

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme (UNEP RSP) are natural partners in world-wide efforts to conserve marine and coastal biodiversity. Although their mutual goals are global, and most of the on-the-ground implementation takes place at the national and local levels, it is their partnership at the regional level that offers the greatest opportunity for strengthening coordination amongst countries to meet international commitments to effective environmental protection and sustainability.

CBD

The CBD is one of the most important international legal frameworks for the creation, management and support of protected areas. Article 8 calls specifically for the establishment of protected area systems to protect biodiversity.



The Parties to the CBD adopted in 1998 a programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity, an important component of which is the establishment and maintenance of MCPAs. This mandate was reinforced in 2002 when the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) set a target of

establishing a global network of MCPAs by the year 2012.

According to the text of the Convention, the goal of such work should be the establishment and maintenance of MCPAs that are

- effectively managed
- ecologically based
- part of a global MCPA network.

Moreover, this work should build on national and regional systems, and include a range of levels of protection.



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West to East: North-East Pacific South-East Pacific Wider Caribbean West & Central Africa Mediterranean Black Sea Eastern Africa Red Sea & Gulf of Aden ROPME Sea Area South Asian Seas East Asian Seas North-West Pacific Pacific Partner programmes: Arctic North-East Atlantic Baltic Sea Caspian Sea Antarctic

ICRAN

The International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) is an innovative and dynamic global partnership of many of the world's leading coral reef science and conservation organizations, working together to implement strategically linked actions across local, regional and global scales, to bring added value to existing partner investments in reef monitoring, knowledge dissemination, and practical management.

ICRAN was established in 2000, with support from the United Nations Foundation, to provide a coordinated response to the International Coral Reef Initiative's urgent call to protect coral reefs.

ICRAN actions are coordinated at the regional level by Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and include alternative livelihoods, training, capacity building, and the exchange and application of scientific, economic and social information, to encourage the realization of commitments to Multilateral Environmental Agreements and support direct on-the-ground action throughout the world's major coral reef regions.



UNEP-WCMC

The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is the biodiversity assessment and policy implementation arm of UNEP. The Centre has been in operation for over 25 years, combining scientific research with practical policy advice.



UNEP-WCMC provides objective, scientifically rigorous products and services to help decision makers recognize the value of biodiversity and apply this knowledge to all that they do. Its core business is managing data about ecosystems and biodiversity, interpreting and analysing that data to provide assessments and policy analysis, and making the results available to national and international decision makers and businesses.

UNEP-WCMC is the custodian of the World Database of Protected Areas. This database contains information on protected areas (including MCPAs) at a global scale.

The UNEP Regional Seas Programme

The UNEP Regional Seas Programme (UNEP RSP) addresses the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas by promoting and facilitating their sustainable management and use. It works at the regional level by



engaging neighbouring countries in joint actions to protect their shared marine environment. Today, more than 140 countries participate in 13 Regional Seas programmes established under the auspices of UNEP (see map), and five independent partner programmes.

UNEP RSP is an internationally-recognized platform for tackling issues which require cooperation beyond national jurisdiction, and is considered the most appropriate framework for implementing MCPA networks. It has been identified by the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) as the most appropriate framework for implementing MCPA networks and taking the lead role at the regional level.

The Strategic Directions for the UNEP RSP (2004-2007) call for its increased use as a platform for pursuing common regional objectives, promoting synergies and coordinating regional implementation of relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the CBD and the other biodiversity conventions.



SUSTAINABLE SEAMOUNT FARMING INITIATIVE, ICRAN MESOAMERICAN REEF ALLIANCE PROJECT. © ICRAN

The Project

The UNEP Regional Seas Programme has joined efforts with the CBD Secretariat, ICRAN and UNEP-WCMC to undertake a research project examining the current status of MCPAs and networks within the 18 Regional Seas programmes.

The project will be carried out in collaboration with the two complementary MCPA-related databases: MPA Global and the World Database on Protected Areas. The outcome of this research project will be the publication in 2006 of a joint technical report on MCPA networks in the Regional Seas and globally.



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Objectives

The joint research project will analyze the current status of MCPAs at the regional and global level based on information generated by the Regional Seas programmes, and examine the role of the UNEP RSP in that context. It will identify gaps and related issues for the development of a strategic approach for meeting international goals, such as

- WSSD (establishment of a global representative network of MCPAs by 2012) and
- CBD ("effective conservation of at least 10% of each of the world's ecological regions by 2010") targets



ECOTOURISTS AND GREY WHALE OFF THE COAST OF MEXICO. D.FLEETHAM/UNEP/STILL PICTURES

Initial steps

Initial research for this study focused on a literature review, web research, and distribution of a questionnaire to the Regional Seas programmes.

In the second phase of the study, summaries were compiled of the distribution and coverage of MCPAs within each of the Regional Seas. This data was then distributed for review along with a follow-up questionnaire.

The resulting report illustrates the extent of MCPA protection offered in the various Regional Seas.

It also reviews

- existing regional legislative frameworks on MCPAs,
- the current role of UNEP RSP,
- regional targets, and
- existing resources.

The report will examine gaps and major constraints that prevent the development of MCPA networks, and offers potential solutions.

The document will conclude with some recommendations on how to meet WSSD and CBD targets through continued collaboration between the CBD and the UNEP RSP and suggestions for strengthening MCPA networks.

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DIVER ON A CORAL REEF IN THAILAND. D. FLEETHAM/UNEP/STILL PICTURES

Natural partners

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme (UNEP RSP) are working together to build a global network of

Marine and Coastal Protected Areas



VISITOR PRESSURE AT BUCCOO REEF MARINE PARK, TOBAGO. © BUCCOO REEF TRUST

Marine and coastal protected areas (MCPAs) are now universally recognized as key tools for the conservation and management of marine species, habitats and ecosystems. The need is clear: coastal development and population growth, depleted marine resources, pollution of coastal ecosystems, degradation of coral reefs, and dramatic loss of biodiversity are but a few of the warning signs that urgent action is needed.



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