



## PRESS RELEASE

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### MEETING CLOSURES WITH A MAJOR STEP FOR THE OCEAN

**New York, 24 January 2015:** States took a major step toward urgently needed ocean protection at the UN today agreeing to develop a legally binding agreement to conserve marine life in the high seas.

After four days of deliberations States reached consensus to begin negotiating the first UN treaty that specifically addresses the protection of marine life in an area covering half the planet – those ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Progress came despite pressure from a small group of governments that questioned the need for a new legal framework. That minority blocked agreement on a faster timeline reflecting the clear scientific imperative for action, but all countries agreed on the need to act.

Karen Sack of The Pew Charitable Trusts said, “This is a big moment for the high seas. Countries from around the world sat down and agreed to negotiate a way forward and that’s really good news for life in the global ocean.”

Sofia Tsenikli of Greenpeace said “Today’s agreement could go a long way in securing the protection the high seas desperately need. Countries now must respond to the overwhelming public demand for better ocean protection and develop an historic agreement for the oceans. Time is of the essence.”

Lisa Speer of the Natural Resource Defense Council said, “Many States have shown great efforts to protect the half of the planet that is the high seas. We know that these States will continue to champion the urgent need for more protection in the process before us.”

Daniela Diz of WWF said “Today we have seen a decisive step forward for ocean conservation and can now look to a future in which we bring conservation for the benefit of all humankind to these vital global commons.”

Mission Blue’s Dr Sylvia Earle said “Armed with new knowledge, we are taking our first steps to safeguard the high seas and keep the world safe for our children.”

The outcome of the meetings in New York will now have to be adopted by the UN General Assembly by September 2015. The High Seas Alliance will continue to press for a strong resolution by the UN General assembly for a new agreement under UNCLOS that will ensure a healthy global ocean for the long-term.

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors:**

### **High Seas**

The high seas is the ocean beyond any country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) - amounting to 64% of the ocean - and the ocean seabed that lies beyond the continental shelf of any country. These areas make up nearly 50% of the surface of the Earth and include some of the most environmentally important, critically threatened and least protected ecosystems on the planet. Only an international High Seas Biodiversity Agreement would address the inadequate, highly fragmented and poorly implemented legal and institutional framework that is currently failing to protect the high seas – and therefore the entire global ocean – from the multiple threats they face in the 21st century.

### **Ocean Governance: a brief background**

The high seas are open to all states, whether coastal or land-locked. Freedom of the high seas, and particularly the governance of high seas fishing, is exercised under the conditions laid down in 'Part VII: High Seas' of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which entered into force in 1994, and in the 1995 Agreement on the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks And Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (known as the UN Fish Stocks Agreement), which entered into force in 2001.

The FAO Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries integrates the requirements of UNCLOS and the Fish Stocks Agreement, as well as bridging them with the wider requirements of the UN Convention on Environment and Development (UNCED).

High seas resources are currently primarily managed by regional fishery organizations (RFOs) charged with organizing international cooperation around a number of tasks, including: the collection of fishery statistics; the assessment of the state of resources; the imparting of scientific advice; management decisions; and monitoring. The implementation and enforcement of measures is, however, usually the prerogative of the Flag State, and the relative effectiveness of RFOs varies from region to region, and task to task.

### **High Seas Alliance**

The High Seas Alliance is a partnership of organizations and groups aimed at building a strong common voice and constituency for the conservation of the high seas. The Alliance is currently made up of 27 NGOs plus the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The objective of the Alliance is to facilitate international cooperation to establish high seas protected areas and to strengthen high seas governance.

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