

(provisional translation)

The 12th World Ocean Summit
Opening Speech by Mr.SAKAI Manabu,
Minister of State for Ocean Policy

(March 12, Tokyo)

I am pleased to give the opening speech on the occasion of the 12th World Ocean Summit, held in Japan for the first time. As the Minister of State for Ocean Policy of the Government of Japan, I would like to introduce Japan's ocean policy and efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, let me explain my current duties as the Minister for Ocean Policy. I am in charge of ocean policy as Japan's Basic Act on Ocean Policy stipulates that I am to assist the Prime Minister in the intensive and comprehensive promotion of ocean-related policies.

Under the Basic Act on Ocean Policy, the government formulates and implements ocean-related policies in a comprehensive and systematic manner. The Basic Plan for Ocean

Policy is decided by the Government of Japan and publicized as the government's basic ocean plan. The outline of Japan's basic ocean policy is presented in the plan, and I would like to explain the main points of the plan.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For Japan, a country surrounded on all sides by vast ocean areas, it is an important task to protect the oceans in order to preserve the land and ensure the safety of the people, and at the same time, to utilize the oceans as a foundation for the existence and growth of the economy and society, and to pass them on to future generations as a valuable foundation for the survival of humanity.

At the same time, we believe that in today's international society, where aspects of confrontation and cooperation are intricately intertwined, it is necessary to address the following four points in particular.

The first is “securing an open and stable ocean”. As a maritime nation, open seas are an essential element of our nation's prosperity, and to this end we must promote a stable and foreseeable maritime order based on the rule of law. At the center of this concept is the United

Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The second is “addressing global issues”. As human activities expand globally, the threat of natural disasters is increasing. Environmental changes caused by climate change, including global warming, and the growing severity and frequency of extreme weather events are becoming major concerns. These challenges have grown too large for any single country to handle alone.

In this context, the marine sector also needs to promote efforts to predict events and enhance disaster prevention and mitigation functions based on scientific knowledge, as well as to realize a decarbonized society.

The third is “strengthening the blue economy”. Since ancient times, fishing, shipping and other ocean-related activities have been an essential part of life in Japan. While the industrial structure is changing in line with technological advances and social changes, the maritime sector must not be left behind, and sustainable and effective measures must be implemented in a timely manner. There also is a need in the maritime sector to strengthen competitiveness and create new industries through improving technological capabilities

and their implementation.

The fourth is “empowerment of marine human resources”. Various ocean-related measures must ultimately be implemented in a way that rewards people dedicating themselves to ocean-related activities.

This includes educating and securing human resources fitting in with today’s society, as well as strengthening industry effectiveness through unmanned, and/or labor-saving operations.

Based on this recognition and comprehensive view of its maritime policy, the Government of Japan listed 379 measures to be taken in a comprehensive and systematic manner under the two pillars of comprehensive maritime security and building a sustainable ocean, and is steadily implementing these measures under the supervision of the relevant ministries and agencies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Prior to today's discussion, I would like to offer some perspectives based on the points I have mentioned above. I hope these will be kept in mind in the discussions.

The first is utilizing scientific knowledge.

One of the prioritized measures of our ocean

policy is Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). This is an effort to improve the visualization of the oceans, which occupy about 70% of the Earth's surface, while we were not necessarily aware of the situation similarly on land, through satellite data and international exchange of information, for example.

The ocean-related data that Japan has access includes not only the area around Japan but also, for example, the state of the Arctic Ocean ice sheet. While observation data in the polar regions are not necessarily sufficient, environmental fluctuations in these regions can have an impact on natural disasters even in Japan and other countries. Any related measures should be based on such accumulated basic data and knowledge.

One of the challenges in preserving the marine environment is countermeasures against marine litter. As Japan is surrounded by the sea, the collection and disposal of marine litter coming in not only from domestic areas, but also from overseas has become a major issue in recent years.

International negotiation is underway to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, and the next meeting is

scheduled to be held in August this year. Japan believes it is important to analyze the current situation based on scientific monitoring and promote efforts throughout the entire life cycle of plastic to prevent the emission of plastic waste.

Next is the utilization of new technologies and the return profits of their results. The traditional fishing industry continues to be an important source of food supply for Japan, and is also an essential element of Japanese cuisine, such as sushi, which is well known around the world.

On the other hand, it is important to revitalize the traditional industries related to the sea, not only by continuing to need them as before, but also by pursuing synergistic effects with new industries, such as service and tourism, for example. We call it "Umigyō" in the field of fishing village development, but new innovations must also be considered.

Marine transportation, another important marine sector which supports Japan's economy, is responsible for approximately 40% of domestic transportation and more than 99% of international trade, and together with the shipbuilding industry and seafarers who support it, it is an indispensable part of the

social infrastructure.

From the perspective of expanding industrial use of the ocean, it is expected that the utilization of cutting-edge technologies, such as labor-saving and unmanned systems, will also lead to more sustainable use of the ocean and the creation of new employment opportunities. The vast territorial waters and exclusive economic zones around Japan are not only deemed as large in size, but also one of the new fields in which we can make use of them, such as utilization of marine renewable energy like tidal and wind power.

While keeping in mind the need for international management of activities that overburden the ocean, such as various international efforts to control pollutants discharged by ships and to eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, we must also keep in mind that ocean policies should formulate so as to return their fruits to those responsible for various ocean-related activities.

Lastly but not least, let me mention about the maritime order based on the "rule of law." Legal stability and predictability are important for nations like Pacific islands and the Caribbean countries that are exposed to various

uncertainties due to sea level rise caused by climate change. Japan has expressed its position that it is permissible to preserve the existing baselines established in accordance with the UNCLOS, notwithstanding the regression of coastlines caused by climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year, for the first time in three years, the United Nations Ocean Conference will be held to discuss the sustainable use and conservation of the oceans. Together with the APEC Ocean-related Ministerial Meeting which will be held for the first time in 10 years, this year will be an occasion of intensive global discussion on issues related to the oceans.

This two-day summit will cover a wide range of topics, including the blue economy, climate change, countermeasures against maritime pollution, shipping, fishing and aquaculture.

We hope that all participants will bring their knowledge to the meeting and share their views on how we can maximize the potential and a better future for the oceans, and that this will serve as an opportunity for future international discussions.

Thank you very much.