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Conventions and Action Plans
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Background Document Visioning Workshop

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Visioning Workshop for the Regional Seas next 40 years

I. Background and rationale

The international community has, over the past decade, become increasingly concerned about the many issues involving oceans and coasts as demonstrated in the Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want”. The issues of concern include depleting fishing stocks, destruction of natural marine habitats (notably in coastal zones and around islands), pressure of urbanisation and tourism on coastal regions, and marine pollution from maritime and land-based activities. Also, the international community (UN agencies, governments, environmental NGOs, and a multitude of other stakeholders) appears to increasingly acknowledge the existence of a governance gap with respect to oceans, especially in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

A major concern is that the efficiency and effectiveness of global oceans governance is being weakened by the fragmentation of responsibilities within the UN system (UN-DOALOS, FAO, IMO, UNEP, IOC-UNESCO) and among the many global and regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). This is certainly not a new phenomenon, but one that has been grown proportionally with the emergence of new institutions and actors.

Further symptoms of a governance gap include:

- i) Lack of cooperation between biodiversity and fishing frameworks;
- ii) Slow progress with establishing MPAs;
- iii) Absence or low level of implementation of legally-binding mechanism addressing critical challenges of ocean governance;
- iv) Lack or weak links between the scientific community (including monitoring and assessment activities) and the policy and decision makers; and
- v) Loopholes in the prevention and control of environmental impact from maritime activities (particularly areas beyond national jurisdiction).

Lately, emerging issues such as biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction, the status of the high seas in terms of conservation and sustainable use, the exploitation of the seabed, and the impact of climate change and ocean acidification have raised the profile of marine issues even further. All these issues, as well as some sensitive regional matters (e.g. the sustainable management of the Arctic Sea), have generated a host of new initiatives from international NGOs, think tanks and other groups.

While the international community remains engaged and have acknowledge the challenges related to the management and sustainable use of oceans, there is renewed momentum being gained since Rio+20, the sustainable development goals and the entire post 2015 development agenda.

II. Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans within the UN governance context

The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans certainly have played an important role in the protection of the marine environment during the last 40 years. With a view towards the future, it has become important to understand where can the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans contribute to the large international initiatives being discussed within and outside of the UN system.

In this sense, it is important to identify potential roles in:

- Sustainable Development Goals / post-2015 development agenda. Given that the mandate comes from member states, will the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans be able to adapt/utilize the opportunity? Are there limitations in terms of the current mandate?

- Decisions related to the CBD, CITES, CMS and Law of the Sea.
- The *UN reform process*, One UN and UNDAF processes.
- World Oceans Assessment.
- Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).
- Emerging trends such as climate change, seabed mining, areas beyond national jurisdiction, National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAPs).
- Global Programme of Action for the protection of the marine environment against land based sources of pollution / Manila Declaration
- Global Partnership for Oceans.
- 50 in 10 Initiative.

III. Objectives of the workshop

Taking into the account the above mentioned context, the objectives of the workshop are:

1. Identify objectives and priorities for the future positioning of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.
2. Identification of a roadmap with short, medium and long term milestones.
3. Identification of partnerships with external partners (UN agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders).

IV. Matrix for identification of priorities

The workshop will be invited to establish a list of marine priorities. A matrix will be provided in order to facilitate the group discussions.

The list of priorities could be based on some of the following criteria:

- Existing mandate of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and other MEAs.
- Internationally adopted targets and potential future ones (SDGs).
- Emerging trends recognized at scientific or political level.
- Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans comparative advantage and capacity to address the issue.

Based on this proposed list of criteria (to be reviewed by participants), an indicative set of priorities (open for discussion) might include the following:

- Pollution from land-based activities (LBA) including nutrients
- Areas beyond national jurisdiction and biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction
- Chemicals and other hazardous substances affecting the marine environment
- Oil (and other hazardous and toxic substances) spills from maritime activities including shipping and ports
- Environmental aspects of fisheries
- Destruction of natural coastlines

- Climate change and ocean acidification
- Marine litter
- Seabed mining

The following governance and management issues would be associated with each substantive issue, as the case may be:

- Monitoring and assessment of the marine and coastal environment
- Mainstreaming into the planning and budgetary processes
- Development of and compliance with international law, including those covering EEZ and territorial waters
- Financing mechanisms and infrastructure
- Economic valuation and trade off analysis of marine and coastal ecosystems services
- Management approach (e.g. marine protected areas, integrated coastal zone management, large marine ecosystem, integrated coastal and river management)

Matrix for assessing priorities (to be reviewed)

Substantive issue	Governance elements	RSCAPS role	Building blocks / Partners	Priority	Constraints/challenges
1. Pollution from land-based activities (LBA) including nutrients	Mainstreaming into the planning and budgetary processes Financing mechanisms and infrastructure Development of and compliance with international rules	Range of 1 to 5	List to be discussed	Range of 1 to 5	To be discussed
2. Areas beyond national jurisdiction and biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction	Management approach Monitoring and assessment Economic valuation of marine and coastal ecosystems services				
3. Climate change and ocean acidification	Management approach Monitoring and assessment Economic valuation of marine and coastal ecosystems services				
4. Chemicals and other hazardous substances affecting the marine environment	Management approach Economic valuation of marine and coastal				

	ecosystems services				
	Mainstreaming into the planning and budgetary processes				

V. History of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans

UNEP's Regional Seas Programme - launched in 1974 in the wake of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment - is one of UNEP's most significant achievements in the past 35 years.

It aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas through the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment, by engaging neighbouring countries in comprehensive and specific actions to protect their shared marine environment. More than 143 countries participate in one or more of the 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans around the world.

The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have:

- Provided a regional cooperation framework that mobilises countries to address transboundary issues;
- Improved management of coastal zones;
- Reduced pollution in coastal waters;
- Cast light on marine litter, and reduced it in some areas; and
- Designated regional networks of Marine Protected Areas.

Many long-term and unique issues keep the Regional Seas Programmes relevant to their member states. The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans provide a platform for implementing marine and coastal policies regionally and nationally. Regional Action Plans, which form the basis for the programme, are usually adopted by high-level intergovernmental meetings and implemented, in most cases, in the framework of a legally binding Regional Seas Convention and specific protocols, under the authority of the respective Contracting Parties.

These Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans serve two major objectives:

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