

Minister Santos,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted that after more than two years we are meeting in person once again. My sincere gratitude goes to our Portuguese hosts for offering us such a fantastic venue – Cascais, with its clean beaches and clear waters, is a truly exceptional place.

The past few years have been extremely challenging. On top of the climate emergency and the biodiversity crisis, we have had to contend with the Covid-19 pandemic. Probably no previous generation has been confronted so starkly with the question of the very future of humanity.

Business as usual is certainly not the answer. To be fit for the future, our response must identify concrete ways to counter these threats and determine what role oceans have in saving our “blue planet”. In that context, I would like to highlight a few points:

1. The protection of the world’s oceans and the current global environmental crises are closely connected. As OSPAR countries we must give our ocean the best protection possible. To this end, we are creating a network of protected habitats. We endeavour to use marine resources only according to stringent sustainability criteria. Pressures of all kinds must be reduced. This will make our marine ecosystems more resilient. In other words, the OSPAR NEAES is also a programme for adapting to climate change.

2. Marine conservation already encompasses a broad spectrum of measures, and of course we develop and modify these as new challenges arise. For instance, the oceans, including the North-East Atlantic, are polluted with inconceivable levels of plastic waste.

That is why it is imperative that we reach agreement today on reducing litter on our beaches by 70 percent by 2030. To achieve that goal, we will have to take regulatory measures, all the way down to the municipal level. In parallel, we are working hard on corresponding EU legislation. And we are engaging at global level

as well. At a recent Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution in Geneva, the international community took a decisive step towards a global agreement. We expect UNEA 5.2 in February next year to adopt a resolution, paving the way for negotiations to commence.

3. I am particularly pleased that we are designating the NACES marine protected area (MPA) today, a huge area in the mid North Atlantic. At present, it particularly targets the protection of key seabird populations but we are looking forward to expanding the conservation objectives of the site in the near future. With these almost 600,000 square metres of additional protected area, we are even exceeding the ten percent target which we committed to under the CBD. Nevertheless, we are aware that this is still not enough. For that reason, today we are already looking at enlarging to 30 percent by 2030.

These goals demand further efforts. Effective, cross-sectoral cooperation is indispensable. We see an urgent need for OSPAR and other relevant organisations to work even more closely together - for instance on fisheries, mining and maritime shipping. We need to develop joint management based on the ecosystem approach. Reaching agreement on this under the NEA Environment Strategy is also crucial.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Neither climate action nor marine conservation will succeed if we act as individual nation states. Such goals require professional collaboration among the OSPAR countries. Concerted international efforts are the key to success.

And finally, we must emphasise our role as policymakers. It is up to us to initiate the transformational steps needed. To this end, we are building on our achievements, setting our sights on new goals, moving our cooperation forward and addressing the challenges together. Germany is ready to tackle these tasks.

Thank you.