8th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas
Conventions and Action Plans
Beijing, People's Republic of China
13th –14th October 2006

Regional Seas and Marine & Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs)

Regional Seas and Marine & Coastal Protected Areas

Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) are according to the CBD (2004): "any defined area within or adjacent to the marine environment, together with its overlying waters and associated flora, fauna and historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by legislation or other effective means, including custom, with the effect that its marine and/or coastal biodiversity enjoys a higher level of protection than its surroundings."

Marine and Coastal Protected Areas are an important tool for implementing the principles of the ecosystem approach and in promoting conservation and sustainable use of the marine and coastal environment. They provide protection of ecosystems, natural habitats and species, allowing natural recovery of degraded resources and provide a unique method to maintain marine ecosystems in a truly natural state.

The challenges posed for the implementation of global and regional commitments on marine and coastal protected areas suggest that strengthened cooperation and coordination among UN agencies and major partners would be beneficial to address such challenges, particularly through improving coherence and effectiveness of efforts. As a response, UNEP Regional Seas Programme together with IOC of UNESCO, UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) established a UN Partnership on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas during the UN Oceans meeting in Paris, in January 2006. The challenges posed for the implementation of global and regional commitments on marine and coastal protected areas suggest that strengthened cooperation and coordination among UN agencies and major partners would be beneficial to address such challenges, particularly through improving coherence and effectiveness of efforts.

The purpose of this partnership is to coordinate information inputs to the UN and other international processes dealing with activities related to MCPAs particularly with reference to the 2012 target of establishing representative networks of marine and coastal protected areas agreed upon at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. For issues concerning MCPAs on the high seas, the partnership will liaise with the UN-OCEANS Task Force on Biodiversity in Marine Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions led by CBD. The partnership will operate on a temporary basis, possibly over a period of two years, after which it will be reassessed. The partner organizations propose to formalize the partnership as a task force under UN-OCEANS at this meeting. Possible participants in the task force include: CBD, UNEP (Regional Seas Programme, WCMC), UN-DOALOS, FAO, IMO, UNDP, RAMSAR, ICRAN, World Bank, GEF and IWC.

In a joint initiative, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK, and the Regional Seas Programme, Nairobi, Kenya, in collaboration with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), IUCN/WCPA-Marine, the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), are reviewing advances in the development of MPA systems. This project will aid in measuring progress towards the target set by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, and later reinforced by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to establish comprehensive, effectively-managed and ecologically representative national and regional systems of marine protected areas by 2012. The review, "Establishing national and regional systems of MPAs – a review of progress with lessons learned", will be published in late 2006.

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