

Update on the activities of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) – South Asian Seas Programme (SASP) – for the 2020 Report of the SG on oceans and the law of the sea

1. Nutrient Management:

Reports on nutrient scoping studies from the coral reef task force and coastal biodiversity studies by South Asian Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) stated that anthropogenic inputs are the most important contributors to nutrient pollution in South Asian Seas (SAS) region. To halve this in sustainable manner, the Government of India on behalf of the SACEP Member States submitted a draft resolution to UNEA-4 titled, ‘Sustainable Nitrogen Management’ for considerations. The Resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management was adopted by UNEA-4 while giving recognition to SACEP for initiating the process (UNEP/EA.4/L.16). The resolution recognizes the multiple pollution threats resulting from anthropogenic reactive nitrogen, with adverse effects on the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments and contributing to air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and highlights ways to better manage nitrogen.

SACEP secretariat is a partnering organization for South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH) working with its member countries and other partners to develop a Framework Policy on Nitrogen Management for South Asia region. SACEP in partnership with SANH organized the 1st Sub-regional virtual workshop for South Asia in July 2020, where all SACEP member countries shared nitrogen related information. Further information was collected till October 2020 via a questionnaire. Information collected would inform the draft situation report for the region. Meetings of the expert groups are being held regularly to develop the Zero draft of the Framework Policy.

2. Marine Litter Management:

The partnership agreement between South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), The World Bank and Parley for the Oceans Foundation, on the Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia project (PLEASE) will strengthen innovation and coordination of circular economy solutions to plastic pollution flowing into South Asian seas and Indian ocean. The overall project is financed through an International Development Association (IDA) regional grant and parallel co-financing and investment from Parley. To overcome the potential delays due to COVID19 all required documents needed for The World Bank to approve the said project were produced in-house by SACEP during the first half of year 2020. The financing agreement between SACEP and The World Bank was signed in a virtual ceremony held on 8th June 2020, the World Ocean Day and was declared effective on 12th August 2020.

Recognizing the importance, a Regional Marine Litter Action Plan was developed for South Asian Seas Region and adopted on 6th November 2019 at the Sixth Inter-governmental Meeting of Ministers of the South Asian Seas Programme (IMM.6-SASP). SACEP-SAS became the regional node under UNEP-Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML) to host the South Asia Seas Region in June 2020 and submitted a request to the UNEP-GPML for allocating grants to

develop the National Marine Litter Action Plan for the Governments of Bangladesh and India, which will be extended to the other member states too.

3. Ratification London Protocol

With the decision of the IMM.6-SASP, SAS member states are working for implementation of London Convention and Protocol on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and other Matters, which actively respond to the decades of dumping into the oceans, dredging and incineration at sea. SACEP-SAS partnership with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) assist to achieve this great challenge to protect the SAS national coastal and marine environment of the Member States. SACEP-SAS and IMO have planned to organize a national level workshop of LC/LP ratification for India, but has been delayed due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions.

4. Ballast Water Management Convention

SACEP-SAS joined the GloFouling Project of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as a Regional Coordinating Organization (RCO). This is a sub- activity of the Ballast Water Management strategy. As the RCO, SACEP participated and presented in National Awareness raising workshop on Biofouling Management and National Task force meetings of Sri Lanka held in February, May and November of 2020. SACEP is in the process of developing regional webpage on the activities related to Glofouling Project.

5. Regional Oil spill Contingency plan:

Regional Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan was consolidated in August, 2016. As of year 2018 all SAS member countries viz. Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have signed the MoU. SACEP-SAS has been coordinating with IMO on implementing activities in the SAS region for achieving major pollution incidents, such as the use of dispersants, aerial surveillance and liability and compensation addressed and related agreements reflected in the regional contingency plan, through organizing SAS regional level exercise conducted to test the communication and the operational procedures.

The first major incident following the entry into force of the MoU and Regional Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan occurred in September 2020 with an oil spill off the Western Coast of Sri Lanka. As per the Regional plan, request for assistance was conveyed from Government of Sri Lanka to Government of India through SACEP. SACEP help facilitate regional sharing of information and regional collaboration in the incident.

6. Development of Blue-economy by implementing the regional marine and coastal biodiversity strategy.

One of the key objectives of the Regional Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Strategy for the South Asian Seas Region which was adopted at the IMM.6-SASP in November 2019 is to support countries of the region in the process of developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15)

as well as in its implementation. The strategy also contributes strengthening regional coherence in planning for, implementing and tracking progress towards the 2030 Agenda for SDGs, particularly SDG14.

UNEP and the European Commission (EC) organized the virtual workshop on the Regional Seas Programme and the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework on 27-28 October 2020. The workshop focused on the regional seas indicators used for the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and policy uptake of the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework developed by regional seas programmes. SACEP-SASP actively participated at this workshop.

7. Development of Sea Water Quality Criteria in South Asian Seas Region

Development of Sea Water Quality Criteria for South Asian Region is funded by United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

The objective of this activity is for reduction of and control of various types of pollution by developing threshold values for various parameters of marine and coastal waters to maintain healthy and resilient ecosystem for the common benefit of the SAS region. The SAS member countries will develop threshold values of the significant polluting parameters that are degrading their marine and coastal waters and validate those values with relevant stakeholders.

The work has been initiated in Bangladesh and India with the first-round of meetings organized virtually in September 2020 and October 2020 respectively to know the progress of the activity. Activity would be further expanded to other member countries of the South Asian Seas region.

8. SACEP-SAS and IOCINDIO collaboration initiatives

The intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Regional Committee for the Central Indian Ocean (IOCINDIO) organized Workshops on Coastal Vulnerability and Regional Planning of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) for Northern and Central Indian Ocean Countries as well as ROPME Seas Area, which was held on 6-10 January 2020. SACEP-SAS presented the regional action plans and expressed the interest to work collaboratively with IOCINDIO to avoid duplication and pool expertise, knowledge and best practices available in the region.

SACEP-SASP shared valuable inputs to UN Decade report that brings more visibility for mitigating the environmental management of the region and has attended meetings on a regular basis since February 2020.

9. South Asian Seas (SAS) Regional Coral Reef Monitoring for Adaptation and Resilience

ICRI-GCRMN invited SACEP-SAS for their annual and steering committee meeting in 2018, 2019 and 2020 for strengthening the agreed actions. SACEP-SAS also participated and presented the South Asia Coral Reef analysis information at ICRI/GCRMN Regional Workshop for SAS Region during 28-29 January 2020 held in Malé, Maldives and also discussed further on reactivation of the South Asia Coral Reef Task Force (SACRTF) which was initially launched in July 2007 by SACEP.

Ecosystems Integration Branch of UNEP invited SACEP-SAS to the Project Steering Committee meeting of the Global Coral Reef Partnership on 18th November 2020. The aim of the meeting was to breathe new life into the Partnership to help secure a future with coral reefs for people and planet. SACEP-SAS presented about coral situation analysis in the SAS regional and shared the major Gaps, Challenges and Constraints.