

Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

New Zealand views on lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process

In a letter dated 29 January 2016, Member States were invited by the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole of the Regular Process (the Working Group) to submit views on lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process. New Zealand is pleased to present its views on lessons learned.

Choice of chapters

New Zealand is of the view that at the beginning of a cycle, greater attention should be given to the definition of scope and content of each chapter, including the provision of a detailed list of contents. Such scoping would benefit from early and joint engagement with both science and policy practitioners. In New Zealand's view, better definition of scope would avoid duplication of effort across chapters, allow for early integration of sections where the content substantially covers the same ground, and help with author selection. With respect to the bundling of chapters, it is New Zealand's view that it should be either by habitat or by ecological topic, but not both.

Selection of authors

New Zealand is of the view that writing teams for each chapter should be limited to a modest number and led by a subject matter expert. New Zealand suggests that specific criteria for lead authors be considered, including in relation to experience with authoring and co-authoring peer-reviewed publications in the subject of the chapter. Each author should have clearly defined responsibilities in order to ensure work is well coordinated and the contributions of each author should be clearly stated in drafts and revisions.

Coordination and guidelines

New Zealand is of the view that better guidelines for length, referencing, data quality and process would improve the quality and consistency of the Assessment. In the first cycle, length guidelines and deadlines were not clearly or consistently communicated to writing teams, resulting in variations in length and level of detail between chapters.

New Zealand is also of the view that guidelines on process for writing teams, including communication standards, should be more clearly stated at the outset of the cycle. In the first cycle, a number of pool experts reported either patchy or a total lack of communication from the coordinating body. A substantial amount of work was required by authors at a late stage in the process as they were requested to make changes to their contributions to enable consistency within chapters. New Zealand is of the view that greater emphasis should be placed on communication with experts, including the

provision of better guidance at the start of the process. Clear and achievable timeframes should be set early on.

New Zealand notes that some chapters in the first Assessment lack supporting references, which is a fundamental standard for scientific reports. New Zealand is of the view that the scientific quality and veracity of information in chapters would be improved if data quality standards were issued in the guidelines for writing teams.

Review processes

Line by line feedback

New Zealand had a mixed experience with the line by line feedback tool. Some New Zealand contributors felt it facilitated responses to reviewers. Others, particularly reviewers, felt it did not allow scope to provide comprehensive feedback. Many reviewers opted to give comprehensive feedback in the comments section of the feedback tool, rather than line by line. As both forms of feedback are important, New Zealand suggests considering how the feedback tool can sensibly provide for each.

A more formal review process

New Zealand is of the view that a more structured and consistently applied, formal review process is required in order to ensure quality, efficiency and transparency. The use of existing, often freely available, editorial management systems could assist in this. Conventional best-practice protocols should be established, verified and used.

Stakeholder Engagement

Through better engagement, stakeholders could play valuable roles as both contributors to, and end-users of, the global marine assessment. New Zealand suggests that consideration be given to engagement with stakeholder groups and organisations with experience and capacity in fields relevant to the scope of the assessment.

Dissemination

The two primary incentives for the science community in voluntarily contributing to this assessment processes are confidence in its quality (on which our comments above on peer review are based) and visibility and uptake of the assessment findings. Given the critical reliance of this assessment process on such voluntary contributions and the importance more generally of this significant effort driving real outcomes, New Zealand suggests greater effort be made to ensure the assessment is widely publicised and to encourage consideration of the assessment findings by States, including through relevant regional and international bodies, with respect to informing management, policy and capacity building decisions.

Funding

New Zealand believes the issue of funding of the Regular Process requires considered attention. Improved funding may help to resolve some of the aforementioned shortcomings relating to coordination and communication, peer review, and editorial

oversight. New Zealand perceives the following risks attached to insufficient funding of future Assessment cycles:

- Expert contributors who participate on a voluntary basis may lose interest and confidence in the Regular Process. This could lead to lower quality input or decisions not to participate.
- If the Regular Process does not continue to attract high quality contributors, the usefulness of the Assessment to the international community may diminish.
- Expert contributors and Member States may increasingly decide to invest in alternative assessment processes that are comparatively well-funded and more established.

Policy relevance

New Zealand is of the view that some chapters of the First Assessment are of too narrow focus. In the process of defining the scope of each chapter, policy relevance could be improved by prior identification of information that would be useful to policy makers.

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