



Regional Seas Partnerships for Sustainable Development





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Seas
Partnerships**

for Sustainable Development

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Introduction

The Regional Seas Programme (RSP) was launched in 1974 in the wake of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden.

The RSP 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 environments, by engaging neighbouring countries in comprehensive and specific actions to protect their shared marine environment.

Today more than 140 countries participate in 13 regional programmes established under UNEP auspices: the Black Sea, Wider Caribbean, East Africa, East Asia, ROPME Sea Area, Mediterranean, North-East Pacific, North-West Pacific, Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, South Asia, South-East Pacific, and West and Central Africa. Five partner programmes for the Antarctic, Arctic, Baltic Sea, Caspian Sea and North-East Atlantic regions are members of the Regional Seas family. Thus the Regional Seas Programme covers in total 18 regions across the world, making it one of the most globally comprehensive initiatives for the protection of marine and coastal environments.

Common Elements

The Regional Seas programmes have several common elements. The process of establishing a regional programme usually begins with the development of an Action Plan outlining the strategy and substance of a regionally coordinated programme aimed at the protection of the common body of water. Each Action Plan is based on the region's particular environmental concerns and challenges as well as its socio-economic and political situation. The Plan may cover issues ranging from chemical wastes and coastal development to oil spill preparedness and response or the conservation of marine species and ecosystems.

In most regions the Action Plan is underpinned by a strong legal framework in the form of a regional Convention and associated Protocols on specific problems. The legally binding Convention expresses in clear terms the commitment and political will of governments to tackle their common environmental issues through jointly coordinated activities.

A New Era

At the request of its Governing Council, UNEP strengthened its commitment to the Regional Seas Programme in the mid-1990s. Although the political, environmental and socio-economic variation between the numerous Regional Seas programmes is significant, the creation of a forum for dialogue, for exchange of experience and information, and for adoption of joint global challenges is still required. To generate and sustain its momentum, UNEP began to convene regular Global Meetings of the secretariats of all the regional and partner programmes to discuss their common interests, set priorities, and establish strong links with one another, with global environmental Conventions and with international organizations. That close collaboration continues today, and the Global Meetings are characterized by their enthusiasm, determination and productivity.

A New Global Strategy

The strategic directions listed below aim at strengthening the Regional Seas Programme at the global level. They are intended to complement the implementation of the programmes of work of the individual Regional Seas, as well as the decisions of the governing bodies of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs). They provide an opportunity to improve efficiency, individually and collectively, in the regional programmes. They facilitate cooperation and the incorporation of new elements in future programmes of work.

The Regional Seas Programme is an alliance between the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans. Since its inception 30 years ago, it has constituted a unique approach to the protection of the coastal and marine environment. The regional programmes of work are mandated by the Governing Bodies of the RSCAPs.

The Regional Seas have a long history of challenges, successes and lessons learnt, that can be beneficial in optimizing the potential and prospects of both individual RSCAPs and the global RSP.

Changes in the development agenda, the state of the coastal and marine environment, the international policy framework, scientific knowledge as well as socio-economic realities and trends, constitute challenges that the RSP must meet, but at the same time provide opportunities for strengthening the programme as a whole.



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Recognising this, the UNEP Governing Council requested (Decision 22/2 III A) the development and strengthening of RSCAPs in promoting the conservation and sustainable use of the marine and coastal environment. It requested UNEP to encourage and support RSCAPs to incorporate new strategic elements in their programmes of work, bringing those elements to the attention of their respective Member States through governing bodies and other relevant *fora*.

In order to effectively address evolving challenges and the priorities identified by the UNEP Governing Council, and to contribute to reaching the relevant targets of Agenda 21, the WSSD Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals, the RSP must be strategically adaptive and proactive.

The following global Strategic Directions were agreed by the representatives of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans Secretariats at their 5th Global Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya 26-28 November 2003. These were further endorsed by the chairpersons of the COPs and IGMs or their representatives at the 6th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas, hosted by the Permanent Secretariat to the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution in Istanbul, November, Turkey, 30 November-2 December 2004.

Strategic Directions for the Regional Seas Programme 2004-2007

1. Increase Regional Seas' contribution to Sustainable Development, through the enhancement of local, national, regional and global partnerships with relevant social, economic and environmental stakeholders, and through the strengthened implementation of the mandates of the

Regional Seas, as a major contribution to the implementation of the WSSD Plan of Implementation and the goals and targets associated with the Millennium Declaration.

2. Enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of Regional Seas programmes through increasing country ownership, incorporating Regional Seas conventions and protocols into national legislation, promoting compliance and enforcement mechanisms, involving civil society and the private sector, building capacities, ensuring viable national and international financial arrangements, as well as developing assessment/evaluation procedures where appropriate.
3. Enhance Regional Seas' visibility and political impact in global, regional and national policy setting, through strengthening the Regional Seas partnership, increasing political and public awareness on the economic, social, and environmental importance of coastal and marine resources, promoting concerted information and communication policies, and ensuring participation and promotion of the Regional Seas in relevant national, regional and global *fora*.
4. Support knowledge-based policy making, enhanced public participation, education, awareness, and improved reporting on the state of the coastal and marine environment, its resources, and possible threats to them, by contributing to appropriate national and regional monitoring and assessment activities, amongst others.
5. Increase the use of Regional Seas as a platform for developing common regional objectives, promoting synergies and coordinated regional implementation of relevant MEAs, global and regional initiatives, and responsibilities of United Nations Agencies and other international actors, as a contribution to the sustainable management of the coastal and marine environment.
6. Develop and promote a common vision and integrated management, based on ecosystem approaches, of priorities and concerns related to the coastal and marine environment and its resources in Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, introducing amongst others proactive, creative and innovative partnerships and networks and effective communication strategies.

Priorities

With nearly 30 years of experience, the Regional Seas Programme provides an operational platform on which to construct regional sustainable development, using the deliberations and results of WSSD as the blueprint. Practically, it provides regional platforms for both implementation of the principles of sustainable development and for regional implementation of programmes and activities related to global conventions and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

At a meeting held during the WSSD preparatory phase, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans identified their major concerns and priorities as:

- **Land-based sources of marine pollution**, with particular emphasis on responding to pollution resulting from municipal wastewater. Municipal, industrial and agricultural wastes and run-off account for as much as 80 percent of all marine pollution. Sewage and waste water, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, oils, nutrients and sediments – whether brought by rivers or discharged directly into coastal waters – take a severe toll on human health and well-being as well as on coastal ecosystems;
- **Ship-generated marine pollution, oil spill preparedness and response, and the construction of port reception facilities for ships' wastes**. These concerns were reinforced by the major oil spills that occurred off the coasts of France, Spain and Pakistan within the last four years. Some 20 percent of sea pollution comes from the deliberate dumping of oil and other wastes from ships, from accidental spills and offshore oil drilling, and hydrocarbons from ship engines;



WARNING: CONTAMINATED BEACH. R.SMITH/UNEP/STILL PICTURES

- ▶ **Increased urbanization and coastal development.** Seacoasts are under increasing pressure, as more and more of the natural environment is being paved over or converted into ports, tourist beaches, and grounds for new communities. Almost 50 percent of the world's coasts are threatened by development-related activities. Coastal development often entails dredging up bottom sediments, reshaping the shoreline and the destruction of mangrove forests and other habitats;
- ▶ **Conservation and management of marine and coastal ecosystems.** The overarching goal of ecosystem management is to protect and restore the functioning of marine ecosystems to ensure the provision of ecosystem services. It is important both for fisheries management and for maintaining important habitats for endangered sea turtles and marine mammals such as seals, manatees and small whales.

Marine ecosystems around the globe are experiencing unprecedented change. Human activities, including aquaculture, coastal development, fisheries, invasive species, present a collective and cumulative threat to our oceans. Coral reefs are among the most productive and diverse of all natural ecosystems but recent decades have seen 10 percent of the world's reefs degraded beyond recovery, and another 30 percent are in decline. In addition, biologically rich coastal wetlands, including mangrove forests and salt marshes, are favourite sites for dredging and filling by industry, farmers and home builders. The provision of marine parks and sanctuary areas are obvious first steps in providing a measure of protection of coastal and marine ecosystems and therefore establishing and managing Marine Protected Areas is one of the focus areas of the Regional Seas Programme.

The new Regional Seas strategy continues this emphasis, calling for the development with 'relevant regional partners' of programmes for ecosystem-based management of living marine resources and large marine ecosystems.

Integrated Coastal Area Management (ICAM) is an interdisciplinary activity where scientists, coastal managers and policy makers focus on how to manage the diverse problems of coastal areas in the long-term. The rapid exploitation and development of coastal areas along with increasing population growth and urbanization have led to environmental degradation of

Major international instruments related to the marine environment

1992: Governments at the Rio Summit signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Climate Change Convention; the Baltic countries adopted the Helsinki Convention; the Oslo and Paris Conventions combined to create the OSPAR Convention; Black Sea States adopted the Bucharest Convention; the Arctic Council for the Protection of the Marine Environment was established; and the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal entered into force.

1994: The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) entered into force; and the North-West Pacific Action Plan was adopted.

1995: The Washington Declaration established the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA); the South Asian Seas Action Plan was adopted, the Jakarta Mandate of the CBD was adopted; and the Mediterranean countries revised and adopted the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.

1997: The Jakarta Mandate and the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea began operations.

2001: The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was signed.

2002: The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg adopted a Plan of Implementation which set specific targets for the protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment, such as to establish representative networks of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by 2012 and to encourage the application of the Ecosystem-based Approach by 2010.

2002: The Convention for the North-East Pacific (Antigua Convention) was adopted.

2004: The IMO International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and sediments was signed; and the Seventh Meeting to the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 7) adopted a series of important resolutions related to the conservation of the biodiversity of marine and coastal ecosystems.

world-wide marine ecosystems. Consequently, ICAM has become an important concept for regional sustainable development. Further development towards a more integrated approach

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