

## **Second Global Meeting of Regional Seas Conventions And Action Plans, The Hague, 5-8 July 1999**

### **Report of the Second Global Meeting of Regional Seas Conventions And Action Plans Introduction**

1. The regional seas programme, initiated in 1974, has remained the central United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) initiative providing the major legal, administrative, substantive and financial framework for the implementation of Agenda 21, and its chapter 17 on oceans in particular. The regional seas programme is based on periodically revised action plans adopted by high-level intergovernmental meetings and implemented, in most cases, in the framework of legally binding regional seas conventions, under the authority of the respective contracting parties or intergovernmental meetings.

2. Following the adoption of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities at the Washington Conference in November 1995, UNEP initiated actions to revitalize the regional seas programme. In addition, by its decision 20/19 A of 5 February 1999, the UNEP Governing Council stressed the need for UNEP to strengthen the regional seas programme as its central mechanism for implementation of its activities relevant to chapter 17 of Agenda 21.

3. The second global meeting of the secretariats of the regional seas conventions and action plans, which in the new organizational structure of UNEP falls under the responsibility of the Division of Environmental Conventions, was hosted in response to that need and had the following specific objectives:

(a) To channel more effectively UNEP programmatic support to the regional seas conventions and action plans, particularly in areas complementary to the UNEP programme of work (1999 and 2000-2001);

(b) To promote horizontal ties among regional seas conventions and action plans;

(c) To strengthen the linkages between the regional seas conventions and action plans and the Global Programme of Action through agreed upon specific actions, particularly regarding the role of the secretariats in the implementation of the UNEP/Global Programme of Action strategic action plan on sewage and the Global Programme of Action clearing-house;

(d) To strengthen the linkages between the regional seas conventions and action plans and other global conventions and agreements, specifically the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Global Plan of Action for Marine Mammals, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea;

(e) To promote cooperation between regional seas conventions and action plans and the UNEP regional offices.

#### **I. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

##### **A. Opening statements and organizational matters**

4. The meeting was opened at 9 a.m. on Monday, 5 July 1999, by Mr. Jorge Illueca, Assistant Executive Director, Division of Environmental Conventions, UNEP, who, on behalf of Mr. Klaus Töpfer, executive Director of UNEP, welcomed all participants. Ms. Veerle Vandeweerd, Director-designate, Coordination Office for the Global Programme of Action, also welcomed participants to The Hague and thanked the Government of The Netherlands which was hosting the Coordination Office for the Global Programme of Action, for providing the facilities for the meeting.

5. Mr. Illueca read out a statement by the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Klaus Töpfer, in which the Executive Director noted that the current meeting was attended by representatives of 21 environmental conventions and related international

agreements, making it the largest meeting ever held of environmental conventions and related international agreements.

6. Among the results which the Executive Director hoped the meeting would achieve, he noted, in particular, the identification of clear priorities with strategic actions for the regional seas conventions and action plans which UNEP could support; recognition that the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA) responded to the priority assessment needs of the regional seas conventions and action plans and of its advantage to them as a valuable tool in the implementation of their

programmes of work; proposals for specific actions to accelerate the implementation of the Global Programme of Action; meaningful collaboration between regional seas conventions and action plans and global environmental conventions and related international agreements; and increased technical horizontal cooperation between the more mature and less developed regional seas conventions and action plans.

7. He pledged the support of UNEP in 1999 and in the coming biennium to catalyse the building of synergies among the regional seas conventions and action plans and with global environmental conventions and related international agreements, and recalled that, to facilitate that process, the Governing Council at its twentieth session had approved the establishment of a Division of Environmental Conventions, which would work with the other divisions of UNEP in providing such support.

8. Noting that the current meeting was the first of four important meetings that UNEP was organizing in 1999 to facilitate collaboration among conventions, he assured participants that the results and recommendations of the meeting would be carefully considered by UNEP in the preparation of its strategic action programme on regional seas conventions and action plans for the remainder of 1999 and for the coming biennium and he wished them all every success in their deliberations.

9. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Illueca and considered the agenda contained in annex I to the present report.

#### B. Attendance

10. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following organizations:

(a) Regional seas conventions and action plans: Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission); Black Sea Environmental Programme (BSEP); Commission of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Commission); Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP); Northwest Pacific Region Environmental Cooperation Centre; Plan of Action of the South East Pacific; Protection Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); Regional Coordinating Unit for the Caribbean Environment Programme (CAR/RCU); Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA); Regional Coordinating Unit for the East Asian Seas (EAS/RCU); Regional Coordinating Unit for the West and Central African Action Plan (WACAF/RCU); Regional Coordinating Unit of the Eastern African Region (EAF/RCU); South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP); South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP);

(b) Global and international agreements: Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS); Convention on Biological Diversity; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA); Global Plan of Action for Marine Mammals; Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities; International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI); United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

(c) Intergovernmental organizations: Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); International Maritime Organization (IMO); Marine Environment Laboratory of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); World Conservation

Union (IUCN).

11. The list of participants is provided in annex VIII to the present report.

## II. LINKING THE REGIONAL SEAS CONVENTIONS AND ACTION PLANS TO RELEVANT GLOBAL CONVENTIONS, AGREEMENTS AND INITIATIVES

12. Introducing the item, the Chair noted that UNEP played a facilitating role in the area of regional seas and that the actual work carried out under the regional seas programme was driven by the conventions and action plans adopted in the respective regions. He also drew attention to the need to consider how the regional seas programme could interact with such global environmental agreements and organizations as, inter alia, the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and ICRI. In addition, he suggested that the meeting should consider such issues as the interface between the regional conventions and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; the importance of information exchange; and the need to ensure the sustainability of the regional seas conventions and action plans.

13. In their introductory statements, representatives drew attention to issues of particular concern to their respective organizations and in respect of which they hoped to receive guidance during the course of the current meeting. Those issues included:

- (a) The need for newer organizations and conventions to learn from mature conventions and organizations with longer experience;
- (b) Issues of communication and coordination among environmental organizations, as well as with the Global Programme of Action and with organizations outside the UNEP family, such as AOSIS;
- (c) The need to define more clearly the respective roles of regional environmental programmes;
- (d) The legal regimes covering regional sea areas and other relevant legal issues;
- (e) The need to update some regional seas conventions, and to take into account the consequences for those conventions of the Convention on the Law of the Sea;
- (f) The need, when determining future action, to be guided by the availability and sources of funding and to ensure follow-up to the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session;
- (g) The importance of partnership and, accordingly, of partnership conferences.

### A. Global International Waters Assessment

#### 1. Introduction

14. Mr. Per Wramner, Scientific Director of the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA), gave a presentation on the work carried out by GIWA to date. He noted that, of the four focal areas identified by GEF, only international waters had as yet no assessment: GIWA had been established as a four-year programme to meet that need. He also pointed out that, as a small organization with limited funding, GIWA would be working in cooperation with a number of other partners and would base its global assessment largely on those sectoral and regional assessments already in existence. In view of the limited funding, it was vital for GIWA to prioritize its work and to concentrate on its objective of assessing the ecological status of international waters ? both coastal and inland - and identifying the social and economic causes of environmental degradation.

15. Turning to the working methods of GIWA, he said that it had a regional and subregional emphasis and had provisionally identified 66 subregions, grouped into nine megaregions, for the purposes of its assessment. As an initial stage, a pilot assessment would be conducted at a regional level, possibly in the Mediterranean region, in view of the extensive data already available in the secretariat of the Barcelona Convention. Following that pilot assessment and the establishment of the

GIWA network, work would be carried out over a period of four years, in phases, ending with the dissemination of its products, which would be made as widely available as possible. He suggested that the regional seas conventions and action plans could act as focal points for the GIWA subregions which fell within their responsibility.

## 2. Discussion

16. In the ensuing discussion, the view was expressed that the GIWA subregions ? which were based primarily on environmental and biogeographical factors, taking due account of linkages between freshwater and marine systems - should be harmonized with those applied in other forums, such as UNEP, to avoid the further proliferation of such regional divisions. In addition, it was stressed that the different regional and inter-regional environmental assessments and related complementary activities currently being carried out should be carefully harmonized and synchronized, with a view to avoiding duplication. The need for such harmonization was even greater when it came to a global exercise such as that undertaken by GIWA.

17. On the issue of funding, Mr. Wranmer clarified that \$14 million had already been provided to GIWA, half from GEF and half in combined funding from the Government of Finland, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Municipality and University of Kalmar, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and UNEP, and that additional funding would be needed for all the work that GIWA had to conduct, especially in studying the social and economic causes of pollution, about which little was known. In addition, he pointed out that GEF funding was restricted to covering incremental costs in developing countries and there was consequently a need for counterpart funding or in-kind assistance from developed countries for activities in their region. The meeting agreed on the need to define precisely what was covered by incremental costs and he explained further that, by raising interest from donors in international waters issues, GIWA would help leverage additional funding for all actors concerned.

18. In response to questions about the relationship between GIWA and other bodies, particular attention was given to cooperation with the Joint Group of Experts on Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP). It was noted that, although GIWA and GESAMP had different schedules for the completion and scope of their respective assessments, their combined involvement with the assessment of marine and coastal areas had resulted in useful cooperative arrangements, in particular, with the activities of the GESAMP Working Group on Marine Environmental Assessments, which was preparing a global report on land-based activities and a report on the state of the marine environment.

19. Concern was expressed by a number of representatives about the different priorities set by different bodies and there was agreement on the need to harmonize those priorities, as it would be unwise to send conflicting signals to potential donors. Representatives also drew attention to the problem, particularly for smaller States, of having to deal with an increasingly large number of intergovernmental organizations.

20. Attention was drawn, also, to the need for capacity-building and technology transfer, to assist smaller countries in complying with their requirements under GIWA. At the same time, it was suggested that the GIWA project document might need to be amended, to ensure that it responded to the actual needs of States.

21. It was pointed out that the scope of GIWA extended beyond the jurisdiction of all except one of the regional seas conventions and action plans ? covering inland areas like river-basins - and, accordingly, it was suggested that there was a need for enhanced coordination among regional bodies for the purposes of GIWA, including

through such measures as an inventory of all existing institutions, bodies, etc. In accordance with the work plan currently being drafted, that inventory would be carried out during the initial phase of GIWA.

22. In addition, it was noted that a number of regional seas assessments had already been completed or were being finalized and might help meet the information requirements under GIWA.

23. In response to a question about the future of GIWA, once its four-year programme had been completed, the meeting was informed that, in the view of the Executive Director of UNEP, consideration must be given to continuation of the work undertaken by GIWA.

24. A small contact group was established to consider such issues as the relationship and linkages between GIWA, the Global Programme of Action and GESAMP; the scope of GIWA; complementarity, additionality, synergy and integration of activities; whether and in what way GIWA would use the numerous assessments already produced through the regional seas programme and its subprogrammes, as well as through the Global Programme of Action and GESAMP; what would be the role of the regional seas units and secretariats in the implementation of GIWA; and what would become of GIWA after conclusion of its assessment, and also to suggest how collaborative arrangements could be organized, especially during the four distinct phases of the project.

25. The contact group refined the table setting out the programme for the integration of the regional seas convention plans in the work of GIWA. The table, as revised, is provided in annex II to the present report.

### 3. Recommendations

26. Following that debate, the meeting agreed on the following recommendations on organizational and operational principles to facilitate effective implementation of GIWA and the regional seas programme:

(a) In the area of consultations, that:

(i) The annual meeting of the regional seas programmes would serve the broad purpose of consultations on GIWA-related issues;

(ii) Regional consultations should precede each GIWA phase;

(iii) At the subregional level, GIWA focal points would facilitate coordination between the GIWA team and other collaborating partners;

(b) In the area of taking stock, that:

(i) GIWA would take into account existing information and data as well as existing programmes and activities;

(ii) Quality assurance procedures would be applied to the data sets and information to be utilized by GIWA and that due recognition should be given to the gaps, in data or information, which may exist, especially in the developing regions;

(c) In the area of capacity-building, that capacity-building would be an integral part of the GIWA process;

(d) In respect of contributions by the regional seas programmes to GIWA, that:

(i) The programmes should, to the extent possible, participate actively in the assessment, for instance, as subregional focal points, task team members, etc.;

(ii) Available data should be compiled to meet the needs of GIWA, as follows:

a. Basic ecological data;

b. Data about human impacts on the environment;

c. Environmental assessments, including trends;

d. Basic social and economic data;

e. Data about the social root causes of environmental problems;

(e) In respect of contributions by GIWA to the regional seas programmes, that:

(i) Consideration would be given to the provision of financial assistance to secretariats of regional seas conventions and action plans, to assist them in the

conduct of activities under GIWA;

(ii) GIWA should provide subregional assessments of environmental status, information on the social and economic root causes of environmental problems and other data which could be used as a basis, inter alia, for work plans, fund raising (especially GEF funds), and more detailed assessments; and

(f) Recognizing the linkages between GIWA and the Global Programme of Action, that GIWA should take into account the particular needs of the regional seas conventions and action plans in terms of scientific assessments on land-based activities and that it should also consider modalities to support the identification or, as appropriate, updating of priority actions as a contribution to the implementation of the regional programmes of action and protocols on land-based activities.

27. The meeting provided inputs into the work plan components that should constitute the four phases of the programme for the integration of the regional seas conventions and action plans in the work of GIWA, including the identification of main institutional players, as set out in the table contained in annex II to the present report.

#### B. Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

##### 1. Introduction

28. Introducing the subitem, Ms. Vandeweerd noted that it was important at the current stage to move the implementation of the Global Programme of Action forward, paying particular attention to the need to revitalize some of the regional seas programmes. Given the decisions of the UNEP Governing Council at its nineteenth and twentieth sessions and of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session, there was a need for real progress to be made in the abatement of the degradation of the marine environment from land-based activities through, inter alia, strengthening the regional seas programmes, particularly those in developing countries. Specific measures should be considered within a holistic framework to implement those regional programmes.

29. The following account of the discussions on the Global Programme of Action is divided in two sections: the first describes the current work of the Coordination Office and the related discussion; the second provides some initial direction for the way forward.

##### 2. Current work of the Global Programme of Action Coordination Office

###### (a) Regional programmes of action on land-based activities

30. Mr. Omar Vidal, Deputy Coordinator, Global Programme of Action Coordination Office, introduced the background documents relevant to the Global Programme of Action, as listed in annex VII to the present report, drawing particular attention to document UNEP(DEC)/RS.2/INF/8 on the Global Programme of Action implementation of regional and national programmes of action. He affirmed that, in accordance with the provisions in the Global Programme of Action itself and its implementation plan, as well as the General Assembly resolution 51/189 of 16 December 1996 and successive decisions of the UNEP Governing Council, the underlying philosophy of the Global Programme of Action was to foster the implementation of regional programmes of action. One of the principal mechanisms for its implementation was through the regional seas conventions and action plans. Accordingly, a number of workshops had been held in eight regions and, as a result, in six of those, regional programmes of action had now been formulated.

31. The meeting had before it a preliminary summary of proposed actions for delivery by the Coordination Office in 1999 and beyond, contained in the annexes to background document UNEP(DEC)/R.2/INF/8, on the implementation under the Global Programme of Action of regional and national programmes of action. Draft tables of selected needs identified in the regional processes for implementation of

the Global Programme of Action are contained in annex III to the present report.

32. In the ensuing discussion, it was noted that the report on progress in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action only covered activities carried out by the Coordination Office. Many other institutions, international and regional organizations and countries were also contributing to implementation of the Global Programme of Action. The Coordination Office needed to remain abreast of the latest developments, programmes and actions undertaken by them (including the regional seas), to implement the Global Programme of Action. It was suggested that a questionnaire could be developed as a means of obtaining up-to-date information and that a compilation of activities that contributed to the implementation of the Global Programme of Action should be published on a regular basis. To compile the document, use had to be made of existing overviews, such as those produced within the framework of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Division of Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea and regional organizations. It was also suggested that a diagram be prepared, indicating the linkages between the Global Programme of Action, GIWA, the regional seas, the UNEP divisions and regional offices and other organizations.

33. It was noted that several regions and countries had developed or were in the process of developing regional or national programmes of action for implementation of the Global Programme of Action. The need for a consistent definition of regions throughout UNEP programmes was highlighted but not further discussed. It was pointed out that efforts should be made to avoid a situation where one and the same country had to report to two different regional bodies.

34. Attention was drawn to the forthcoming major conference on water in the Netherlands and the need to present a coherent UNEP water strategy at that conference.

35. The meeting recommended that:

(a) Periodic overviews should be produced of national, regional and international programmes that contributed to the implementation of the Global Programme of Action;

(b) Preparations should be made for the Netherlands water conference.

36. In addition, the strategic approach for the implementation and operationalization of the Global Programme of Action, as set forth in the section entitled "Way forward" below, was approved.

(b) UNEP/Global Programme of Action strategic action plan to address sewage as a major land-based pollutant

37. Mr. Leo de Vrees, Senior Expert, Global Programme of Action Coordination Office, briefed the meeting on activities planned and undertaken by the Coordination Office pursuant to decisions of the UNEP Governing Council, at its nineteenth and twentieth sessions, on the issue of sewage and in response to the prioritization of sewage as a land-based source of marine pollution in most of the regions. He noted that responsibility for the actual implementation of measures to address sewage was at the local and national level. The Coordination Office had developed a strategic action plan on Sewage and, as a first step, was facilitating its implementation by providing assistance to a small number of regions (Eastern Africa, South Asian Seas, East Asian Seas, South-East Pacific). He invited the other regions to contribute and share their experiences.

38. The primary aim of the strategic action plan on sewage was to initiate and facilitate a process leading to the development and implementation of national strategies to address sewage and the promotion of global interest and commitment. The emphasis of the strategic action plan was envisaged to be on linking the sewage problem with social and economic opportunities and benefits. He described the different phases under the plan, for which national, regional and global actions had

been identified. Those steps would lead to the global conference on building partnerships for sewage management, planned for the year 2001.

39. Attention was drawn to a tentative draft programme for the conference (contained in the annex to document UNEP(DEC)/RS.2/2) and comments on that programme were invited.

40. In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that there were three main components to sewage, namely, bacteria, organic pollutants and nutrients. When developing mitigation measures, the effects of each should be assessed, as it might not be necessary to remove all three components. That could have significant cost benefits in the case of nutrients, the most costly to remove. Other factors, such as point and non-point sources, sludge disposal, storm water run-off and loads of industrial waste carried with the sewage, also had to be considered. It was noted that, in some cases, the reporting of monitoring data, such as the mussel watch, might be politically sensitive, particularly where pollution data had implications for trade.

41. There was some debate on whether or not the issue of sewage was of a transboundary nature and relevant to the regional seas conventions and action plans. The meeting agreed that, in view, in particular, of its extensive transboundary effects and the global extent of the problem, it was relevant to all regions and their conventions and action plans.

42. Attention was drawn to information on useful mechanisms and experience already available under other instruments and organizations, such as the London Convention on Dumping at Sea and its 1996 Protocol, the UNEP International Environment Technology Centre (IETC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and others, as well as to the need for synergies with other instruments, in particular, the provisions on habitat protection in the Convention on Biological Diversity.

43. In addition, it was suggested that countries under financial constraints could be assisted with the auditing of their current environmental situations, with capacity-building measures and with the use of environmental impact assessments. Attention should be given to the introduction of environmentally sound technologies for the management of freshwater resources and for environmental management in urban areas.

44. It was noted that, on sewage, the Global Programme of Action could provide a conducive framework and stimulate action at the national and local levels through, inter alia, regional action plans and agreements, information and knowledge dissemination, the sharing of best practices and the brokering of partnerships. The Global Programme of Action could be instrumental in securing ? or heightening ? the commitment of Governments to address the problems associated with sewage.

45. The meeting recommended that:

(a) The Global Programme of Action should be a standing item on future global meetings of the regional seas conventions and action plans, with a particular focus

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