



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 April 2013

Original: English

Substantive session of 2013

Geneva, 1-26 July 2013

Economic and environmental questions: environment

Statement submitted by OceanCare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The impacts of ocean noise pollution on marine ecosystems and on their living resources

The development of science and technology for the promotion of sustainable development is crucial. Significant progress has been made and there are promising things that we can contribute positively to enhance sustainable development through better science and technology. The protection of marine ecosystems and their living resources is our main goal. We therefore welcome the development of new technologies such as marine vibroseis. This is a quieter alternative technology to seismic airguns, which are used by the industry for collecting geophysical data in the search for oil and gas in the seabed. Marine vibroseis is at least 1,000 times quieter than seismic airguns and doesn't use sharp pulses, which are known to be quite damaging for marine life. In order to decrease the levels of ocean noise pollution in marine ecosystems, the further development and consequent use of similar technologies should be a top priority for States.

We also welcome the promotion of a blue economy and are strongly in favour of increasing reliance on alternative energy sources that have the potential to be environmentally friendly. However, precautionary actions will be necessary to minimize their impacts on marine life, especially acoustic impacts. We should avoid being overconfident and suppose that marine renewable energies, for instance, will not increase the level of ocean noise pollution. As a matter of fact, the cumulative impacts of these energies, coupled with shipping and emissions from military devices, could worsen a situation that is already alarming. In this regard, we would like to draw your attention to the recent report prepared by the Secretary-General (A/67/79) which examines several challenges that are linked to the development of marine renewable energies, including environmental challenges. The acoustic impacts that these energies may have on marine ecosystems and their living resources are emphasized several times and should be preventively assessed by States. Nonetheless, we do recognize the potential of marine renewable energies and are positive that the development of science and technology will help to mitigate negative impacts possibly coming from this source.

The law of the sea has been always affected by the development of science and technology. This development has been often instrumental to elaborate new rules or revise existing ones. We should remind ourselves that, before applying any new technology, an environmental impact assessment should be performed to answer the question of how to proceed with precaution and not add to the many existing stressors that already pose a significant threat to marine life. Some international organizations have prompted further research and called for strategic environmental assessments for the placing of marine renewable industry sites. Some other encouraged the adoption of mitigation measures. In our view, this will be easier to achieve if science and technology will be employed by States to serve sustainable development.
