



**High Seas Alliance Statement to Ocean Conference Plenary
June 7, 2017**

Thank you Mr. President, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Ladies & Gentleman, ocean friends,

I am honoured to speak for the High Seas Alliance and its 35 global NGO members who are dedicated to the conservation of the high seas. The high seas and deep seabed Area are the international areas of the ocean that lie beyond national jurisdiction – our shared global commons. Often referred to as areas beyond national jurisdiction or ABNJ, these marine areas beyond national jurisdiction cover almost 70% of the global ocean – nearly half the planet -- and contain natural wonders that rival our national parks on land. Beneath the waves and far from shore, there are undersea volcanoes that dwarf the largest mountains on land, floating rainforests of the sea, and species so unique that NASA is studying them to have an idea of what life might like on other planets. But this rich reservoir faces a host of threats from human activities – including from climate change related ocean acidification to plastics and other pollution, illegal and overfishing, underwater noise and deep water trawling.

To address these threats, research shows that marine protected areas and reserves help rebuild species abundance and diversity, bolster the ocean’s resilience to climate change, and help maintain the overall health of the marine environment. We urge that the target to conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020 be only the starting point, as best available science indicates that this goal should be much higher. We call on governments to support that 30% of the ocean and beyond be protected through a representative network of highly protected areas by 2030 with the aim of a fully sustainable ocean. In this regard, we strongly support the voluntary commitments proposed by The Kingdom of Belgium in the form of a declaration of support for high seas marine reserves to implement SDG 14.5, and we urge States and stakeholders to join that commitment.

Deciding how best to conserve and sustainably manage high seas biodiversity has long been a challenge. Perhaps because the high seas are so remote and mysterious, it has suffered from being out of sight and out of mind. But we are on the verge of a new chapter for the ocean.

Here at the United Nations we have been discussing for over a decade the need for improved ocean governance to provide more comprehensive protections for marine life in the high seas. In

mid- July, the fourth preparatory committee for the development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction will conclude its final deliberations, on the convening and on the starting date of an intergovernmental conference to elaborate the text of this new instrument.

We at the High Seas Alliance look forward to a decision to convene the conference to start next year in 2018, toward finally bringing legal protection to this last great global commons. This will be the first ever global treaty dedicated to protecting the life, ecosystems, and habitats of the high seas and the importance of this decision is hard to overstate. We believe this is essential to achieve SDG14 to conserve and sustainably use the entire ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. We look forward to working together as we continue on this journey to a sustainable high seas for not only our future, but for generations to come.

Thank you very much.