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Regional Seas Coral Reef Partnership

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UNEP-Regional Seas Coral Reef Partnership

Background paper for the 15th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and the 2nd Global Conference on Land - Ocean Connections (GLOC-2)

Synopsis

In the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2013-2016, adopted at the 14th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas in 2012, UNEP and Regional Seas committed to collaboration through a global coral reef partnership (strategic direction 6). Partnership development was also announced to the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) at its General Meeting in July 2012, and progress in the establishment of the partnership will be presented to the ICRI General Meeting 14-17 October 2013.

Based on consultation with Regional Seas programmes as well as other prospective partner organizations, most notably the ICRI Secretariat as well as a number of governments and institutions participating in ICRI, the partnership has been elaborated in terms of its main purpose, functions and activities, as well as in terms of its governance structure. This is outlined in the present document. Additional detail will be provided in partnership draft Terms of Reference and Work Programme (UNEP's broader work on marine and coastal ecosystem-based management is described in UNEP (DEPI)/RS. 14/WP.5.RS).

This document is submitted to the 15th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas to provide an update on partnership development and encourage engagement in and collaboration through the partnership by Regional Seas Programmes. The meeting is requested to take note of the partnership, and to encourage individual Regional Seas programmes to formally confirm their participation in the partnership to UNEP. Regional Seas Programmes are encouraged to attend the Coral Reef Partnership Workshop and Forum during the 2nd Global Conference on Land Oceans Connections (GLOC-2).

This document also provides a basis for discussion at the Coral Reef Partnership Workshop and Forum organized during GLOC-2. The workshop will provide information on partnership development to date, seek congruence around main themes and invite collaboration in the partnership among agencies and organizations attending the event. Participants will be invited to:

- Provide input and comments towards further development of partnership work programme and operational structure;
- Support identification of existing tools, guidelines and other resources that can be adapted and applied towards achieving the objectives of the partnership;
- As possible, provide information on potential future collaboration through the partnership, including indicative information on technical or other contributions towards implementation of partnership activities.

Background

1. The urgency in addressing the downward trajectory of the world's coral reefs is reflected in Aichi Biodiversity Target 10: *"By 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning"*. Aichi Target 6 on ecosystem based management of fish and invertebrate stocks and Target 11 on effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas also have particular relevance to coral reefs and related ecosystems.
2. CBD CoP 11 decision 18 emphasizes the need to understand the vulnerability of corals to multiple stressors; plan proactively for climate risks, applying ecosystem-based adaptation measures; and formulate strategies that enhance ecosystem resilience for continued provision of goods and services.
3. Paragraph 176 of 'The Future We Want' supports *"international cooperation with a view to conserving coral reef and mangrove ecosystems and realizing their social, economic and environmental benefits as well as facilitating technical collaboration and voluntary information sharing."* Meeting Aichi Target 10 is specifically emphasized in the Secretary-General's Oceans Compact, which sets out a strategic vision for the UN system to deliver on its ocean-related mandates;
4. The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), bringing together governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, was launched in 1994 as the only global entity devoted solely to conservation of coral reefs and related systems. It's foundation documents, the ICRI Call to Action and the Framework for Action, provide a global blueprint for coral reef action by countries and organizations under four thematic areas: coastal management; capacity building; research and monitoring; and review. The Framework for Action further encourages regional organizations to assist countries and communities implementing the Call to Action and Framework for Action. (The Call and the Framework are currently being "refreshed", with new versions tabled for adoption at the 28th ICRI General Meeting in Belize in October 2013).
5. The UNEP Governing Council has provided guidance on UNEP's work on coral reefs, including through Decisions 19/15, 20/21 and 21/5. These decisions, inter alia, recognize the strong role of the Regional Seas programmes as implementing mechanisms for sustainable management of coral reefs. The decisions further ask UNEP to play a leading role in the development, implementation and coordination of activities.
6. The Regional Seas constitute a global network of regional, intergovernmental mechanisms for delivering environmental protection and sustainable management and development. Regional Seas have an important and direct role in meeting international targets and commitments under global MEAs, the secretariats of which support mainly normative work. Several Regional Seas have developed specific strategies or plans for strengthening coral reef protection and management, including e.g. the Nairobi Convention¹, the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA)², and the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)³.
7. Development of joint coral reef activities by UNEP and the Regional Seas through a partnership approach was proposed by UNEP at the Global Meeting of the Regional Seas 2012. Under the Global

¹ Strengthening Capacity for the Sustainable Management of Coral Reefs in the Western Indian Ocean: A Regional Coral Reef Action Plan

² Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Coral Reefs in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden ³

Regional Strategy for Coral Reef Management in South Asia

Strategic Directions for the Regional Seas 2013-2016 the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans will, inter alia, *1. Endeavor to effectively apply an ecosystem approach in the management of the marine and coastal environment in order to protect and restore the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future generations; and 6. Strengthen collaboration mechanisms to address common regional objectives, partnerships and co-ordinated regional implementation of relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements, global and regional initiatives, such as... ICRI.* Under these strategic directions UNEP and Regional Seas programmes committed to collaborating on a coral reef partnership. In the decision on Oceans adopted at the first United Nations Environment Assembly in 2013 Member States requested the Executive Director of UNEP to coordinate work as contained in the Regional Seas strategic directions.

8. Partnership development was also presented to the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) at its General Meeting in July 2012, and ICRI members were requested to take note of partnership development, offer advice or support as appropriate, and engage in consultations towards developing the Partnership. The partnership is being established as ICRI's primary mechanism for implementation through the Regional Seas reflecting their capacity to develop and implement regional and national programmes and building on past collaboration on coral reefs through the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN).
9. This document outlines the partnership purpose, work programme and governance arrangements, as developed by UNEP through consultation with Regional Seas programmes, the ICRI Secretariat, and several ICRI members. Full drafts Terms of Reference of the partnership, as well as draft Work Programme for 2014-15 are under development.

Partnership Purpose and Objectives

10. The Partnership is established to provide a delivery support framework for regional actions towards achieving internationally adopted targets relevant to coral reefs, in particular Aichi Target 10.
11. To this end the partnership will use coral reefs as a flagship ecosystem in catalysing, enabling and supporting an ecosystem approach to management of coastal and marine areas for food security, livelihoods and biodiversity.
12. The objectives of the partnership are to:
 - i. At the global level, develop approaches and tools that enable an ecosystem approach to assessment, planning and management of coral reefs and related ecosystems, and support exchange of best practice and lessons learned between regions through a community of practice;
 - ii. At the regional level, adapt and tailor approaches, tools and methods to regional and national needs, and facilitate their adoption by regional intergovernmental mechanisms through provision of policy support;
 - iii. At the national level, support uptake, application and capacity building through pilot or demonstration interventions implemented with national and regional partners.

Partnership Structure and Governance

13. The partnership is voluntary and open-ended. It is global in scope, and will work as a “coordinating forum” for partners, thereby facilitating joint or complementary activities and efficient and effective use of resources.
14. Membership is open to Regional Seas Programmes, which provide the primary mechanisms for achieving impact at regional and national level, as well as intergovernmental, government, international or regional organizations, industry or business organizations, non-governmental/civil society organizations or academic institutions that support the Partnership goals and commit to their achievement. UNEP, in its capacity of partnership Executive Secretariat, is an ex officio Member of the partnership. Pending approval by the ICRI General Meeting, the ICRI Secretariat may also participate in the partnership as an ex officio member.
15. Members of the partnership commit to contributing towards development, implementation and review of the partnership work programme through technical or financial input; sharing information and reporting on activities; and working with the Executive Secretariat in fundraising for partnership activities.
16. Members are served by the partnership through access to peer networks/communities of practice; sharing of information, technical and financial resources towards addressing issues of common concern; access to reliable and credible tools and information for ecosystem based management of coral reef areas; and access to pathways for regional and national adoption of such tools.
17. The biennial Partnership Forum, with representation of all members, is the principal decision making body of the Partnership, providing overall guidance and direction, approving the biannual work plan and reviewing and approving reports on partnership.
18. An Executive Secretariat, hosted by UNEP, is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the partnership, including administration of grants; consultation and communication with partners between forum meetings and leading resource mobilization. The Executive Secretariat also represents the partnership in ICRI.
19. The ICRI General Meeting provides recommendations on partnership objectives, work programme and activities based on reports provided by the Executive Secretariat to the ICRI General Meeting.
20. A Pool of Experts identified by the Executive Secretariat based on recommendations by partners provides technical guidance to the Partnership including review of its outputs. Meetings may be called by the Executive Secretariat if/as needed, and held mainly by electronic means.

Thematic Work Areas

21. The partnership will implement activities consistent with the ICRI Call to Action and Framework For Action through the Regional Seas, under three primary technical work areas:
 - ☐ Theme 1. Management for resilient coral reefs. Under this theme the partnership will develop indicators, methods and planning tools for adaptive management of coral reefs and related ecosystems, their biological diversity, ecosystem processes and water quality as well as human use, impacts and dependencies;

- Theme 2. Sustaining coral reef ecosystem services, businesses and livelihoods. Under this theme the partnership will enable application of an ecosystem services approach in coral reef decision-making. This may encompass tools for assessment and valuation of coral reef ecosystem services to underpin public financing decisions, tenure-based management of coral reef resources, as well as development and adoption of sectoral codes of practice;
 - Theme 3. Data and information for coral reef policy. Under this theme the partnership will support Regional Seas based state of environment, management performance reporting and needs assessment for coral reef decision-making. Indicators and approaches for tracking progress towards targets and management performance will also be developed and applied.
22. The partnership may develop new approaches, tools or knowledge products or, where possible, adapt existing tools for use in coral reef areas/regions. The partnership will draw upon and collaborate with on-going activities addressing marine and coastal ecosystem based management by UNEP, Regional Seas and other partners. This includes UNEP's current initiatives on Blue Carbon, Marine Spatial Planning and Area-based Management, Island Ecosystem Management, etc. Where relevant the partnership will collaborate with existing global partnerships, including but not limited to the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, global partnerships on nutrients, sewage, and marine litter supported by the UNEP Global Programme of Action on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), and the global partnership on sustainable tourism supported by UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and the Environment (DTIE).

Work Programme 2014-2015: Priority Activities

23. Priority activities and products under each theme have been defined based on consultation with Regional Seas programmes, UNEP/DEPI Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Unit (MCEU), UNEP-WCMC, UNEP GRID-Arendal, and other partners. This constitutes an initial identification of priorities for the partnership 2014-15, and implementation under the partnership will in the first instance focus on these priorities. This will be further elaborated in the Partnership Work Programme. Available resources will be allocated towards these activities as well as raising additional funds as required.
24. Theme 1: Management for Resilient Coral Reefs
- a. Scientific workshop on coral reef resilience metrics for planning and management. The technical workshop will provide further and more detailed direction for work carried out under the partnership towards development of indicators and tools, including the following:
 - i. Development of compendium of robust coral reef resilience indicators, aimed at planners/practitioner. This will incorporate physical/oceanographic as well as biological/ecological/microbial indicators, assessed through field surveys, remote sensing and secondary data, and related methods guidance. Adoption/endorsement of the compendium through Regional Seas will be sought. Lead: UNEP, UNEP-WCMC and technical partner to be identified.
 - ii. Pilot application of resilience indicators/metrics in coral reef spatial planning, utilizing the indicators compendium as well as the UNEP report *integrating coral reef resilience into marine spatial planning: A guiding framework* (in prep by UNEP/MCEU and CRU). Lead: Regional Seas partner and relevant target country agency.

- iii. Development of guidance for utilizing resilience indicators to support adaptation planning and implementation in coral reef areas. This will be developed as a plug-in to the UNEP/MCEU Ecosystem Based Adaptation Decision Support Framework. Lead: UNEP and technical partner to be identified.
 - b. Global rapid assessment/geomorphic mapping of submerged reef habitat to identify and document the potential extent of deep-water communities of hermatypic corals. Such coral communities have an important function as depth refugia and for repopulation of damaged reefs, but are rarely considered in coral reef planning and management. Lead: UNEP-GRID-Arendal
 - c. Addressing sanitation on small islands for improved coral reef water quality and human health. Development of a comprehensive thematic proposal. This may encompass development of indicators of loading as well as stress, including characterization of reef ecological and microbial status; and actions to mitigate sewage and nutrient impacts on coral reefs. Lead: UNEP (partnership consultant Richard Kenchington), GPA and SPREP
 - d. Identifying and addressing regional EBM training needs among coral reef planners, decision makers and site managers. Using coral reefs as a flagship system, this will seek to enable practical application in coral reef areas of the principles and practical guidance contained in the UNEP Coastal EBM guide. This may encompass development of coral reef specific guidance materials as necessary, and training modules for workshops and associated materials that can be utilized by UNEP and Regional Seas programmes in trainings. Lead: UNEP (Development of a comprehensive proposal by partnership consultant Richard Kenchington).

25. Theme 2: Sustaining coral reef ecosystem services, businesses and livelihoods

a. Green Fins:

- i. Development of a sectoral code of practice for coral reef stewardship in the dive tourism industry and certification of dive operators. Building on the Green Fins approach established by UNEP and COBSEA, a global code of practice for the diving industry will be established. Adoption among industry partners will be facilitated in regions where the code of practice has been endorsed by Regional Seas programme. This will encompass ecosystem service assessment and valuation of coral reefs as an industry asset; development of regionally tailored tools for certification, compliance, impact assessment and evaluation, as well as development of a sustainability model for regional and national Green Fins operations. Lead:

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