SUSAN GARDNER FINAL SPEECH

Excellencies, delegates, colleagues,

It’s a privilege to be here today at the opening of MEA day,

- a time to reflect on the strength of cooperation
  - across our multilateral environmental agreements.

- And there is no more poignant example of the need for cooperation,
  - than our ocean
  - where our Regional Seas Conventions have been among
    - our most powerful and long-standing tools,

Let me take you back for a moment, in the history of multilateralism,

Even before UNEP’s founding,

  - when ocean pollution was already making headlines.

In the late 1960s,

- There was international news of **30 million gallons** of crude oil on the English coastline
  - because of a sinking oil tanker,
  - and reports of California beaches covered with tar from **offshore drilling**

- **50 years ago, in 1974**, just two years after UNEP’s establishment,
  - the 2nd session of the Governing Council,
  - launched the **UNEP Regional Seas Programme**,
    - which continues to be one of our most foundational achievements for coastal and marine cooperation;

- Those early ambitions, led to the **first** Regional Seas Convention
  - in **1974**: the **Helsinki Convention**, 
until the most recent adoption of the 18th Regional Sea Convention,

**Our 50-year long history of Regional Seas**
- has brought together more than 146 countries
- with the shared understanding that what happens in one region of the ocean,
  - extends far beyond its origins and affects us all,

For me, this is personal...

I started my career as a young scientist in the 1990’s,
- studying sea turtles in Bahia Magdalena, Puerto San Carlos,
  - a remote fishing village on the Pacific Coast of Mexico,

One day, a fisherman handed me a flipper tag from a loggerhead turtle,
That tag had two markings, an ID number, and the word “Okinawa”,
That fisherman, held in his hand,
  - the first proof of the transpacific journey of loggerhead sea turtles
  - from **Japanese nesting beaches** to **Mexican feeding grounds**,  
    - 10,000 km away

This was my first personal experience with the interconnections across our ocean,
- that the health of sea turtle populations in Latin America,
  - depends on habitat protection in Asia,

The Regional Seas have played an extraordinary role in combatting global crises:

**On pollution,**
- For example in the **Mediterranean, the Barcelona Convention**
  - has helped implement regulations on single-use plastic bags
    - across **17 Mediterranean countries**.

For **Biodiversity,**
- In the **Caribbean, the Cartagena Convention**
  - has helped to designate over **50,000 square km** of marine protected areas since 2010,

For **Climate,**
- along the Kenyan Coast, under the **Nairobi Convention**,
• the ‘Go Blue’ project is protecting and restoring 2000 hectares of mangroves,
• storing more than 30,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year,

As platforms for cooperation, the Regional Seas Conventions with their Action Plans
• are powerful engines for implementation existing global commitments,
  And now, of course, they are poised and ready
• to support member states with swift actions to ratify the BBNJ Agreement,
  • And accelerate readiness for its implementation

To conclude,
As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of
the UNEP Regional Seas Programme,
• we can reflect on all that we have learned about working together for ocean governance.
• the Regional Seas Conventions have created the connections between
  ○ global commitments, regional context and local knowledge;

• Knowledge that comes from generations of living on the sea,

Like that fisherman in Mexico,
• Despite all of our sophisticated technology of satellites tracking sea turtle migration,
• that fisherman in Bahia Magdalena,
  • was probably the first to know about the connection between
    ○ Okinawa and Puerto San Carlos.

That fisherman understood the importance of our ocean for food, health and livelihoods,
  ▪ That fisherman understood that with cooperation, a rising tide, lifts all boats.

The Regional Seas Conventions were designed to embrace the local and regional strengths,
  ○ by working together in a spirit of support and cooperation,
  ○ And today we celebrate 50 years of their enormous contributions.

Thank you.