Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

By

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at the General Assembly

on

Agenda items 74 (a) and (b)
"Oceans and the law of the sea, including sustainable fisheries"

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -
Mr. President,

I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia align themselves with this statement.

Mr. President,

This year, I would like to start my intervention in this debate concerning the adoption of the two UNGA Resolutions on Oceans and the Law of the Sea and that on Sustainable Fisheries by recalling two important anniversaries for the EU and its Member States.

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which we hold to be a crucial factor for stability, peace and progress, particularly in today's delicate international context, as well as for ensuring the sustainable development of the oceans and for fostering sustainable “blue economy”. Twenty years down the line, more than a hundred other States from the developed and the developing world have become party to this Convention which now counts 166 parties, including the European Union. The EU and its Member States continue to believe that this framework convention represents the constitution of the oceans, reflects customary international law and establishes the overarching legal framework within which all activities in oceans and seas must be carried out and wish that the goal of universal participation in this Convention will soon be met.

While we continue to subscribe to the vital importance of preserving the integrity of the Convention, we acknowledge the necessity of ensuring that the Convention, negotiated over 30 years ago, remains relevant and able to meet today's challenges as well as those which we will be faced with in the future. We hold that today the best way to achieve this is by complementing the Convention through implementing agreements.

This is why we are pleased to be celebrating next year the twentieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, the second implementing agreement of the Convention. The EU and its Member States are parties and strong supporters of this Agreement which develops the principle of cooperation between States fishing for the same resources or in the same area, whether they are coastal States or States fishing on the high seas, in order to ensure their conservation and sustainable use. In this respect, the EU and its Member States welcome the Philippines as a new party to this Agreement and, while acknowledging the positions of some States, we exhort all States to become parties to this Agreement. We look forward to the next Resumed Review Conference of the Agreement which the UN General

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
Assembly has agreed should be held in 2016, and which we consider to be a useful exercise in reviewing the implementation of the Agreement in order to improve its implementation.

Furthermore, the EU and its Member States would like to declare their strong support for the work of the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations or Arrangements and to encourage them to continue their efforts towards the governance and the sustainable management of the fisheries resources. It is the responsibility of each party to ensure that it fully complies with measures adopted by the organizations or arrangements, including those identified in the performance reviews undertaken by them. The EU and its Member States encourage these bodies to continue to undertake such reviews on a regular basis.

The EU and its Member States also express their strong hope that in a few years' time, besides the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the Implementing Agreement to Part XI, there will be a third implementing agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Mr. President,

Once again this year, the EU and its Member States continued to demonstrate their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as to the 1995 Agreement on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks by actively participating in the consultations which led to drawing up the resolutions that have been submitted to the General Assembly today. We hold that both these resolutions serve to bring to the attention of the UN General Assembly and to the general public important issues in the marine domain, including fisheries. We would like to express our appreciation for the excellent stewardship demonstrated once more by both chairs, Ambassador Eden Charles and Ms. Alice Revell as well as for their unrelenting efforts to reach a consensus. We look forward to working with them on these resolutions next year. We would also like to thank all the co-chairs of the different meetings which feed into the resolutions and whose work facilitates the work of the delegations.

Mr. President,

The importance of oceans and their resources in the context of sustainable development has been recognized by the international community, including within the development of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including a possible new goal on oceans. However, the marine environment continues to face a number of major threats, such as climate change and ocean acidification, marine debris including plastics and micro-plastics, invasive alien species, eutrophication and dead zones, anthropogenic underwater noise, overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, the declining health of the marine environment and the continued loss of marine biodiversity, all of which deserve to be tackled within these resolutions which we are adopting today. We hold that the international community must continue to take an active role to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of the oceans and their resources, including maintaining and restoring marine ecosystems, in accordance with the Law of the Sea. Consequently, the EU and its Member States welcome the choice of topics for the 16th and 17th meetings of the UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process, which will deal with "Oceans and Sustainable Development" and "Marine Debris, plastics and microplastics" respectively and which we consider to be both very pertinent. Looking back, the EU is fully
satisfied with the outcome of this year's meeting concerning the role of seafood in global food security.

The EU and its Member States would also like to reiterate their support for the initiatives taken by competent international organisations, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to tackle these threats including those under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as in the framework of competent regional organisations. We hold that while, as the UNCLOS declares, the problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole, the regional and subregional dimensions are also important to tackle some of these challenges in order to better take into account regional specificities. This is why we support the work of the Regional Seas Conventions as well as that of Regional Fisheries Organisations and Arrangements.

We are also pleased to note that the first cycle of the World Ocean Assessment, in the context of the UN Regular Process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, will soon be concluded with the publication of its report and summary early next year. We continue to support the invaluable work being undertaken in this context and would like to take this opportunity to thank all the scientists who have generously given freely their expertise and time. We believe that the results of this assessment will provide decision makers with a useful tool which will allow them to adopt and implement management and conservation measures based on better science.

Turning to another important UN working group, the EU and its Member States remain conscious of the threats faced by marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and have always supported the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group. Thus, we are very satisfied with the constructive spirit all delegations have shown in discussing the scope, parameters and feasibility of a new international instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the two meetings of the working group held this year. We believe that substantial progress was achieved at these two meetings in which it was possible for the first time to engage in in-depth substantive discussions. We are happy to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of States are convinced that the best way forward is to develop a new implementing agreement of the Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. We thus strongly wish that consensus will be achieved at the January meeting of this working group to adopt recommendations to the UN General Assembly calling for the launching of formal negotiations of what will be the third UNCLOS Implementing Agreement so that the General Assembly can take this decision during the current session of the UNGA in line with the relevant commitment undertaken at Rio+20.

Mr. President,

The EU and its member States are also appreciative of the work of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in discharging of its mandate. We also duly welcome the decisions of the 24th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention regarding the work of the Commission. We recognize that working conditions of the Commission have been impacted by its increased workload and consequently, we are pleased to be participating in efforts to try and resolve these issues.
Mr. President,

"The EU and its Member States are overall satisfied with the resolution and support its adoption". However, we would like to take this opportunity to transmit our strong disappointment that it was not possible to include language relating to marine mammals in this resolution, despite all the efforts by a large number of delegations to reach an acceptable compromise in this regard.

Marine mammals are an important and vulnerable component of the marine environment and are the subject of specific provisions in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We consequently do not understand why in a General Assembly resolution composed of more than 350 paragraphs (preamble included) and which elaborates on a multitude of subjects related to oceans and the law of the sea it could be a problem to refer to those species.

We acknowledge that States hold well known different and divergent positions with regard of the issue of hunting for marine mammals. This is why the proposals that were discussed did not touch upon hunting, but simply highlighted a number of threats specifically affecting marine mammals and called for increased scientific studies and information sharing with regard to the consequences of the threats in question on those animals and other marine species. Consensus was nearly reached with almost all States for which the issue is of importance and that were ready to compromise by accepting a specific paragraph. However, because of the inflexible position of a single State, in the end, the compromise paragraph had to be withdrawn.

While recognizing that States have different priorities and positions, we encourage all States to undertake negotiations in a spirit of flexibility and trying to understand each-others’ position. We would like to thank Monaco for their unstinting efforts to promote the conservation of marine mammals also in this resolution and we look forward to discussing in a constructive way the question next year.

Mr. President,

The European Union and its Member States note that sharks, as top predators, are an important part of the marine ecosystem and contribute to maintaining ecosystem health. The EU would like to register its satisfaction that through this year's resolution, the UN General Assembly has now been able to express its concerns with regard to the issue of shark finning whereby fins are removed from sharks with the remainder of the carcass being discarded at sea. We thank all delegations who have worked with us on this issue which is a major contributor to shark mortality and which represents an unnecessary waste of resources. It was indeed heartening to see that all countries have recognized the importance of these species and are ready to work together to ensure their long term sustainability.

We are also happy that this year’s resolution contains new language concerning the importance of data collection and catch reporting for the purposes of ensuring scientific stock assessment and implementing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management as well as to the ever-increasing threat of invasive alien species. We are also pleased to recognize the importance accorded by all UNGA Member States to the review of bottom fishing measures including the useful workshop which serves as a forum for the sharing of best-practices by relevant fisheries bodies and stakeholders. We look forward to this review in 2016.
Mr. President,

The EU and its Member States would like to reiterate once more their appreciation for the work done by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and particularly the work of the Committee on Fisheries. We hold that the work of this Committee complements what we try to achieve with the Sustainable Fisheries Resolution and consequently, have been happy to endorse the outcomes of the thirty-first meeting of this Committee, particularly the work on the Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels; the Unique Vessel Identifier; the Voluntary Guidelines on Flag State Performance and the development of guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes. We believe that these outcomes will provide States with better tools to prevent, deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing. IUU fishing is recognized by all countries as one of the major problems in fisheries since it undermines measures adopted to restore fisheries to sustainability, penalizes those fishers which comply with the rules and robs countries, particularly developing States of their resources.

Lastly, Mr. President,

The EU and its Member States would like to express their gratitude to the Secretariat and to the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea for the work done during the year, including the preparation of the annual report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, as an invaluable compilation of recent developments.

Mr. President, thank you very much.