



ICELAND'S NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION

for the protection of the marine environment
from land-based activities

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION 2001-2006 IN ICELAND

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Guðjón Ó – vistvæn prentsmiðja

Preface

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Minister for the Environment



The Global Programme of Action for the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities (GPA) is of great importance to Iceland. The Government of Iceland supported the preparation process of the Washington Conference in 1995 which adopted the GPA and has supported the GPA coordination office in The Hague that supervises the Global Programme of Action. The Ministry for the Environment has implemented various measures in all the GPA pollutant categories in order to minimize as much as possible the negative effects of the pollution of the ocean from land-based activities.

The Icelandic government regards the protection of the marine environment from pollution as one of the high priority matters regarding global environmental challenges. Healthy seas sustain the productivity of the ocean and diminish the effects of global warming. The ocean is a very important source of food for many countries and a sustainable use of the ocean's resources forms the base of the economic welfare of many nations. As 80% of the marine pollution is believed to originate from land-based activities, it is clear that the implementation of the Global Programme of Action is an important milestone towards sustainable development. Implementation of the GPA is also an important contribution to reach many of the Millennium Development Goals

This report evaluates the status of the Icelandic National Programme of Action and the progress achieved in all the GPA pollutant categories since the National Programme of Action was initiated in 2001. It gives me a great pleasure to communicate on the progress that has been made in Iceland in the last few years. However, there is still work to be done in order to secure the coastal and marine environment.

I would like to congratulate the United Nations Environment Programme for the success accomplished up to now, in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action. At the same time I hope that the world's nations will put more emphasis on the protection of the ocean from pollution and increase their efforts to promote actions against marine pollution from land-based activities.

Summary and conclusions

This report forms a part of a large-scale project launched by the United Nations Environment Programme designed to protect the sea from pollution from land-based sources. The project was introduced and approved in Washington in 1995 under the title, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA).

This project is of major significance for Icelandic interests, and a task-force was subsequently formed by the Ministry for the Environment to prepare an Icelandic Action Programme. The report of the committee on a Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities was subsequently published in 2001. The Report suggested proposals on actions for improvement in all the pollutant categories covered by the Programme. The actions were divided into immediate projects and long-term projects. The situation as regards each issue was assessed and the issues prioritised in accordance with Icelandic conditions, which does not necessarily reflect their general importance in the world or in neighbouring countries [1]. For many issues limited knowledge was available, and therefore in some cases further studies were needed. The Report also contains a review and assessment of individual issues falling within the Programme of Action. The Report also includes proposals for continued measures within each issue based on the proposals already made and the changes which have occurred as regards the separate issues.

The Minister for the environment instructed the Steering committee on actions against pollution from land-based activities to prepare the present report. The Report is intended to shed a light on the progress of the Programme of Action over the years from the time that the national programme was presented in 2001. The content of the Report is derived from numerous sources, but a large part of the information is obtained from staff members of the Environment and Food Agency, the Icelandic Fisheries Laboratory, the Marine Research Institute, the Icelandic Radiation Protection Institute, the Municipal Health Committees, the National Planning Agency, the Technological Institute of Iceland and the Ministry for the Environment.

The Icelandic government has taken various measures to prevent pollution of the marine environment by land-based activities in recent years. Many of the projects presented in the Icelandic National Programme of Action for the

Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities have been implemented, while other are in the late stages of preparation. Other actions taken by government authorities for the protection of the marine environment include enactment of domestic legislation and participation in various international cooperation designed for the protection of marine and coastal areas.

The most significant changes have occurred in the sewage situation in Iceland, and sewage treatment has increased substantially. In 2001 the proportion of inhabitants with sewage treatment was approximately 40%, but in 2006 this proportion is approximately 70%. Open incineration of waste has been discontinued, and this has significantly reduced the release of dioxin into the atmosphere. New legislation on the prevention of marine and coastal pollution was enacted in 2004, and Iceland also signed an agreement banning the use and release of twelve persistent pollutants in 2001; both are important factors in the struggle against marine and coastal pollution.

Even though much has been achieved in environmental matters in recent years and numerous important initiatives taken there is still room for improvement in various spheres. Environmental matters are a dynamic issue and conditions can change in a relatively short time. Recently a report was issued by the Ministry of Foreign affairs forecasting huge increases in shipping in the Arctic Ocean in the coming years; preparations are in progress for prospective oil exploration and an increase is foreseen in the visits of cruising liners to Iceland. These are all matters that call for a variety of preparations and increased environmental research by government authorities and stakeholders.

Even though the pollution situation in the marine and coastal areas around Iceland is in good order, it is important for Icelanders to monitor and study the marine ecosystem. This is the only way to remain constantly alert and react to any potential changes in the marine environment with regard to pollution.

In the coming years, work will continue on environmental solutions and improvements relating to marine and coastal areas. Projects already begun need to be completed and work needs to be started on the implementation of the projects that have been in preparation.

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Introduction

1.1 Marine pollution

Almost all pollutants that are released into the environment end up in the sea at some point owing to the constant circulation of water, which transports to the sea the substances which are released on land, either into the atmosphere or into rivers and lakes. About 80% of all pollution that reaches the sea has its origins on land. In order to prevent pollution of the marine and coastal environment it is therefore important to attack the root of the problem and prevent the release of pollutants on land.

Pollutants are carried throughout the world by air and ocean currents. Organic materials have a tendency to evaporate at their sources, particularly in warm climates, and because of the stability of persistent organic compounds they can be carried over long distances. They fall to the earth with falling temperatures, but can then evaporate again and be carried still further. The Gulf Stream brings warm surface water to Iceland from the south, which becomes cold deep-sea water and flows southwards. Iceland lies at the juncture of currents flowing from the south and the north [22].

Because of the way that pollutants are transported between regions of the globe, it is necessary for the nations of the world to work together on the protection of the sea through international co-operation. The OSPAR Convention is an extremely important international instrument for Iceland, and it marks the starting point of the reduction in pollution which has now become measurable in the Northeast Atlantic according to OSPAR

Maritime Organisation, MARPOL which has the objectives of reducing pollution from ships and preventing the discharge of waste and pollutants. A few agreements address oil pollution specifically and provide for international co-operation in the case of serious incidents.

1.2 The Global Programme of Action

The Global Programme of Action which was approved in 1995 has proved its worth beyond any doubt. The Programme was devised for the purpose of serving as an ideological and practical instrument for nations that wish to protect the marine environment from pollution of all kinds. In an international context, approximately 80% of the goals set at the first intergovernmental review meeting in Montreal, Canada, have been achieved. Over eighty nations have formed their own action programmes in accordance with the Global Programme of Action and in keeping with the situation in each respective country.

The second Intergovernmental Review Meeting will be held in the autumn of 2006, in China. At the meeting, the nations of the world will come together to assess the results that have been achieved in the implementation of the Programme and to seek ways of enhancing these results still further, focusing on the action programmes of the individual countries. Also, the strategy for the years 2007 to 2010 will be formulated based on the common

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