

## BACKGROUND

### PAPER:

UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

## ***Ocean Conservation***

### **Introduction:**

On May 9, 2019, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to meet in 2020 to discuss and debate the implementation of Goal 14, a plan to help protect the oceans. Some targets of Goal 14 included protecting marine coasts, regulating ocean overfishing, enhanced research into ocean acidification and marine life, and more.

Unfortunately, the COVID -19 pandemic forced nations to postpone the conference.

While the pandemic has hindered nations' diplomatic capabilities for more related resolutions, Goal 14's deadlines are still approaching. [One Goal 14 target](#) aims to

By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices, and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristic.

However, according to the [World Bank](#), over 15% of fish catches worldwide may be “illegal, unregulated and unreported.”

Fortunately, the pandemic has limited human activity and temporarily reduced carbon emissions. [The UN reported](#), “The pandemic offers an opportunity to revive the ocean and start building a sustainable ocean economy. A report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific suggests that the temporary shutdown of activities as well as reduced human mobility and resource demands due to the COVID-19 pandemic may provide marine environments the much-needed breathing space for them to start to recover.” However, the situation is still dire. Unless nations rapidly change their behavior, the ocean is still very much in danger.

### **Background & History:**

While this resolution and Goal 14 is somewhat new, the idea of ocean conservation is not. In the past century, scientists have noticed that the water levels of our oceans and lakes have risen about 20-30 cm or about a foot, which is highly significant. The water level has risen about 2.6 inches in the past 25 years, and the level will keep going up by an  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch per year. Scientists have also noted that the surface water is getting warmer 24% faster than it did decades ago. The smallest rise in temperature could kill off multiple species of coral and small biotic marine life, potentially throwing off an entire ecosystem.

Fortunately for scientists, we know what causes this. The answer is global warming, which is caused by greenhouse gas emissions or pollution. 80% of ocean pollution starts ashore—whether along the coast or far inland. Contaminants, for example chemicals, nutrients, and heavy metals, are carried from farms, factories, and cities by streams and rivers into our bays and estuaries; from there they travel out to sea. Meanwhile, marine trash—especially plastic—is blown in by the breeze or washed in through tempest channels and sewers. Our oceans are additionally ruined by oil spills and leaks—of all sizes—and are constantly absorbing carbon contamination from the air. The sea assimilates as much as a fourth of man-made carbon discharges. Positive and measurable action does need to be taken.

### **The Causes of Failure**

If scientists know and can measure the changes to the ocean, why can't we fix them?

The problem, unfortunately, is much more complex. The oceans are struggling for a multitude of reasons, including,

1. the overuse of nonrenewable plastic,
2. overfishing and marine life exploitation
3. water pollution (especially agricultural and oil), and
4. carbon emissions causing oceans to acidify and ocean levels to rise.

These factors seem difficult to control because they go beyond the control of the average consumer. Fossil fuels make up about 80% of energy consumption, so stopping the use of fossil fuels immediately in any country would be near-impossible.

The climate crisis and its surrounding issues are systemic issues, so it's hard to swiftly make a change, especially with other pressing issues of poverty, human trafficking, and inequality.

**Committee Focus:** Reduce pollution to our oceans and revive the ecosystem. Your job as a committee is to draft and pass a resolution that lists pre-operatives and operatives that should measurably improve the conservation of the oceans on earth.

**Committee Mission:** At the end of this conference, you and your fellow delegates should have drafted a document that outlines what our United Nations needs to accomplish to start aiding in ocean conservation. The goal is to create a resolution that is unique and is achievable for all nations involved. Try to think outside the box and be original. This may be large-scale and systemic (setting national reduction goals) or very small and specific steps (coral reef restoration or more sustainable fishing techniques).

## **Developing A Position**

Fundamental to every country's position will be its ability to

- Have resources to make change in ocean treatment
- Have a stable government that can successfully make regulations, new legislation to make change, and prioritize ocean goals effectively
- Make changes in country culture in order to reduce plastic consumption, promote responsible fishing, and respect protected areas
- Respond to climate change, in not only honorary action, but in efficient, impactful changes to fossil fuel use

### **Questions To Consider**

- 1) What immediate goals does your country have that could take priority over ocean conservation?
- 2) How likely is it that your government can effectively craft regulations and maintain research and action to help the oceans for several years? What would you need in a resolution that would help your country achieve those goals?
- 3) Does your country have any common practices that may negatively affect the oceans? Is it possible to change these practices? What need to happen in order to change? What would happen if the UN tried to compel your country to change?
- 4) What can the committee do about countries unwilling to change?

### **Resources for Further Research**

[UN Environmental Program \(UNEP\)](#)

[UN Development Goals, Goal 14, “Life Below Water”](#)

[World Wildlife Fund](#)

[World Bank](#) (with their work/research on overfishing)

[UN Development Program \(UNDP\)](#)

[UN Oceans](#)