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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL HIGH-LEVEL OPEN DEBATE ON ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY

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Written statement by H.E. The Hon. Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

Australia commends India for convening this important United Nations (UN) Security Council open debate on “Enhancing Maritime Security: A case for international cooperation”.

The blue economy, which depends on healthy oceans, has never been more important for livelihoods and economic growth. This importance will only grow, with the OECD estimating USD 3 trillion will be generated by ocean-based industry by 2030, doubling from USD 1.5 trillion in 2010.

At the same time, maritime security threats – traditional and new – are growing. They are more interconnected than ever before. And they demand cooperation – between states, but also non-state and private actors.

Terrorism, trafficking, people-smuggling and other transnational crimes are persistent challenges.

The FAO estimates that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing takes between USD 10–23 billion of fish out of the world’s oceans.

Unchecked, IUU fishing threatens the long-term sustainability of global fish resources and marine biodiversity. Coupled with environmental damage, IUU fishing threatens food security and livelihoods worldwide. And it can lead to tensions between states.

In the Pacific, Australia supports the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency to help monitor fishing fleets to support sustainable fishing and combat IUU fishing. Under the Pacific Maritime Security Program, we are gifting 21 new patrol vessels to 12 Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste, as well as providing contracted aerial surveillance. In Southeast Asia, we have launched a regional IUU fishing program that will provide education, training and improved capacity to partner nations.

Piracy and armed robbery remain a significant risk to global maritime security. In our region, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) reported 97 incidents of piracy or armed robbery in Asian waters. As a party to ReCAAP, Australia supports efforts to share information, promote cooperation and build capacity across the region.

We recognise that we cannot solve these problems alone. Working in partnerships – bilateral, regional and multilateral, is vital.

Whether that is working together in support of the maritime pillar of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, with its focus on cooperative management of marine resources and transnational crime. Or working with India under its Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, with its strong focus on maritime security cooperation across the Indo-Pacific. Or collaboration with Pacific Islands nations through the Pacific Fusion Centre, working with states, territories and regional organisations to analyse and respond to security challenges in our region.

Just as we cooperate to meet challenges to maritime security, so too we need to work together to uphold the rules and norms which underpin an open and stable maritime order.

The foundation of maritime security and cooperation is respect for international law and the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes. As we affirm each year in the UN General Assembly resolution on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. It contains clear rules that apply to all countries for maritime claims, the lawful uses of maritime spaces, including freedom of navigation and overflight, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Adherence to international law is fundamental to the continuing peace, prosperity and stability of our region. It allows all states – big and small – to resolve disputes peacefully. Whether in the South China Sea or elsewhere.

In this respect, where international courts or tribunals have rendered binding decisions, we call on the parties to those decisions to abide by them.

The maritime security challenges raised in this UN Security Council debate cannot be addressed alone. They require collective, coordinated and determined effort. Australia is committed to working with all states to enhance maritime security and protect the marine environment.