

Opening Remarks for First Meeting of the Prepcom

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, delegates, members of Secretariat, ladies and gentleman,

I am speaking on behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts and Greenpeace. Our organizations are committed to securing a healthy and sustainable future for the global ocean. We are encouraged that this commitment is shared by so many in this room.

Many of us have met in Johannesburg in 2002, in Nagoya in 2010, in Rio in 2012 or here in New York during the SDG negotiations. While the commitments agreed at these events provide important milestones towards a more sustainable future, we must recognize that despite these commitments little actual progress has been made towards the sustainable management of our oceans, in particular in ABNJ. Many have identified the development of a new implementing agreement as a condition, necessary to honor the commitments made to present and future generations. We have been waiting, anticipating, and advocating for this moment for a long time. For over a decade, States have debated the question of how best to cooperate in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It is a hopeful sign that negotiations have at last commenced for a new instrument to address that question. With others having catalogued all of the pressures confronting our ocean, including pressures from climate change, it should be clear that an answer cannot wait.

It is widely recognized that marine protected areas, particularly fully-protected marine reserves, can help safeguard the ocean from many human activities, conserve species and habitats, and build ecosystem resilience. If this new instrument is to deliver on its promise and succeed in protecting ocean life, we must ensure that its elements include a mechanism to identify, designate, and implement management measures for marine protected areas in ABNJ, including the large, fully protected reserves that science tells us are needed to stabilize the ocean environment and protect marine biodiversity. To reach this vision, the new agreement must be comprehensive in scope and must go farther than merely relying on existing bodies, most of which don't have a mandate to protect biodiversity.

And we also need to secure a robust framework for environmental impact assessments for high seas activities, including clear thresholds for carrying out such assessments, minimum standards for their content, and mechanisms for transparency and public participation. Too much of what takes places on the high seas is unknown or uncontrolled. We need a clearer picture of our impacts, including our cumulative impacts, and smarter, more collaborative ways to control them.

Mr. Chair, we are inspired by your leadership. The burden of negotiation falls on the States gathered here, but we are eager to assist you and all States in the weeks and months to come and we appreciate the opportunity to participate in this process. The specific recommendations we generate through this process will help us to provide, for the darkest parts of the ocean, a brighter future.