing.
28. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of strengthening EU actions in the global fight against IUU fishing in particular to ensure that fisheries products imported into the EU are from fishing activities conducted in accordance with applicable conservation and management measures; SUPPORTS a zero-tolerance approach to IUU fishing building on existing dialogues with third countries and ensuring the adoption of new technologies to tackle this issue effectively.
29. UNDERLINES the duty set out by UNCLOS and the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the UNCLOS relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks to cooperate in the conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks and all fish stocks in the high seas and the key role played by regional fisheries management organisations to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the stocks under their purview and their ecosystem; ACKNOWLEDGES sustainable partnership fisheries agreements as mutually beneficial forms of cooperation, which direct efforts and funds to reinforcing capacities on science and control in fisheries and support partner countries in setting up their sustainable fishing policies.

30. WELCOMES the ocean partnerships between the EU and China and the EU and Canada; APPRECIATES the cooperative actions developing under these partnerships, such as the EU-China Blue Partnership for the Oceans Forum, as a means of achieving better global governance and policy coherence towards the oceans. SUPPORTS the development of future ocean partnerships.

III. SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

31. HIGHLIGHTS the findings of the Blue Economy Report 2019; WELCOMES the development of a new approach for a sustainable Blue Economy; EMPHASISES that a coordinated management of the Blue Economy sectors is crucial to securing a sustainable Blue Economy.
32. ACKNOWLEDGES the significance of Blue Economy as part of the Union's Integrated Maritime Policy; REAFFIRMS the importance of the Integrated Maritime Policy to foster coordinated and coherent decision-making and to promote sustainable growth.
33. STRESSES that the established sectors of coastal and maritime tourism, marine living resources, including sustainable fisheries, marine non-living resources, port activities, shipbuilding, marine technologies and maritime transport, continue to be the main pillars and contributors to the Union's Blue Economy; EMPHASISES that further development of the Blue Economy needs to be in line with the principles of sustainability; RECOMMENDS to give special attention to the emerging sectors, such as blue energy, blue bioeconomy and biotechnology, as well as desalination, as they offer significant potential for sustainable development of the Blue Economy and mitigating climate change.
34. EMPHASISES the importance of digitalisation considering the significant potential for optimising technical and operational aspects of the marine and maritime sector, with the benefit of a reduction of emissions in shipping.

35. HIGHLIGHTS the ocean's huge potential contribution to marine renewable energies; WELCOMES the Member States' shared commitment in their national energy and climate plans to quadruple Europe's offshore renewable energy capacity by 2030; NOTES the Commission's estimates in its Clean Planet Communication of 2018 that a quarter of the EU's electricity capacity will be generated offshore by 2050; HIGHLIGHTS the potential of low-trophic level aquaculture to produce protein with low greenhouse gas emissions as highlighted by the Commission's Chief Scientific Advisors' report on food from the oceans.
36. REAFFIRMS the importance of a coordinated approach while implementing the Maritime Spatial Planning and the Marine Strategy Framework Directives as key tools for applying the ecosystem-based approach to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and seas; WELCOMES the progress in the implementation of maritime spatial planning at national, sea basin, Union and global level to ensure coherence with environmental, social and economic objectives; STRESSES the importance of coordinated action between countries and within multilateral conventions and organisations.
37. ACKNOWLEDGES that increased public and private investment is essential for achieving an innovative and sustainable Blue Economy in the EU and globally.
38. WELCOMES the BlueInvest to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to bring innovative and sustainable new products and services to the market through a package of measures, including coaching, grants and matchmaking with investors; ENCOURAGES measures to reduce risk for investors through guarantees from the European Fund for Strategic Investment.
39. WELCOMES the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative and Principles that complement existing frameworks in sustainable finance and RECOGNISES the importance of compliance, transparency and disclosure, as well as the specific challenges of investment in the context of the ocean.

40. STRESSES that the European Maritime Day Conference is an important event that contributes to developing the maritime sector in Europe; CONGRATULATES Portugal on holding a successful European Maritime Day Conference in Lisbon on 15–16 May 2019 and LOOKS FORWARD to the next Conference in 2020 in Cork, Ireland.
41. ACKNOWLEDGES the importance of maritime regional cooperation and EU sea basin strategies and initiatives that enable the development of tailored measures; RECOGNISES the complementarity of the EU sea basin strategies and initiatives with the EU's macro regional strategies, including with Union neighbourhood policy objectives; INVITES the Member States concerned to take into account the priorities and specific objectives and actions of the EU sea basin strategies and initiatives, and of the Union Strategy for the Outermost regions, in the programming and implementation of relevant funding instruments.

IV. MARINE LITTER AND PLASTIC WASTE

42. NOTES WITH CONCERN the rapidly increasing levels of marine litter, including plastic waste and microplastics, which is causing serious environmental problems on a global scale, threatening the environment, ecosystems and biodiversity as well as the economy and health, and should be given immediate attention and action.
43. WELCOMES the adoption of the Directive on Single Use Plastic Products and of the new Port Reception Facilities Directive; SUPPORTS the full implementation of the remaining actions relating to marine litter in the EU Strategy for Plastics.
44. ACKNOWLEDGES that marine litter is not only having a significant impact on marine ecosystems, but is also already generating additional costs and lost revenues for the Blue Economy, especially in fishing, aquaculture and tourism, and causing problems in maritime transport.

45. SUPPORTS the transition to a circular economy with a broad set of measures to minimise marine litter and the generation of waste; WELCOMES regional and local partnerships and public-private partnerships consortia to develop waste management including the collection of plastic waste from coastal areas, waste water treatment and improved port reception facilities; STRESSES the importance of stepping up global actions for preventing the leakage of plastic litter and other harmful substances into the environment, and in particular the oceans, including through the consideration of an international agreement to address plastic pollution, in particular marine plastics pollution.
46. WELCOMES the adoption of relevant resolutions at the fourth meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly; NOTES WITH APPRECIATION the adoption of relevant declarations by the Leaders of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and G20 Leaders.

V. MARINE KNOWLEDGE

47. EMPHASISES that the risk of irreversible damage to ecosystems and the risk of investment in the blue economy can be considerably reduced with better knowledge of the state and dynamics of the marine environment.
48. RECALLS the important investments made through Horizon 2020, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation; WELCOMES the Horizon Europe mission area on healthy oceans, seas, coastal and inland waters.
49. HIGHLIGHTS the valuable contribution made by the EU's Earth Observation global monitoring system Copernicus, including its Marine, Climate Change and Security Services, to collecting essential satellite data on the oceans.

50. ACKNOWLEDGES that data dissemination initiatives such as the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) and the Copernicus Marine Service and the Open Data Policy promoted under Horizon 2020 have already greatly improved the availability of data and data products and are setting examples for international partners; STRESSES the importance of sharing instruments and infrastructures to promote marine knowledge; HIGHLIGHTS the need for further action to fill the gaps in terms of underpinning observation and data availability and interoperability.
51. RECOGNISES the need to upgrade skills to take account of technological advance and looks forward to the blueprint for a strategy on skills in shipbuilding and renewable energy being prepared by a sector skills alliance; UNDERLINES the need for a strong EU strategy to preserve and develop maritime skills for enhancing blue education and promoting blue jobs.
52. STRESSES that raising the level of Ocean Literacy in Europe and encouraging stakeholders' engagement to act and network actively on issues related to ocean conservation is instrumental to better stewardship of the oceans and seas.

VI. MARITIME SECURITY AND SURVEILLANCE

53. RECALLS the importance of ensuring a high level of maritime security at EU and global level, in accordance with the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) and its updated Action Plan⁶ for the protection of EU citizens and EU Member States' waters and for the development of a sustainable Blue Economy; INVITES Member States to enhance coordination in maritime security.

⁶ 10494/18

54. STRESSES the importance of maritime surveillance in the context of EUMSS and WELCOMES the progress made for setting up a Common Information Sharing Environment for the maritime domain (CISE) and more particularly the transition to the operational phase managed by the European Maritime Safety Agency; ENCOURAGES all Member States and relevant Union agencies and bodies to participate in this phase in order to ensure a widespread implementation of the CISE interoperability solutions for the exchange of maritime information across sectors and across borders, taking into account other voluntary initiatives and networks and in line with existing Union mandatory systems. NOTES with interest the ongoing discussion for possible Coordinated Maritime Presences.
55. ENCOURAGES renewed commitment to maritime security through a regional approach and UNDERLINES that other relevant EU sectoral and regional strategies and policies, applicable to the European seas and sub-sea basins should be promoted in full coordination with EUMSS.

VII. OUTERMOST REGIONS AND OVERSEAS COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

56. HIGHLIGHTS the specific vulnerability of the outermost regions and overseas countries and territories to climate change affecting their coastal landscape, their ecosystems and their biodiversity.
57. REAFFIRMS the importance of the Integrated Maritime Policy and the European maritime and fisheries policy in the outermost regions to promoting sustainable growth and blue economic activities; WELCOMES the work achieved since 2017 under the Union strategy 'A stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU's outermost regions', in particular in the fields of climate change adaptation and blue economy.
58. WELCOMES the work achieved in the context of the association of overseas countries and territories with the Union on ocean-related issues, such as the promotion of the Blue Economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation to the impacts of climate change, the promotion of disaster risk reduction, sustainable management and conservation of marine biodiversity and ecosystem services, sustainable water, maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management, cooperation in the field of international ocean resources, and Arctic issues.

VIII. ARCTIC

59. EXPRESSES ITS DEEP CONCERN that the Arctic sea region is among those most affected by climate change and that it is warming at more than twice the global average rate; RECOGNISES the special attention needed for the unique and fragile Arctic marine environment and remains committed to its protection from the adverse impacts of human activities, including through enhanced marine research, and encourages the implementation of the Arctic Council Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the development of scientific knowledge about the region, in close collaboration with international organisations and countries in the Arctic region. RECOGNISES the effort of the Arctic Council to include traditional and local knowledge in its work.
60. STRESSES that any shipping in the Arctic should be safe and sustainable, taking into account the IMO's greenhouse gas reduction objective; WELCOMES the efforts by the IMO on reducing the impact of Black Carbon emissions from international shipping on the Arctic; EMPHASISES the importance of the harmonized implementation of the IMO Polar Code, and compliance with the Code of dedicated maritime surveillance, in particular close and effective cooperation on Search and Rescue, and emergency prevention, preparedness and response.
61. EMPHASISES the role of further developing circumpolar meteorological and oceanographic cooperation to improve safety in the Arctic; RECALLS the importance of synergies between Galileo and Copernicus for safe shipping operations and environmental monitoring, meeting the needs of users located in the Arctic region; ENCOURAGES the European GNSS Agency to make use of such synergies when developing “multi-dimensional” (positioning/Earth observation/satellite communications) applications.
62. RECOGNISES a growing geopolitical interest in the Arctic and STRESSES the importance of maintaining the Arctic as a low-tension–high cooperation region.

63. LOOKS FORWARD to the Commission and the High Representative updating the EU Arctic Policy, including the 2016 Joint Communication in view of the new challenges and opportunities, and the growing international interest.
 64. HIGHLIGHTS the valuable contribution of the Arctic Council and its Working Groups, which provide a forum for the protection and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment, as well as the commitment to consult and cooperate with Arctic indigenous peoples and local communities and support their meaningful engagement in Arctic Council Activities.
 65. WELCOMES the programme for the Icelandic Chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2019-2021, highlighting the Arctic Marine Environment as one of its priorities; WELCOMES the work of the Arctic Council on developing a Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.
 66. WELCOMES the signing of the Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean on 3 October 2018 in Ilulissat, Greenland, by the EU and nine States, and ENCOURAGES the agreement's swift entry into force.
 67. WELCOMES the EU Arctic Forum co-organised by the Union and Sweden, which was held in Umeå on 3-4 October 2019 to kick-off discussions on the future EU Arctic Policy.
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