

Australia's input on the prospective theme for the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5)

Australia thanks the President of UNEA-5 and the members of the Bureau for sharing its thought-starter paper and subsequent update note to support members in finding the theme for the 2021 Environment Assembly, and for the opportunity to input into this decision. UNEA-5 will be held between several key events. In 2020, there are the quadrennial World Conservation Congress under the auspices of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the adoption of the post-2020 biodiversity framework through the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Ocean Conference, at which the work of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy will culminate. In 2022, the 50th commemoration of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment and the establishment of UNEP will occur. As such, Australia supports a theme for the next Environment Assembly that reflects and informs these milestone events and their environmental issues.

Australia supports the basic criteria for defining a theme as outlined in the thought-starter paper from July 2019. A productive theme for the Environment Assembly should be simple, have broad resonance, and inspire tangible, action-oriented outcomes for the environment at all levels. It should also be a theme to which UNEA can make a valuable contribution, including by addressing a gap, achieving greater cohesion, or progressing an agenda. Importantly, a successful theme for the Environment Assembly should not just address environmental issues in isolation, but also interlink the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Recognising these criteria and the opportunity to leverage and build upon the outcomes of the important multilateral fora mentioned above, Australia has a strong interest in an Environment Assembly theme that considers progress towards a sustainable ocean economy.

The world needs to move to a sustainable ocean economy. As the world's population grows, so will the need for ocean resources. Production, protection and prosperity go hand in hand. Overuse or misuse of ocean resources puts the health and resilience of the ocean, its biodiversity, and the growth of the economy, at risk.

The ocean is critical to health, wealth and survival, but it is under pressure. The ocean is home to 50-80 per cent of all life on Earth. It shapes our climate and weather, and is essential to our future wellbeing. It provides food for half of the world's population, and is an economic powerhouse that supports entire industries, generates millions of jobs, and helps to drive the global economy.

For example, Australia's marine industries will contribute around \$100 billion each year to our economy by 2025. Our ocean and coasts will provide a further \$25 billion worth of benefits. With 85 per cent of our population living within 50 kilometres of the coast, Australians have a deep connection to the ocean. Local communities expect our coasts and oceans to be clean, healthy and productive.

In a sustainable ocean economy, the economic opportunities of the ocean and ocean industries are maximised, and the long-term health of the marine environment is safeguarded. UNEA can play a leading role in ensuring that a healthy ocean is recognised as the central underpinning of a sustainable ocean economy.

Global concern for the health of the ocean has never been stronger. However, there is currently no one global body that is responsible for the ocean or the sustainable development of ocean industries. Australia is convinced of the need to do more for the protection and sustainable use of our shared ocean.

The High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy is an initiative of the Norwegian Prime Minister and consists of the heads of government from 14 coastal nations: Australia, Canada, Chile, Fiji, Ghana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Palau, and Portugal. Its role is to amplify and accelerate action for ocean health and wealth, and to create a roadmap for a rapid transition to a sustainable ocean economy. The High Level Panel will deliver a set of recommendations supported by a scientific synthesis report at the UN Ocean Conference in June 2020.

As the leading global authority on the environment, UNEA is an ideal forum to harness the global attention on the ocean and look for opportunities to transition to a sustainable ocean economy. UNEA could provide the much-needed high-level and global support to help bring some cohesion to the fractured, crowded ocean agenda. This could include implementing the Panel's recommendations and building on the outcomes of the World Conservation Congress and the post-2020 biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Australia appreciates the consultative approach to the development of a theme for the next Environment Assembly by the UNEA-5 President. Australia offers our support to the Presidency and the Bureau, and encourages their leadership in deciding on a suitable theme for UNEA-5.