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# PEW Oceans and UNCSD Workshop Bulletin

## A Summary Report of the Workshop “Keeping the Green Economy Blue”

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### SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP ON KEEPING THE GREEN ECONOMY BLUE: IN PREPARATION FOR THE UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 29 APRIL 2011

The informal interactive workshop “Keeping the Green Economy Blue” was held on Friday, 29 April 2011, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., at UN Headquarters, New York, US. Co-organized by the Permanent Mission of Australia and the Pew Environment Group, the workshop responded to the emerging consensus that healthy oceans are an essential part of the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and as such should figure prominently in the agenda of the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (UNCSD).

The workshop: assessed the current state of the oceans and marine environment; reviewed the commitments made at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002; and considered social and economic implications and policy recommendations for transitioning to a “blue economy.”

The workshop consisted of presentations by expert panelists and interactive audience discussions. It was attended by over 70 representatives from government, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

#### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF OCEANS AND THE UNCSD**

While vital for sustainable development and for hundreds of millions of people who depend on them for survival, healthy oceans are increasingly under threat, managed through a fragmented and incomplete system where national and international bodies possess separate and overlapping jurisdictions. The following brief history outlines key meetings related to oceans and the UNCSD.

**UN CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA (UNCLOS):** Opened for signature on 10 December 1982, in Montego Bay, Jamaica, UNCLOS sets forth the rights and obligations of states regarding the use of the oceans, their resources, and the protection of the marine and coastal environment. UNCLOS entered into force on 16 November 1994, and is supplemented by the 1994 Deep Seabed Mining Agreement and the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of UNCLOS relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

**UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (UNCSD):** To mark the 20th anniversary of UNCED, which convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, and the 10th anniversary of the WSSD, held in 2002 in

Johannesburg, South Africa, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 64/236 in December 2009 agreeing to convene the UNCSD in 2012 in Brazil. The UNCSD will seek to: secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess the progress and implementation gaps in meeting previously-agreed commitments, and address new and emerging challenges. The focus of the Conference includes the following two themes, to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and the institutional framework for sustainable development. Three Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings were scheduled to convene prior to the UNCSD.

**UNCSD PREPCOM I and PREPCOM II:** The first session of the PrepCom for the UNCSD was held from 17-19 May 2010, and the second session from 7-8 March 2011, both at UN Headquarters in New York. During the latter meeting, consensus began to emerge on the need to “keep the green economy blue” by ensuring that oceans and fisheries issues receive due attention in the UNCSD. PrepCom II also decided on the process for the preparation of the draft outcome document for the UNCSD. This includes an invitation to all member states and relevant stakeholders to provide inputs by 1 November 2011 for inclusion in a compilation document to serve as basis for the preparation of “zero-draft” of the outcome document. This draft outcome document is to be presented in January 2012 and discussed in a series of week-long “informal informal” negotiations in February, March and April 2012.

#### **REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP**

In his welcoming address, His Excellency Gary Quinlan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN, underscored the need for a sustainable approach for oceans and marine ecosystems and emphasized Australia’s interest in working in partnership with its neighbors and beyond. He also cautioned against letting “blue economy” become a mantra only in words, and called for understanding and clear action.

Ellen Pikitch, Executive Director of the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science, Stony Brook University, presented on the current state of the oceans and marine environment. She said oceans are clearly in crisis and no area is unaffected: coral reefs are threatened; marine life is disappearing; fisheries are, on the whole, depleted; and habitats are being destroyed. She identified the major causes for this, including overexploitation due to excessive fishing, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and ocean acidification, and emphasized that the combined effects of these impacts make a big difference. Pointing to what can be done, Pikitch noted that marine protected areas (MPAs) can be highly successful, and recommended: reducing fishing rates, eliminating destructive practices, implementing an ecosystem-

based approach, and meeting existing internationally-agreed obligations. She concluded by saying that it is not too late, but we need to act fast and strategically.

Susan Lieberman, Director of International Policy, The Pew Environment Group, outlined existing marine-related goals, gaps in ocean governance, and remaining work to be done. Among the existing commitments and targets, she highlighted: Agenda 21 and the Rio Principles from UNCED; the resulting 1995 fish stocks agreement; the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation – which includes an unmet 2005 target on illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing, an unmet 2010 target on biodiversity and MPAs, and a 2012 target on destructive fishing that is unlikely to be met. She also highlighted targets agreed at the 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan. Noting that a green economy will not be possible without the ocean, Lieberman said governments must figure out how to implement these unmet targets. “What is lacking can be found,” she concluded, noting that political will, not science or money, is needed.

Tom Grasso, Senior Adviser, Oceans Program of Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), presented on reforming global fisheries management. He referred to the 2008 World Bank report “Sunken Billions,” which estimated that US\$2 billion were lost every year as a result of mismanaged fisheries, and argued that fisheries management systems can be reformed in a way that makes both economic and biological sense. He pointed to various examples of successful fisheries management, which can be found on a searchable database prepared by EDF. For UNCSD, Grasso recommended: reinforcing the trend towards better fisheries management systems, including through: wider employment of carefully-designed, rights-based management; and addressing transition finance, for example through public-private partnerships.

Lauretta Burke, Senior Associate, World Resources Institute (WRI), presented on the social and economic implications of coral reef loss, based on the WRI report “Coral Reefs Revisited.” She said that under a business-as-usual scenario, 90% of coral reefs will be threatened by 2030, and all coral reefs will be threatened by 2050 – with 25% at critical levels. She said global threats include warming seas and acidification, while local ones include coastal development, sediment and pollution, marine pollution and damage, overfishing, and destructive fishing practices. Noting that the situation appears fairly depressing overall, she said that hope remains given the capacity of coral reefs to recover, but that this requires keeping local pressures low. Her recommendations included: halting destructive fishing, enforcing coastal development regulations, protecting mangroves, managing fisheries and tourism sustainably, increasing and enhancing MPAs, honoring environmental impact assessment processes, tackling greenhouse gas emissions, increasing research on ocean acidification, and, in particular, increasing investments in the enforcement of fisheries regulations.

**AUDIENCE DISCUSSION:** In the ensuing question-and-answer session, many representatives, including those of various small island developing States emphasized the importance of placing ocean issues at the top of the UNCSD’s agenda. Representatives of Spain, Argentina, and Brazil reflected on the fragmentation of UN discussions even on areas of common interest, like oceans and coral reefs.

A representative from Brazil noted the lack of an international regime for protecting biodiversity in the high seas beyond national jurisdiction. This accounts, she said, for the current 0.1% level of protection. Lieberman suggested that the UNCSD

could decide to move forward with the establishment of a regime on protecting high seas, while Pikitch recalled the ongoing destruction caused by deep sea bottom trawling and stressed the urgency of the matter.

In response to a question on reforming fishing subsidies, Grasso said the causes of overexploitation are complicated, and that ending subsidies would not necessarily solve the broader dysfunction of the industries involved. Lieberman suggested that ending harmful subsidies, such as for fuel, could help save global fisheries and promote food security.

A representative from the Maldives expressed concern about economic disadvantages of sustainable fishing practices, while a representative from Uruguay wondered how countries could protect livelihoods of those dependent on fisheries. According to Pikitch, sustainably-fished, higher-quality products could prove to be a market advantage through eco-labeling. Burke added that sustainable practices protect reefs and are a “high-value, long-term investment” for the tourism sector. Grasso noted the option of certifying fisheries through the Marine Stewardship Council.

A representative from Argentina said: “taking care of the environment” unavoidably implies costs for developing countries, likely in the international trading sphere; and that eco-labeling lacked an internationally-agreed system. Lieberman observed that the Maldives had not caused the fisheries problems it faced; industrial fisheries were responsible for overfishing nearby high seas, and global greenhouse gas emissions threatened their reefs. She said the UNCSD presented an opportunity for small island and coastal states to speak out on these impacts and address their larger causes.

A representative of Mauritius alluded to the UK’s occupation of the Chagos Archipelago, an MPA, highlighting the potential for misusing international mechanisms originally designed to protect the environment.

In response to a question by a representative from Finland about features of successful stories in fisheries management that could be taken up in the context of UNCSD, Grasso pointed to a set of common attributes the EDF has termed “SEASALT,” which include security for all fishers and accounting for discards as well as what is caught.

Wrapping up the discussion and workshop, Quinlan recalled that over half of all species are from the oceans, and that we will soon face a new wave of extinctions. He highlighted that fulfilling international obligations is only the starting point and that there is great urgency in addressing threats to oceans, underscoring that the discussion of renewed political commitment must look both backward to unmet targets, and forward to remaining gaps and emerging challenges.

Quinlan urged negotiators to “avoid becoming prisoners of their negotiating methods” and called for taking advantage of the unique gathering of leaders at UNCSD to deliver the right messages. He affirmed that the purpose of the UNCSD is to unite economic and ecological factors. It sounds simple, he said, but it would be new to truly operationalize this. Finally, he suggested that the UNCSD outcome document should identify new threats, assess what is already underway operationally in the UN system based on existing commitments, and identify what more remains to be done.