

## Towards better protection of the High Seas

*Potsdam, 22.3.2013* **At a workshop with Federal Minister of the Environment Peter Altmaier on 20 -21 March 2013, leading international scientists and high-ranking representatives of policy, NGOs and international organizations developed strategies for better protection of the oceans.**

In front of more than 40 leading international experts in marine environmental protection, Federal Minister of the Environment Peter Altmaier called for the adoption of a new international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of the high seas. Until now there has been no effective legal instrument for governing the protection and sustainable use of almost two-thirds of the oceans. At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro ("Rio+20") heads of State and government agreed on the urgent need for improved protection of this global commons. "By 2014 at the latest we must begin negotiating this treaty", said Altmaier. This instrument would give the existing Convention on the Law of the Sea increased power in the field of marine environmental protection. Beyond this, intensified dialogue between policy and science is necessary, the Minister said at the workshop jointly organized by the Potsdam **Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS)** and the French **Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI)**. Minister Altmaier thanked both institutes for playing a critical role in the dialogue between science and policy.

"We must understand the urgency for action and work with our partners and civil society to make this a global commitment", said France's Ambassador for the Environment, Jean-Pierre Thébault.

Elements of the new treaty developed at the workshop include the following topics:

- A legal framework for creating marine protected areas in the high seas
- Obligations to perform environmental impact assessment
- Technology transfer and capacity-building in developing countries, as well as
- Fair use of marine genetic resources.

„Rio+20 last year made clear that the international community has reached a turning point on marine environmental protection and has finally securely anchored the protection of the oceans on the political agenda. 20 years after the Law of the Sea Convention entered into force, it is imperative that negotiations for its progressive development are taken up urgently and brought to a successful conclusion. The development of a new, binding treaty does not relieve us of the responsibility to further develop existing conventions and organizations", said IASS Executive Director Klaus Töpfer. Specific strategies alongside the creation of a new international treaty include:

Common principles for the protection and sustainable use of biological diversity in the high seas should be adopted. These could be based on existing principles of international environmental law such as the precautionary principle and unbureaucratically endorsed in the framework on a UN resolution.

- Existing treaties should be progressively developed, e.g. for fisheries, navigation and deep-sea mining – improved coordination among existing instruments and organizations is essential to this end.
- Regional conventions for the protection of the marine environment and the establishment of protected areas on the high seas should be expanded – an initial network of protected areas



was already established in 2010 in the Northeast Atlantic. This model could be applied to other areas, for example in Antarctica.

The workshop's findings will be further developed with partners in the academic community, politics and NGOs and included in UN-level negotiations.

„Now we need to engage with other countries and civil society to deliver the aspirations from Rio+20“, said IDDRI Director Professor Laurence Tubiana, bringing the workshop to a close.

Researchers at the **Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS)** Potsdam engage in transdisciplinary international research on climate change, earth systems science and sustainability. Supported by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the State of Brandenburg, the goal of the think tank is to actively promote dialogue on emerging global issues in the public and private sectors, as well as civil society.

The **Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI)** is a Paris and Brussels based non-profit policy research institute. Its objective is to develop and share key knowledge and tools for analyzing and shedding light on the strategic issues of sustainable development from a global perspective. Given the rising stakes of the issues posed by climate change and biodiversity loss, IDDRI provides stakeholders with input for their reflection on global governance, and also participates in work on reframing development pathways.

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