



THE DITCHLEY FOUNDATION

THE OCEANS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A NEW LEVEL OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OR A TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS?

19-21 April 2018

This is the first conference, held with the generous sponsorship of Canadian Ditchley, that Ditchley has held in its sixty year history that addresses the challenges and opportunities of the oceans in their entirety. In 1969, Ditchley looked at the resources of the ocean bed; in 1971, at the Arctic Ocean; and in the year 2000 at sustainable fishing. This is telling for an organisation that focuses on complex international problems. The oceans in their entirety represent a vastness and complexity that it is difficult to comprehend. The atmosphere and climate change, itself a contested and complex subject, is arguably easier to grasp and to tackle, proving the truism that we know more about the atmosphere, stratosphere and space than we do about the depths of the sea.

This presents us with a major problem, because all the evidence suggests that we do need to find ways to think of the oceans as an interconnected system that interacts with other complex systems to deliver the essentials for life, stability and human prosperity and progress. Like Lilliputians gathered around a Gulliver, we are beginning to realise that the parts make a whole, and one that could shake our foundations. There is a lot of advocacy around the oceans expressed through one major conference or another. Diplomatic initiatives address this or that aspect, hammered out in one multilateral forum or another. There are relatively few opportunities to try to have a sustained and serious high level conversation across silos of expertise and policy, as to how the various problems of the oceans and climate might interact; what therefore needs to be done; how it could be done; and its relative urgency. This Ditchley conference aims to begin just that conversation.

The reasons for having this conversation now are familiar from other Ditchley discussions.

Fast evolving technologies are opening up both extraordinary new possibilities and new dangers for humanity's treatment of the oceans. The collection, analysis and visualisation of data offers a way genuinely to comprehend the oceans in their reality for the first time. New database technologies like blockchain could make that information broadly and persistently available. Underwater and surface drones, wave and solar generated electricity, wireless networks, automation and artificial intelligence make the detailed mapping and monitoring of all aspects of the oceans and the ocean bed a technological possibility. This could allow ever more ruthless illegal over-fishing and undersea mining but equally it could also enable much closer monitoring of activity in and on the oceans; better control of illegal activity; and more effective action on pollution. We will want to look at how emerging technologies can be applied to benefit our husbandry of the oceans. What new commercial opportunities will there be for companies and how can they be pursued in harmony with the environment?

Failing multilateral governance. The high seas are one of the ultimate "commons" alongside the air and now cyber space. How can international law be developed to improve the conditions of the oceans? How can multilateral fora be made effective? Who will lead and how can authoritarian but now capitalist powers like China cooperate effectively with democracies to safeguard the oceans? Are new initiatives and organisations needed or is it better to work on renewal and reform of what we already have such as UNCLOS?

What is the role for the fast evolving world of finance? How can good behaviour on the oceans be incentivised and bad behaviour penalised and the benefits reduced? What is the overlap with other forms of crime (piracy, people trafficking and drug running) that funnel money from black markets into the financial system?

International policy cannot do everything at once. What is the right prioritisation? Is climate change – leading to warming of the oceans and acidification – in fact the biggest challenge? How bad is the gently accumulating threat from plastic and hydrocarbon pollution of the sea and the marine food chain? What can and must be done to restore fish stocks and is there consensus on urgency?

Although we want to look at the oceans in their entirety, which are the places in most danger and with the fastest rates of change? Which areas of the oceans look like they could have most knock on effects because of their role in marine ecology or the climate? Should the Arctic Ocean be of especial concern?