



**Statement by THE OCEAN CLEANUP, delivered by João Ribeiro-Bidaoui, Head of Global Affairs.**

Thank you, Mr Chair, Distinguished delegates,

Every year millions of tonnes of plastic enter the world's ocean.

According to several studies, including that conducted by the Researchers of The Ocean Cleanup, all estimates on the magnitude of plastic waste entering aquatic environments, tell us that **the predicted growth in plastic waste, exceeds all existing efforts to mitigate plastic pollution**. In short: this crisis is worsening faster than we can stop it.

These figures emphasize the need for multifaceted approaches and renewed efforts. Under our best-case scenario, **we calculate that to collect only 40% of annual marine plastic emissions we would need 750 million people each year participating in manual coastal cleanup campaigns**.

Plastic will continue to be released into the environment in the intervening years before any instrument comes into force, reiterating the urgent need not only to reduce input of new plastic, but also for **large scale cleanup operations of legacy plastic pollution, relying on innovation and on sound, environmentally responsible technologies**.

It is beyond doubt that to rid our Ocean and coastlines of persistent plastic we need to act on three fronts, having in mind the current discussion on potential elements of the instrument:

- **new emissions from rivers must be stopped**, closing the tap, upstream, midstream, and downstream, and as part of National Action Plans.
- such **riverine emissions of plastic pollution must be monitored** in the future as a metric of compliance with the new hard law treaty, as a control measure, against a credible baseline, and as part of the need for accountability of upstream and midstream policies and actions.
- AND thirdly – **we must clean up the legacy plastic** that has built up in the Ocean over decades and will persist there indefinitely unless removed.

The most polluted – and best-studied – of these legacy plastic concentrations is the infamous Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) located between Hawaii and California. While the Patch only covers about 0.5% of the world's ocean surface, it is estimated to contain about half of the plastic mass afloat at sea.

The devastating consequences of Ocean plastic are becoming inescapable closer to home. As we have heard, yesterday, from emotional accounts in this room.

Awareness of the threats to marine and human health posed by Ocean microplastics adds urgency to this problem. The floating fraction is the most harmful, as it can travel long distances. With it, come



invasive hitchhikers and harmful pollutants. Being the one exposed to UV light, it makes plastic brittle, enhancing fragmentation into microplastics.

Once microplastics have formed, they are almost impossible to clean up: we must intervene to remove this pollution. The longer legacy plastic stays floating in the Ocean - and there are believed to be trillions of individual pieces - the more it degrades, breaking down and emitting more microplastics to be consumed by marine life, entering the food chain – a food chain that ends with us.

Furthermore, cleaning up legacy plastic provides a measure to monitor pollution and polluters. Cleaning without reporting or monitoring is a missed opportunity since it can provide valuable data and insights for policy makers and other stakeholders.

Against this background, we believe that the Montego Bay Convention, the 2022 UN Ocean Conference Political Declaration, and the UNEA Resolution to 'End Plastic Pollution, including in the marine environment' provided you, States, with a mandate for action in this field.

For that to happen, and to conclude, THE OCEAN CLEANUP believes that the coming instrument must fill the existing legal gap regarding legacy plastic pollution on the high seas.

**It must therefore provide for a clear collective action, by adding a mandatory prescriptive provision with an explicit legal core obligation, to clean existing and future patches of legacy plastic out in the Ocean, instead of having it lingering forever beyond national jurisdictions.**

I thank you, Mr Chair.