Setting a course for Regional Seas

UNEP

40 ANNIVERSARY Regional Seas YEARS OF ACTION

Regional Seas

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Acronyms

ABNJ	Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction
ALFG/ALDFG	Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
AR5	5th Assessment Report of IPCC
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBNJ	Biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction
CARPHA	Caribbean Public Health Agency
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources of the Antarctic Treaty
CEMP	CCAMLR Ecosystem Monitoring Programme
CEP	Caribbean Environment Programme
CI	Conservation International
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
COFI	Committee on Fisheries (FAO)
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CPPS	Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur
DEPI	UNEP Division of Environmental Policy Implementation
EAF	Ecosystem approach to fisheries
EAS	East Asian Seas
EBSA	Ecologically and biologically significant area
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCFI	Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute
GCRMN	Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESAMP	Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environment Protection (IMO, FAO, UNESCO, WMO, IAEA, UN, UNEP, UNIDO, UNDP)
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean of FAO
GIPME	Global Investigation of Pollution in the Marine Environment of IOC
GOOS	Global Ocean Observing System
GPA	Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities
GPML	Global Partnership on Marine Litter
GPNM	Global Partnership on Nutrient Management
GRIDA	Grid-Arendal
GWI	Global Wastewater Initiative
GWP	Global Water Partnership
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAEA-MEL	Marine Environment Laboratories, IAEA
ICC	International Coastal Cleanup
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
ICRI	International Coral Reef Initiative
ICSU	The International Council for Science
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDDRI	Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations
IFAW	International Fund for Animal Welfare
IMA	Institute of Marine Affairs
IMO	International Maritime Organization (formerly the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization
IOC-UNESCO	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRDR	Integrated Research on Disaster Risk programme of ICSU/ISSC/UNISDR
ISA	International Seabed Authority
ISSC	International Social Science Council
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
LBA	Land-based Activities
LBS	Land-based Sources (of pollution)
LME	Large marine ecosystem
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MED POL	The marine pollution assessment and control component of the Mediterranean Action Plan
MESL	Marine Environmental Studies Laboratory, IAEA
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NEAFC	North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission
NOWPAP	North West Pacific Action Plan
NPA	National Plan of Action
PAH	Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon
PCB	polychlorinated biphenyl
PCCPs	personal care and cosmetics products
PERSGA	Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden
POPs	Persistent Organic Pollutants
PRCM	West African Regional Marine and Coastal Conservation Programme
RCU	Regional Coordinating Unit (Regional Seas)
RFB	Regional Fishery Body
ROPME	Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment
RSCAPs	Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans
RSP	Regional Seas Programme of UNEP
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMS	Seafloor massive sulphides
SPC	South Pacific Commission
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SYKE	Finnish Environment Institute
TEEB	The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UN-DOALOS	United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WOC	World Ocean Council

Introduction
Forty years and counting

Earth's oceans face a crisis that threatens to become insurmountable. Depleted fishing stocks, destruction of coastal habitats by urbanization and tourism, warming and rising seas, pollution from maritime and land-based activities, and a host of new perils such as deep sea mining and mid-ocean islands of plastic debris combine to challenge our technical abilities, institutions and willpower to deal with them.

The Rio+20 outcome document *The Future We Want* reflects the international community's deep concern over these threats, even as efforts to address them become increasingly fragmented and ineffective. There are dozens of organizations, many within the UN system itself, with overlapping aims and responsibilities, which require joining forces; and every year new ones are created. While global and regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) play a critical role in global efforts to address environmental issues, there are still enormous gaps in their coverage, particularly in areas beyond national jurisdiction. As we move into the implementation phase of Rio+20, we must find better ways to work together, share responsibilities, and communicate.

In 2014, UNEP's Regional Seas Programme celebrated its 40th anniversary. We are reminded of how successful these 18 regional MEAs spanning seven continents have been at bringing nations and institutions together in responsible stewardship of their shared environment. Around the world, the Regional Seas have improved coastal zone management, reduced land-based pollution, protected priceless habitats, and perhaps most importantly demonstrated solidarity of purpose. Every one of the Regional Seas Programmes fulfills a unique role, by creating an essential link between local and global levels of action and between member countries and the international community.

One accomplishment of Rio+20 was to give UNEP the go-ahead to promote a global transition to a 'Green Economy' aimed at improving human well-being and social equity while reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities and its marine version, the 'Blue Economy'. This is a perfect opportunity for UNEP to reinforce its commitment to one of its most successful endeavours, and ensure that Regional Seas remains its ocean 'flagship'.

1 Dawn of action

Hands Across the Sand, a popular movement aimed at protecting the ocean environment. © Ababysean | Dreamstime.com

Rio+20 sets the agenda

At the end of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20-22 June 2012, the overall sense of the international community was that the cause of oceans had been heavily strengthened. The media suggested that it might be known as the Oceans Summit, as the momentum generated before world leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro was something rarely seen before in international environmental fora, with the possible exception of Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer negotiations back in 1987 and more recently with the negotiations of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

But it was not to be. Key components, such as a decision on Marine Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction and action to tackle the challenges of overfishing (IUU) or harmful fishing subsidies, were not approved by the 'concert of nations'.

> *"Regional Seas programmes have brought countries together around common marine conservation goals while improving the knowledge base and strengthening capacities for management and decision making. The Regional Seas approach facilitates collaboration to address needs which, independently, countries would not be able to tackle as effectively, in particular nations with unique circumstances and vulnerabilities such as Small Island Developing States.*
>
> **– Alessandra Vanzella Khouri**

20 years before, in the same Brazilian city, the historic Earth Summit took place as part of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. An eloquently elaborated document called Agenda 21 was approved by 178 governments, including 116 Heads of State. For the oceans community, chapter 17: *Protection of the Oceans, all Kinds of Seas, Including Enclosed and Semi-enclosed Seas, and Coastal Areas and the Protection, Rational Use and Development of their Living Resources*, was the response to many years of dispersed actions and governance to protect and sustainably use the marine environment.

The oceans agenda continued to expand through the adoption and implementation of numerous oceans agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1994, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), and the CBD Jakarta Mandate on the "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity" (1995), just to name a few. In addition, the actions taken by governments at the national and local levels were signs that oceans were being taken seriously, underpinned by renewed progress in scientific

> *The Regional Seas Programme helped define governance challenges in many parts of the oceans. In some areas like the Caribbean and Mediterranean it fostered a sense of a shared problem and a search for common solutions. Working with IUCN, the programme assisted many countries to prioritize ocean management issues and decide what programmes were needed to address the increasingly pressing issues.*
>
> *It is hard to measure the wide impact the Regional Seas Programme has had across its many seas, but it is fair to say it has been one of the longest running and most significant programmes of the United Nations.*
>
> **– Carl Gustaf Lunden**

knowledge on oceans and coasts.

At the same time, rifts appeared within the international efforts to protect and sustainably use the marine environment. Critically, there was evidence of an increased fragmentation and lack of coordination among Multilateral Environmental Agreements and institutions, at both the international and regional levels. An overwhelmingly complex ocean governance system evolved. It isolated fisheries (stocks) management within Regional Fishery Management Organizations, separate from management of the overall protection of the marine and coastal environment through the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans. As some experts observed, 'fish do not appear to live in the same sea as pollutants'.

Renewed commitments to the implementation of Agenda 21 came at the World Summit on Sustainable Development that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in the form of the 'Johannesburg Plan of Implementation' in 2002. Crucially for oceans, it launched the ''Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socio-economic Aspects''. This World Oceans Assessment, to be released in 2015, is set to provide the first benchmark on how well our oceans and seas are doing at a global and regional scale at the end of 2014. As this process has moved forward, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have played an important role in building the capacities of Member States to engage and contribute to the World Oceans Assessment. This has been possible in part because the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have developed regional State of the Marine Environment Reports every 3-5 years.

The two decades of momentum building heading towards Rio+20, plus new scientific evidence that overfishing, pollution and climate change were creating the perfect storm that would affect future food security for millions of people, provided ~~for~~ a negotiation platform. While Rio+20 did not achieve the far-reaching outcomes that many expected, the 19 articles in the outcome document *The Future We Want*, saw the emergence of oceans as a top political priority, on a par with other environmental crises that the world currently faces. This political momentum is something that we had not previously witnessed, not even in the early days of 1992.

For the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, which have been protecting the marine environment since 1974, these past 20 years have seen a convergence of partnerships being formed to tackle issues from land-based sources of pollution, the creation of networks of marine protected areas, the assessment of coral reefs and the impacts of ocean acidification, and more recently the arrival of the Green Economy approach to oceans.

Certainly, the way forward for the oceans community will be through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal for Oceans, as part of the entire post-2015 Development Agenda. In this sense, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans continue to stand ready to help Member States to implement their numerous international and regional commitments to protect and sustainably use their marine environment. F

> *Regional Seas, along with SPC/SPREP in the Pacific, pioneered the regional intergovernmental approach to the management and protection of shared environmental resources. It used the environment to build collaboration between governments that otherwise would not have worked together.*
>
> *It also built scientific and environmental management capacity in developing countries and regions where little attention was paid to this at the time, and created confidence in local scientists as environmental advisers to governments.*
>
> *From an early focus on marine pollution control and oil spill prevention and response, as well as biodiversity conservation, the challenges to oceans and coast today are more integrated. Climate change (rising water temperatures, more extreme events) and ocean acidification are major issues for the future. We are only beginning to consider the implications for coastal areas and ecosystems of a 1-2 metre or more rise in sea level over the next century (and continuing). The environmental impacts of deep sea mining and methane hydrate exploitation are another emerging challenge.*
>
> **– Arthur Dahl**

Crucial cooperation

In the mid-1970s public alarm over pollution in the Mediterranean had reached boiling point. The global marine conventions that existed at the time of the Stockholm Conference were found insufficient to address this problem, even if all 18 countries participated in them. Once work got under way to draft an Action Plan and Convention for the region, the scope of these agreements quickly expanded to include a much wider range of environmental impacts (as defined by GESAMP) to include harm to living resources, hazards to human health, fishing impacts, water quality and loss of amenities.

The first international efforts to protect the Mediterranean Sea did not occur in a vacuum, but received important stimuli from work in other regions, especially the Baltic Sea. As in the Baltic, the scope of the Barcelona Convention was all-inclusive, covering all types and sources of marine pollution. This provided a residual basis for regional cooperation on matters not yet covered by protocols on specific threats.

Close cooperation among scientific and legal experts was crucial to the development of the Barcelona instruments. The need for such interdisciplinary teamwork was a theme at technical meetings for pollution control in the Mediterranean as early as 1970, and by 1974 most of the necessary scientific groundwork needed to identify problems and priorities for legal regulation had already been carried out by FAO and its agency partners. Each successive step leading to adoption of the 1976 Barcelona instruments included constant inter-disciplinary review by joint legal/scientific drafting committees; and scientists and technical experts continued to prove essential for the drafting of technical annexes and supplementary protocol