



Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025

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Guiding the Regional Seas
towards global ocean-related
goals for the period 2022-2025

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Abbreviations

BAT	Best available technique
BEP	Best environmental practice
DESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEO BON	The Group On Earth Observations Biodiversity Observation Network
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
iDiv	German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research
IGO	Inter-governmental Organisation
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
MSP	Marine spatial planning
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield
MTS	Medium Term Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECM	Other effective area-based conservation measures
POW	Programme of Works
RAC	Regional Activity Centres
RACER	Relevant, Acceptable, Credible, Easy, Robust
RCU	Regional Coordination Centres
RFMO	Regional fisheries management organization
RSCAP	Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans
RSP	Regional Seas Programme
RSSD	Regional Seas Strategic Directions
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization



Sea Ice, Svalbard, 2015. Sea ice plays an important role for the climate and ecosystems. The extent and thickness of sea ice is significantly decreasing. Photo by Peter Prokosch. Courtesy GRID-Arendal. www.grida.no/resources/3636

Background

Since 1974, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs) Programme has evolved to consist of eighteen unique instruments for enhancing marine environmental cooperation tailored to regional specificities, that are strategically placed to respond to the urgent call for securing planetary health. More specifically, the RSCAPs aim to strengthen the capacity within the region to protect and conserve the marine environment, through education, training, communication, and institution-building, as well as drawing in partnering institutions for delivering key functions, such as information management and pollution monitoring. In addition, testing of protocols and methodologies and setting of targets at the regional level help to inform the development of global responses.

Despite concerted action over the decades to protect the ocean, existing problems continue to escalate, and a new generation of threats are on the horizon. This is witnessed by the recent COVID-19 pandemic that has wreaked socioeconomic havoc on coastal communities and has increased awareness of the link between ecosystem health and human action that necessitates bringing together these aspects in efforts to save the ocean and secure peoples' livelihoods. This calls for bringing nature in as an ally and partner to combat climate change, prevent zoonosis outbreaks and to secure life-supporting ecosystem services. We will also need to rethink production and consumption patterns so that societies are assisted to transition from a linear to a circular economy with markedly less pollution and handling of wastes in a sustainable manner.

Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 Goal

The Regional Seas Strategic Directions (RSSD) 2022-2025 aims to more effectively mainstream the conservation and sustainable use of oceans into policies and programmes, harmonize methodologies for tracking progress, and foster an integrated response to combat the ecological, climate, pollution, and health crisis for achieving long-term health of the ocean, as well as the people who rely on the ocean for subsistence or otherwise.

RSSD Roles and Responsibilities

The RSSD 2022-2025 aims to be very specific on the different roles, functions and mandates of the entities involved in its follow up and implementation:

- Eighteen RSCAPs, each with its own autonomous governing body consisting of the countries/Parties in the region, decision-making processes, work plans and budgets to which the Parties/countries contribute to through assessed or voluntary contributions.
- For seven of these eighteen RSCAPs, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is designated as the secretariat, six being administered through the Ecosystems Division and one through UNEP's Europe Office.
- UNEP provides overall coordination and facilitation of work, including convening the Global Annual Meetings of Regional Seas and Action Plans to facilitate dialogue between RSCAPs, endeavoring to harmonize and strengthen regional approaches thus helping to deliver as one.
- The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) with its universal membership is uniquely positioned to provide overarching global policy guidance, helping to bring together work of RSCAPs, including facilitating partnering with relevant intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders.

How does the RSSD 2022-2025 contribute to global processes?

The RSSD will contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

More specifically, the RSSD 2022-2025 will contribute to and strengthen the delivery of UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025 and Programme of Work (PoW) 2022-2023, particularly regarding activities that address ocean-related components of the identified priority areas of climate action, nature action, chemical and pollution action, science-policy, environmental governance, finance and economic transformations and digital transformations.

In addition, the RSSD 2022-2025 promotes and provides further clarity on the contribution of RSCAPs to UN Decades on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) and Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).

In essence, the RSSD 2022-2025 outlines how UNEP's Regional Seas Programme will deliver on regional and global goals and agreements to protect and sustainably use the oceans.

The aim is to increase the visibility and strategic involvement of RSCAPs in key processes at global and regional levels, while ensuring that UNEP delivers on its mandate in relation to the marine environment.

To this end, the document functions as a catalyst of action for agreements, targets, measures and tools specific to regional needs, ensuring that global ocean-related commitments are addressed, tracked and reported. This document is also closely related to UNEP's Marine and Coastal Strategy, which describes actions to implement the main strategic directions of the RSSD 2022-2025.

The Regional Seas Programme in a nutshell

The Regional Seas Programme (RSP), launched in 1974 in the wake of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, is one of UNEP's most significant achievements. Today, it operates in 18 regions, most of which have adopted a regional action plan underpinned by a legal framework in the form of a regional convention and associated protocols on specific issues. Commonly, they are referred to as RSCAPs. Regional Coordination Units (RCUs), often aided by Regional Activity Centres (RACs), service and facilitate countries' implementation of agreed action under the conventions and action plans. UNEP provides overall coordination and facilitation of the work and in so doing connects the programme to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).

RSCAPs activities aim to strengthen the capacity within the region to enable countries to implement the action plans and work programmes, through education, training, communication and institution-building. The RSCAPs draw in partnering institutions for delivering key functions, including information management and pollution monitoring. In addition to functioning as an effective mechanism for regional marine cooperation, testing of protocols and methodologies and setting of targets at the regional level help to inform global responses.



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