

PROPOSAL

ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON STRENGTHENED COOPERATION ON MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

Proposal

Building on the decision of the 21st Ministerial Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar to adopt the ***ARF Statement on Cooperation in Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Restoration from Marine Oil Spill Incidents***, the United States and [ASEAN Member State] propose that the ARF Ministers make a Statement on strengthened cooperation on protecting and conserving the marine environment.

Background

The ocean covers almost three quarters of our planet and is critical to maintaining life on earth. No matter where people live, they depend on the ocean for the food they eat and the air they breathe. The ocean regulates climate and weather, generates 50 percent of the oxygen we breathe, absorbs excess carbon, and provides food and a source of income for billions of people. The Asia-Pacific region alone has the highest concentration of countries where fish make up a significant amount of people's animal protein intake. It is home to more than 87 percent of the world's fishers and fish farmers – many of whom work in small-scale fisheries that are critical to the economies of their communities. However, the ocean is at grave risk due to human activity. Challenges include unsustainable fishing practices, marine pollution, and ocean acidification.

The causes of ocean degradation are clear – and so are the actions needed to restore the ocean's health. Around the world, governments and partners are addressing the challenges in innovative ways, but as a region so reliant on the health of the oceans, we can do more.

Many of the world's fish stocks are being fished at – or above – their ability to replenish and the Asia-Pacific region is at risk of catastrophic loss of productive fisheries. Overfishing, harmful fishing practices, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing harm the ecology of the ocean and reduce the long term potential of fish stocks to provide food and jobs. Seabird, marine mammal, and sea turtle populations may also be adversely affected.

An estimated 80 percent of marine pollution originates on land – pollutants that threaten wildlife and the health and safety of humans. Nutrients from sources such as agricultural runoff, sewage and wastewater discharges, create “dead zones” where fish and other marine life cannot thrive. There are an estimated 500 dead zones in the world. Marine debris, such as trash and other solid material, enter ocean and coastal waters and threaten wildlife and the health and safety of humans. Plastics consistently make up a significant portion of all marine debris. Many of the largest contributors to ocean pollution are in the Asia-Pacific region. We can combat

the marine debris problem through proper collection, handling and recycling or disposal of trash, as well as by reducing consumption and packaging.

As the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, it becomes more acidic. Many marine organisms are unable to adapt to the new conditions. Today, the ocean is 30 percent more acidic than it was a century ago, and the chemistry of the ocean is changing ten times faster than at any other time in the past 50 million years.

Effectively responding to these challenges requires innovation, cooperation and action among governments, NGOs, industry, and other stakeholders. Working together, we can marshal the solutions we have today and create new solutions for tomorrow.

Goals

Consistent with the Hanoi Plan of Action (POA) to Implement the ARF Vision Statement and the ARF Maritime Security Work Plan, the proposed Statement on promoting strengthened cooperation would seek to:

- Determine gaps in regional protocols, awareness, capabilities (equipment, training, interoperability, information sharing, domain awareness), and institutional capacity.
- Increase the region's awareness of, and the potential to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from the various threats to the region's marine ecosystems and resources by creating opportunities for ARF participants to:
1) share best practices and provide training to help alleviate capability and capacity shortcomings; 2) understand regulatory frameworks through engagement with international organizations; and 3) facilitate government-industry collaboration and cooperation through engagement opportunities.
- Provide a platform for cooperation and eventually a cooperative plan for addressing threats to the marine environment.

Proposed Draft Statement (for adoption by the ARF)

Building on the decision of the 21st Ministerial Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar to issue the ARF Statement on Cooperation in Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Restoration from Marine Oil Spill Incidents,

Acknowledging that marine ecosystems and resources are vital to food security, human health, and economic well-being in the Asia-Pacific region,

Recognizing that *prompt and effective action* at the national, regional, and international level is essential to minimize the impacts resulting from various threats to the marine environment, including marine pollution, ocean acidification, and unsustainable fishing practices,

Consistent with ARF Participants' commitment to cooperation and the preservation of the marine environment for the benefit of their citizens and future generations, we *endeavor* to:

- *Reduce* total nutrient pollution from land-based sources to the marine environment by 20 percent by 2025 in order to reduce hypoxic zones and harmful algal blooms.
- *Significantly reduce* the input of debris, especially plastics, into the marine environment so as to achieve measurable reductions of marine debris by 2025.
- *Stem the increase* in ocean acidification by taking ambitious action to reduce carbon emissions, including in the context of negotiations for a climate change agreement that will be applicable to all under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- *Achieve* worldwide coverage of the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network and significantly increase the number of trained monitors and managers by 2020.
- *Conserve* at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas, including through effectively managed protected areas, by 2020.
- *Conserve* at least 20 percent of coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves, tidal marshes, sea grass beds, and coral reefs by 2020. These ecosystems provide critical ecosystem services and habitat and nursery grounds for many species of marine life, store carbon, and protect vulnerable coastlines against storm surges.
- *End* overfishing of all marine fish stocks by 2020, with the goal of restoring overexploited, depleted, and recovering stocks. To achieve this, we *endeavor* to:
 - *Set* fishing rules based on the best available science, even if it means foregoing catch in the near term;
 - *Develop* fair, and transparent procedures for allocating fishing rights;
 - *Enforce* fishing rules using all available technologies and impose meaningful penalties on violators;
 - *Eliminate* by 2020 fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity of fishing fleets; and
 - *Require* fishing fleets to use gear and fishing techniques that reduce to an absolute minimum the bycatch of other species, waste, and discards of fish.
- *Prevent* illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. To achieve this, we *endeavor* to:
 - *Stop* illegally harvested fish from entering the stream of commerce, consistent with international law, using all tools available;

- *Bring* into force promptly and effectively implement the Port State Measures Agreement by encouraging ARF participants to ratify it;
- *Improve* tracking of fishing vessels by ensuring that by 2017 all large fishing vessels (100 gross tons and above) have obtained an International Maritime Organization (IMO) number – a unique and permanent identifier;
- *Build* capacity to prevent wildlife trafficking of marine species through the regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks and through INTERPOL; and
- *Provide* consumers with information to allow them to choose seafood that has been harvested legally and sustainably.

Next Steps

Following introduction of this proposal at the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security in Honolulu on 31 March – 1 April 2015, feedback from ARF participants will be requested so that this proposal can be further developed and tabled at the ARF ISG on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Tokyo, Japan in May followed by endorsement at the ARF Senior Officials Meeting in Malaysia in June and subsequent adoption and referral to the ARF Ministers in August 2015.