



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

***Guidelines and principles for the preparation  
and implementation of comprehensive action plans  
for the protection and development  
of marine and coastal areas of regional seas***

***UNEP Regional Seas Reports and Studies No. 15***

## PREFACE

It is now almost ten years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972) adopted the Action Plan for the Human Environment, including the General Principles for Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution. In the light of the results of the Stockholm Conference, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to "serve as a focal point for environmental action and co-ordination within the United Nations system" (General Assembly resolution (XXVII) of 15 December 1972). The organizations of the United Nations system were invited "to adopt the measures that may be required to undertake concerted and co-ordinated programmes with regard to international environmental problems", and the "intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have an interest in the field of the environment" were also invited "to lend their full support and collaboration to the United Nations with a view to achieving the largest possible degree of co-operation and co-ordination". Subsequently, the Governing Council of UNEP chose "Oceans" as one of the priority areas in which it would focus efforts to fulfil its catalytic and co-ordinating role.

The Regional Seas Programme was initiated by UNEP in 1974. Since then the Governing Council of UNEP has repeatedly endorsed a regional approach to the control of marine pollution and the management of marine and coastal resources and has requested the development of regional action plans.

The Regional Seas Programme at present includes ten regions<sup>1/</sup> and has over 120 coastal States participating in it. It is conceived as an action-oriented programme having concern not only for the consequences but also for the causes of environmental degradation and encompassing a comprehensive approach to combating environmental problems through the management of marine and coastal areas. Each regional action plan is formulated according to the needs of the region as perceived by the Governments concerned. It is designed to link assessment of the quality of the marine environment and the causes of its deterioration with activities for the management and development of the marine and coastal environment. The action plans promote the parallel development of regional legal agreements and of action-oriented programme activities.

Although UNEP, through the Regional Seas Programme Activity Centre, acts as the overall co-ordinator for the development and implementation of the regional action plans, a large number of international, intergovernmental and regional organizations participate in the day-to-day activities related to specific projects or action plans. The experience of these organizations is periodically reviewed at interagency consultative meetings organized by the Executive Director of UNEP. The meetings are also used to discuss the modalities and the degree of involvement of the various organizations in the continued development and implementation of the Regional Seas Programme.

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<sup>1/</sup> Mediterranean, Kuwait Action Plan Region, West and Central Africa, Wider Caribbean, East Asian Seas, South-East Pacific, South-West Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, East Africa and South-West Atlantic.

The Third Inter-Agency Meeting on Regional Seas was convened in Geneva, 14 - 18 September 1981. It was attended by representatives of the United Nations, Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, World Health Organization (WHO), Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), Comision Permanente del Pacifico Sur (CPPS), South Pacific Commission (SPC), Baltic Marine Environment Commission (HELCOM), Oslo/Paris Commission (Bonn Agreement), International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), European Economic Community (EEC) and Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

The meeting, inter alia, adopted the guidelines and principles for the preparation and implementation of comprehensive action plans for the protection and development of marine and coastal areas of regional seas (UNEP/IAMRS.3/4, Annex IV) which are reproduced in this document.

CONTENTS

	Pages
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	3 - 4
COMPONENTS OF AN ACTION PLAN	5 - 6
PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACTION PLAN	7 - 9
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN	11

## INTRODUCTION

1. This paper outlines ~~procedures~~ procedures for the development and implementation of comprehensive regional ~~seas~~ action plans. The action plans are to be carried out by Government designated institutions in co-operation with competent bodies within the United Nations system and with appropriate intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The development of action plans for the protection and enhancement of the quality of regional bodies of water and adjacent coastal areas has been identified by UNEP's Governing Council as the most effective means of protecting the global marine environment. It must be assumed that the nature of environmental problems will differ considerably between the regions selected as priority areas by the Governing Council. Each regional grouping of Governments will perceive differently the common problems that they wish to resolve through a co-operative programme, and it cannot be over-emphasized that it is these Governments on whom ultimate responsibility rests to ensure wise management of the common resources; management that should result in optimal socio-economic growth on a sustainable basis without environmental degradation.

2. The Governing Council has attached high priority to that part of UNEP's programme concerned with the development of an integrated approach to environment and development and of strategies by which to meet basic human needs on a sustainable basis without exceeding possible "outer limits". The draft action plan developed for each region must be based on, and contribute to, development within the region and thus should embrace environmental and development objectives set by the Governments concerned. Each regional plan will be concerned with environmental quality, which may be measured in a variety of ways, using socio-economic as well as environmental indices.

3. Geographic boundaries of the regions, as well as the contents of the programmes to be implemented within them, will need to be defined by the Governments concerned, taking into account a variety of criteria based, for example, on biophysical factors, jurisdictional structures, political priorities and/or statistical factors. Coastal and other activities that affect the quality of the regional environment may be viewed differently by various parties. Therefore, Governments should determine the criteria by which their regions are to be defined in order to ensure that the action plan is responsive to the particular characteristics of each region. This will require co-operation among those concerned with diverse sectors and interests, including coastal settlements, industrialization, agriculture, fisheries, human health, transportation, science, and indeed the full range of human activities in the region. At the international level, with which this paper is concerned, it is evident that an extensive, dynamic process of mutual consultations and interactions is called for in order to enlist the resources available throughout the entire United Nations system - and beyond, if appropriate - in the service of the Governments of each region.

## BACKGROUND

4. UNEP's role is to be a catalyst for the initiation of regional seas action plans. UNEP is not to act only as a funding agency. UNEP and the United Nations bodies may usefully provide States with a forum in which they may meet, negotiate and co-operate in order to protect common resources. UNEP should be a mobilizing force and should play the role of overall co-ordinator of activities, ensuring an integrated approach and taking care that the inter-disciplinary character of environmental problems is not neglected. Due consideration should be given to the long-term character of such action plans.

5. The Action Plan for the Human Environment (adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, June 1972) represented the first attempt to formulate a comprehensive programme for international action in the field of environment. The plan formed the basis on which objectives and strategies for a variety of activities launched by UNEP were adopted by its Governing Council. All UNEP's activities are cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary in nature and require a close co-operation among the specialized bodies of the whole United Nations system.

6. Theoretically this approach might require a single, fully comprehensive "super-programme", but, in reality, it is not practical to develop UNEP's activities in this manner. Therefore, priorities were chosen and, in particular, "Oceans" were selected as one of the few programme "concentration areas" by the third session of UNEP's Governing Council (Nairobi, 1975).

7. The following elements, which are the subject of various programmes under way throughout the United Nations system, have been endorsed as part of the general strategy for "Oceans" by UNEP's Governing Council:

- "Assessment of the state, sources and trends of marine pollution and its impact on human health, marine ecosystems, resources and amenities;
- Co-ordination of, and support for, environmental management efforts in the protection, development and exploitation of marine and coastal area resources;
- Assistance to interested Governments in the implementation of existing conventions and promotion of new international and regional conventions, guidelines and actions to control marine pollution and protect and manage marine and coastal area resources;
- Support for education and training efforts to enhance the participation of developing countries in the protection, development and management of marine and coastal area resources;
- Exchange of information on the protection, development and management of marine and coastal area resources."

8. Apart from global ocean activities within the United Nations system, it is felt that the aforementioned strategy may be applied to programmes developed for the protection and development of regional bodies of water and adjacent coastal areas.

9. The UNEP Governing Council has so far identified the following ten areas as components of the Regional Seas Programme: the Mediterranean, the Kuwait Action Plan Region, the Wider Caribbean, the West and Central African Region, the East African Region, the East Asian Seas, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the South-West Pacific, the South-East Pacific and the South-West Atlantic.

## COMPONENTS OF AN ACTION PLAN

10. The following functional tasks, as defined by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm 1972), can be considered as components of a comprehensive action plan:

- environmental assessment;
- environmental management, including environmental law; and
- supporting measures.

11. Any action in a regional sea should be based on sound and reliable environmental assessment. The collection and, as needed, the development of comparable data and information on a region is usually a first task. The type of information falling into this category may relate to:

- socio-economic development that may adversely affect the environment, including identification of favourable opportunities for coastal area development in general;
- institutions and experts available in the region for the implementation of the action plan;
- living and non-living resources, their status and trends in their exploitation;
- pollutants in the regional sea and its coastal waters: their sources, amounts and input pathways;
- levels of pollutants in the various components of the marine environment;

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