

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends of the ocean,

Let me start off by conveying my immense regrets for not making it there with you in person, as originally planned – but be assured that I am there with you in spirit.

As we all know, the global ocean covers nearly two thirds of our planet. It provides a home for the majority of earth's biodiversity and it regulates our climate. In addition to this, it provides billions of people with food and livelihoods. It also connects us all – one global ocean stretches from the Polar Regions to the smallest of regional seas.

The biggest threats facing the ocean are also shared; the impacts of climate change, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss and pollution. To reverse these crises, we need urgent action, and we need to take this action together.

Finland was among the first countries in the world to join the Global Ocean Alliance, supporting the target of protecting at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030. As a member of the Blue Leaders, we also aim at a robust new treaty under the United Nations Law of the Sea, to conserve and protect marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. With both of these ambitions, OSPAR is in a position to lead by example.

With its Marine Litter Action Plan, developed as early as 2014, OSPAR has been a forerunner in the battle against marine litter. As we all know, plastic pollution is a global problem, and with a global problem, we need global response. Finland believes that a new global agreement on plastic pollution would be the most effective solution to stop the leakage of plastics into the environment, and our ambition is to agree, in the next session of the UN Environment Assembly, to establish an intergovernmental committee to develop a new global agreement on plastic pollution. Regional cooperation

would continue to play an important role besides this agreement, also in the future.

The North-East Atlantic region is in many respects one of the most advanced regions of the world, with the highest level of research to support our decision-making. Also our level of ambition, when tackling the threats our region is facing, should be high. The fact that our knowledge constantly grows and that scientific information is never entirely complete, should not prevent us from taking action. Instead, we should be guided by the precautionary principle, in all the decisions we take.

Today, we are taking a decision to establish a Marine Protected Area, to protect the seabirds of the North-East Atlantic.

Globally, seabirds are one of the most threatened groups of birds. This Marine Protected Area is vital for numerous seabird species, out of which many also breed in Finland. With the establishment of this MPA, not only are we working towards fulfilling our commitments under OSPAR, but we are also fulfilling our commitments under other international treaties, such as the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement. We are acting as forerunners for the conservation of vital hotspots for seabirds, and hopefully, our action will serve as a positive example for others to follow.

The link between the loss of biodiversity and climate change is clear. By protecting and restoring seas and their ecosystems, we also combat and reduce the impacts of climate change.

We already witness the impacts of climate change in our ocean – and in the Polar Regions, even more so than elsewhere. OSPAR is in a position to take proactive action with regard to Arctic marine areas, and I am happy to learn, that work is now being developed to this end. In particular, Finland is happy to welcome intensified cooperation between OSPAR and the Arctic Council, as it

has always been evident for us smaller countries, that cooperation is the key to success.

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I thank you for this opportunity to deliver my statement virtually, and wish you a successful and productive Ministerial Meeting, in beautiful Portugal.