29 July 2014

Mr. José Maria Figueres
Mr. Trevor Manuel
Mr. David Miliband
Co-chairs and Commissioners
Global Ocean Commission
Somerville College
Woodstock Road
Oxford OX2 6HD

Dear Messrs. Figueres, Manuel and Miliband,

I read with great interest and careful consideration the recent report of the Global Oceans Commission, *From Decline to Recovery: A Rescue Package for the Global Ocean*. As the United Nations specialized agency dedicated to sustainable uses of the world’s oceans through safe, secure and clean ships, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) plays a key role in advancing the critically important agenda you have carried forward in your report. You are to be congratulated for producing such an important, comprehensive document in a short time. Be assured that IMO, through the effective implementation of the instruments developed under its auspices and through its Member Governments, will continue to play a key role in mitigating the threats to the global oceans described in your report.

In my view, thoughtful development of ocean regulations, coupled with early entry into force, effective implementation, stringent compliance, oversight and vigorous enforcement of international standards are the best ways to protect and sustain the precious marine environment and its resources. Through the application of these principles, for example, the average number of large oil spills (>700 tonnes) during the 2000s was just an eighth of that during the 1970s. This dramatic reduction has been due to the combined efforts of IMO, through its Member Governments and the oil/shipping industries to improve safety and pollution prevention. Under the auspices of IMO, a robust regime of liability and compensation for oil spills has been created. Although not yet comprehensive, this regime has made great strides in compensating those who suffer economic and resource loss as a result of discharges of oil.

But even with these success stories, as your report makes clear, far more needs to be done. There is no room to be complacent, and I do share the Commission’s concern about the state of the world’s oceans and support the call for enhanced action, at all levels of the global community. Allow me to take this opportunity to highlight the work of IMO, and outline future challenges within IMO’s purview as they relate to the recommendations contained in your report.

With respect to your Proposal 1; a United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for the Oceans, I welcome the Outcome Document of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most notably proposed goal 14: “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development,” along with proposed goals 8 (productive employment and decent work for all), 13 (climate change).
and 17 (sustainable development). Last year, IMO, through its World Maritime Day theme, focused on sustainable shipping, and that emphasis resonates throughout our work and will remain. Through effective implementation of IMO instruments, the Organization directly addresses several of the proposed sub-goals in the Outcome Document, including pollution reduction through implementation of the MARPOL Convention and IMO's other multilateral environmental agreements in tandem with our capacity-building efforts. The OWG's proposals on SDGs will be submitted to UN General Assembly in September for consideration as part of the broader post-2015 developmental agenda and should these goals be adopted, IMO will continue its strong support of the ideals the goals embrace.

Regarding your Proposal 2 and the need to strengthen the governance of the high seas through promoting care and recovery, IMO has led in the development of ecosystem-based management tools applicable to all marine areas and to date has in place fourteen Particular Sensitive Sea Areas, and various special areas under MARPOL addressing operational discharges from shipping. Furthermore, IMO has established multiple traffic separation schemes and other ship routeing systems in major congested shipping areas in the world.

Regarding your Proposals 2, 3 and 4 collectively and their specific calls for sustainable use of the oceans, particularly fishing, IMO maintains a strong partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN specialized body primarily concerned with combating IUU fishing and ensuring sustainable fish stocks. We are in the preliminary stages of preparing for the third Joint FAO/IMO Working Group meeting on IUU Fishing which will address a number of the issues touched on in your report, including the potential for placing transponders on fishing vessels, a matter for which IMO has particular technical competence. With respect to reducing the number of fishing vessels lost at sea, the 2012 Cape Town Agreement, a protocol to the Torremolinos Convention for the Safety of Fishing Vessels, 1977, upon entry into force, would have the practical effect of removing unsafe fishing vessels from the sea. This year's World Maritime Day theme is "IMO conventions: effective implementation," and I have used the Cape Town Agreement as one example of how ratification of IMO agreements leads to a more sustainable marine industry.

With respect to your Proposal 5; Plastics – Keeping them out of the Ocean, MARPOL Annex V prohibits the discharge of plastics from ships. The Annex applies to all ships, not just large, commercial vessels, and includes offshore drilling units and fishing vessels. It also requires that adequate reception facilities for garbage, including plastics, be available to ships in port, to deter the practice of dumping garbage into the sea. In my view, the regulatory regime to prevent the discharge of ship-borne plastics, including used fishing gear, is already in place through MARPOL Annex V. The key is effective implementation and the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee will remain seized of this issue. Further, with regard to debris in the ocean in general, the 2007 Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks will enter into force in 2015. This Convention provides the first set of uniform, international rules for the removal of wrecked vessels threatening the marine environment in areas beyond the territorial seas of a State. IMO Member States have also adopted the 2009 Hong Kong Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships which, on entry into force, will dramatically improve environmental protection and working conditions for those involved in shipbreaking. I continue to urge its entry into force.

Regarding your Proposal 6; Offshore Oil and Gas – Establishing binding international safety standards and liability, since 1979, IMO has maintained the Code for the Construction and Equipment of Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (The MODU Code). The Code has been completely revised twice since its initial version, most recently in 2009, and it remains under continuous review. Indeed, in March, 2014, the IMO Sub-Committee on Ship Systems and Equipment recommended amendments to the Code, which will be considered by the Maritime Safety Committee later this year. While not legally binding, it is considered, by the
IMO Assembly, to be equivalent to the binding requirements of SOLAS and other IMO conventions, and represents minimum industry standards around the world. With respect to liability and compensation, the 1992 Conventions on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage and for the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage were developed under the auspices of IMO. Issues related to liability and compensation for transboundary pollution resulting from offshore activities remains an active agenda item for the IMO Legal Committee. As to the issue of preparedness and response and capacity building in developing countries, I should point out that in partnership with the oil and shipping industry, IMO has been working, since 1996, within the framework of its International Convention of Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation, 1990, to enhance oil preparedness and response capacity for marine spills at priority locations around the world irrespective of whether the spill originates from a ship, an oil handling facility or an offshore unit.

It is also worth mentioning that, IMO, as one of the UN agencies with a mandate in relation to the oceans, is also working actively through several existing coordination mechanisms - such as UN Oceans, the Global Partnership for Oceans, and the Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) - to ensure that our joint efforts are maximized and duplication reduced.

I appreciate your proposal to strengthen the UN system because it is this system that is available now as the international institutional framework for sustainable development. In this context, I believe that the coordination and cooperation of the current UN system, in particular, those among ocean-related agencies such as IMO, FAO and UNESCO/IOC should be strengthened. I have already discussed this with Mr. José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of FAO, on the need to strengthen our cooperation and I intend to also seek further cooperation and support from UNESCO/IOC in this endeavour.

There is no question that your important work will spur meaningful progress in the common quest to preserve and protect our oceans, while ensuring their sustainable use as an irreplaceable mode of transportation, communication, industry and livelihood. Thank you again for producing this important report, and I look forward, along with my sister agencies in the UN system and our Member States, to meeting the challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Koji Sekimizu
Secretary-General