News release

European Commission, UN Environment Programme step up cooperation to protect the world's oceans

Green growth and biodiversity also on the agenda

Brussels, 20 December 2016 – Protecting the world’s oceans from the rising threats of pollution, marine litter and overfishing will be a top cooperation priority for the European Commission and the United Nations Environment Programme next year.

Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, and UN Environment head Erik Solheim, agreed that safeguarding the world’s oceans, on which more than three billion people depend for livelihoods, is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – the world’s master plan to end poverty, increase prosperity and protect the environment.

Following the recent European Commission Communication on Ocean Governance, a joint roadmap spells out priorities for future cooperation.

“I am very pleased to have a strong international partner in the UN Environment Programme,” said Commissioner Vella. “Joining our forces will bring global benefits for oceans. We all depend on its health for our food, our climate, and as engines for sustainable economic growth. But our cooperation goes much further, as delivering on the environmental dimension of the SDGs is crucial for turning these goals from aspiration to reality.”

“Few ecosystems stand to benefit more from international cooperation than oceans. We must work together to clean and protect these great expanses and vital sources of biodiversity and human livelihoods. UN Environment is pleased to partner with the Commission to advance ocean protection, along with many other global environmental priorities,” said Erik Solheim.

The roadmap agreed today includes joint activities for supporting the implementation of marine policies addressing major pressures, such as pollution and marine litter. The two organizations will closely collaborate at the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in June and the “Our Oceans” conference hosted by the European Union in Malta in October 2017.

Protection of the Mediterranean will be particularly high on the agenda of the two partners who share a long history of successful cooperation through the Barcelona Convention on the protection of
the Mediterranean – the first of the Regional Seas Conventions under the UN Environment Programme.

Other priority topics discussed by Erik Solheim and senior EU Commission officials included:

- Promoting the circular economy at the international level
- Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into other policies, in line with the Cancun Declaration adopted by environment ministers at the UN Biodiversity Convention two weeks ago, and
- Strengthening environmental and climate resilience, as environmental degradation and climate change have serious negative consequences for migration flows and security.

Both partners also took the occasion to formally agree on and launch development cooperation programmes regarding EU support to the sound management of chemicals, the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, and The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Agriculture and Food.

For more information:

UN Environment Programme