

Honourable Ambassadors,

Distinguished speakers and guests,

Ladies and gentleman,

It is a privilege to address such a distinguished audience, gathered here to discuss the crucial nexus between ocean economy, trade policy, and climate action.

The Sustainable Development Goal 14 is a cornerstone of our collective responsibility towards the ocean.

There is no vision of sustainable development that does not place ocean health at its core.

Yet, we are confronted with visible threats: plastic pollution; acidification; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; climate change; among others.

The resilience of marine ecosystems is at stake and, with it, the very foundations of the ocean economy are under jeopardy.

Failing to act on these challenges is, ultimately, turning us away from the sustainable future we aspire to build.

For Portugal, the ocean is not just a geographical feature. It is a defining element of our identity, our economy and our global responsibility.

That was clearly realised in 2022, when Portugal co-organised and hosted the 2nd United Nations Ocean Conference, in Lisbon.

During and after the Conference, Portuguese society gathered around the ocean's importance, recognising its role in economic prosperity, but also embracing the need for sustainable management of marine resources.

A thriving blue economy cannot exist without healthy ocean ecosystems. And for that, strong governance, proactive policies, and international cooperation are essential.

With this in mind, Portugal's Government has been working in order to protect the present and suit the future of Ocean Economy.

We are investing in many layers of the regulatory framework, aiming to align the ocean economy gains, and growths, with sustainability principles and practices.

One key step is the development of the National Plan to Combat Ocean Acidification, being designed to ensure that scientific knowledge drives mitigation and adaptation strategies, through targeted action.

This plan takes a cross-cutting and integrated approach - the same that should guide all public policies for the ocean - and sets out the necessary measures, and actions, to combat the threat that ocean acidification poses to marine ecosystems and to the coastal economies that depend on them.

In the maritime trade sector, we are leading efforts towards the North-East Atlantic Emission Control Area (ECA) proposal, which will significantly reduce carbon emissions.

This ECA will accelerate shipping decarbonization, not only in Portuguese waters, but also throughout the North-East Atlantic region.

Together with our partner countries – which includes Spain, France, UK, Ireland, Denmark and Iceland, we are confident that this proposal will gain the support of IMO members, when presented next April.

We are also reinforcing our Marine Protected Areas network, not only by expanding its coverage, but also by ensuring a comprehensive governance model – one that addresses the expectations of all ocean stakeholders.



I want to highlight here that last October, the Regional Government of the Azores led the creation of the largest network of Marine Protected Areas in the North Atlantic, an initiative already approved by the Azorean Parliament.

This represents a major step toward Portugal's national 30 by 30 target - already accomplished by the Autonomous Region - and will play a crucial role in advancing global ocean conservation.

These efforts go also hand in hand with sustainable ocean plans and Maritime Spatial Planning, ensuring the right balance between economic activities and environmental protection.

The Government of Portugal is also promoting active policies to encourage efficient resource use, while driving growth and revenue.

It is crucial to demonstrate to economic agents that sustainable practices can drive to economic growth, and that new business models may emerge from matching innovation with sustainability.



We are about to launch a new program to fund small-scheme vouchers to SMEs, so that they can develop innovative biotechnology solutions based on marine resources, bridging research and industry.

I would also like to share with you the Hub Azul Initiative, in which Portugal is building its network of structures to accelerate ocean economy, blue technology and innovation, boosting an innovative and prosperous ecosystem.

With a national investment of over 96 million euros, Portugal and Portuguese blue business will benefit from a decentralized knowledge transfer interface, supporting the adoption of science and technology of prospective business blue endeavours.

These initiatives reflect our conviction that the transition to a sustainable ocean economy is not just a necessity - it is an opportunity to turn Portugal a more competitive country.

Ladies and gentleman,

Achieving SDG 14 requires ambitious vision and bold action. But above all, it requires collective will.

Forums like this, sponsored by the United Nations, provide a platform for learning from each other, ensuring that no one is left behind, and forging the necessary alignment between ocean governance, economic policies and climate action.

In this regard, Portugal takes great pride in the recent launch of the UN-Portugal Ocean Fellowship program, a groundbreaking capacity-building initiative, aimed at strengthening global expertise in ocean management and sustainable development.

The first session, held last October in Lisbon, brought together professionals from diverse nations - particularly from developing island states and coastal regions - for training and research.

This exchange fostered knowledge-sharing in key areas such as marine governance, policy development, and blue economy innovation.

By empowering a new generation of leaders with the skills and networks necessary to drive sustainable ocean management, Portugal reaffirms its commitment to the UN's vision of a healthy and resilient ocean, supporting a sustainable future for us all.

Portugal has also an active participation in the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, that has further positioned us as a key player in shaping global ocean stewardship.

Through the Ocean Panel, we are advocating for 100% sustainable ocean management, an ambition we see not only as achievable but as essential to preserving the natural life-support systems on which we all depend.

Our experience as a member reinforces our conviction that, by fostering collaboration across sectors and borders, we can drive the transformative changes needed to restore and protect ocean health.



In closing, remember that our ocean connects us all. It is the lifeblood of our planet, vital for the climate, biodiversity and for countless ways of living.

Portugal remains fully committed to work on this purpose alongside all nations and partners present here today.

Let us seize this momentum to move from ambition to implementation, from commitments to tangible progress.

Together, we can turn vision into action and ensure that the ocean remains a source of life, prosperity, and resilience for generations to come.

Welcoming speech in the High-level Panel of the 5th United Nations Ocean Forum “Trade-related aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Ocean economy, trade policy, the climate and development nexus”,

by Lúcia Bulcão, Secretary of State for Maritime Affairs

Geneve, 3rd March 2025

(Check Against Delivery)