



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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## UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

10 December 2019

### Item 74: Oceans and the Law of the Sea

#### Statement by H.E. Mitch Fifield Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

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Mr President,

Australia aligns in full with the statement delivered by Tuvalu, on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum members.

We thank the coordinators from Singapore and Norway for their excellent work facilitating the Oceans and Sustainable Fisheries resolution negotiations this year.

Australia is pleased to co-sponsor these resolutions. As a Pacific Islands Forum member, and a significant coastal state, we have a strong interest in this Assembly's deliberations on oceans issues.

Mr President,

UNCLOS is a Convention which is critically important for Australia.

It provides an important legal framework governing Australia's management of our maritime zones.

UNCLOS also provides a comprehensive legal framework governing states interaction and cooperation in the oceans – from navigation to conservation.

Australia's support for UNCLOS reflects also our broader commitment to an international rules-based order, as the basis for a stable and prosperous future.

This remains as important today as it has ever been, including in the Indo-Pacific region.

We are committed to freedom of navigation and overflight, which are critical for international trade and security. We value the legal architecture that gives all States a voice.

And we believe strongly that all States have an obligation to resolve disputes peacefully in accordance with international law.

This is particularly vital in the South China Sea.

We do not take sides on competing territorial claims in the South China Sea, but we do have a strong stake in its stability and the rules and norms that govern it.

We urge all claimants to take meaningful steps to ease tensions and build trust, and cease actions that could undermine stability or lead to escalation.

We welcome also the General Assembly's continued affirmation that UNCLOS provides the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

UNCLOS is the 'constitution for the oceans'. It is of fundamental importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation on oceans matters.

Mr President,

Australia is pleased that this year's Sustainable Fisheries resolution includes even stronger language on stateless vessels. Fishing by such vessels is, by definition, IUU fishing.

We welcome the call by this Assembly on States to take action to prevent such vessels from fishing, including by enacting domestic enforcement legislation and prohibiting trans-shipment.

We also commend the close attention this Assembly continues to give to the issue of sea-level rise.

Sea-level rise will affect many States globally.

The Pacific – however – is home to the majority of the world’s low-lying atoll States and States dependent on coral islands and cays.

This region will be particularly vulnerable.

We are pleased the International Law Commission is actively considering the legal aspects of this important subject.

We recognise that a key purpose of UNCLOS is to provide a stable, predictable and durable maritime order in which the interests of all states are balanced.

We look forward to engaging with the ILC as it undertakes this work.

Thank you.