

## **UNEP's inputs to the compilation of lessons learnt from the first cycle of the Regular Process**

### **1. Introduction**

In 2002 Member States agreed to “*establish by 2004 a regular process under the United Nations for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, both current and foreseeable, building on existing regional assessments*” (the Regular Process) at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in paragraph 36 (b) of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI).

Subsequently in 2005 the General Assembly (GA) resolution 60/30 launched the start-up phase of the Regular Process, “the assessment of assessments” (the “AoA”) and requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO) to serve as the lead agencies for the start-up phase. In 2009, the GA Resolution 64/71, paragraph 182 requested the UN Division on the Law of the Sea (UN-DOALOS) to provide support for the Regular Process, in cooperation, as appropriate, with relevant United Nations specialized agencies and programmes. Resolution A/RES/65/37 paragraph 211 further “*requested the Secretary-General to invite the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Maritime Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and other competent United Nations specialized agencies, as appropriate, to provide technical and scientific support to the Regular Process*”.

As one of UNEP's core mandates within the UN system is to keep the environment under review, it has provided technical and scientific support to the secretariat (UN DOALOS) and to Member States in the implementation of the first integrated assessment cycle (2010-2015) according to the GA decisions. UNEP's support included the following:

- **Communication**: UNEP set up a communications portal for use by the Group of Experts and Member State. GRID Arendal and UNEP WCMC created and hosted a dedicated information portal for use by the Group of Experts and expert writing teams. As well as second round editing of the World Ocean Assessment (WOA) report.
- **Assessments**: UNEP shared its extensive knowledge gained through the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) processes and in the development of integrated assessments.
- **Capacity building**: UNEP supported Member States on the Regular Process in the organization and facilitation of regional workshops through the platform of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.
- **Resource mobilization**: UNEP engaged with potential donor countries to support the Regular Process.

In terms of capacity building, UNEP provided technical and financial support for six of the eight workshops held in Santiago in September 2011 (at the invitation of the Government of Chile), in

Sanya in February 2012 (at the invitation of the Government of China), in Miami in November 2012 (at the invitation of the Government of the United States of America), in Maputo in December 2012 (at the invitation of the Government of Mozambique), in Brisbane in February 2013 (at the invitation of the Government of Australia), and in Grand Bassam in October 2013 (at the invitation of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire). Each workshop aimed to consider the scope and methods of the WOA, the information available in the region where it was held, and capacity-building needs in the respective region.

As marine and coastal environmental assessments are typically one of the principal activities of the Regional Action Plans, Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans were closely involved in the capacity development workshops. For example, Nairobi Convention produced the first Regional State of Coast Report as a follow up to the workshops of the Regular Process held from 2012 to 2015. It is the first integrated assessment report on the region to be facilitated by the Nairobi Convention Secretariat. Coordination Body on the Sea of East Asia (COBSEA) and Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) were also involved in the Regular Process workshop for Eastern and South-Eastern Asian Seas, held in February 2012 in Sanya, China. As a result of this workshop, which has identified integrated marine assessment as a regional capacity gap, a 'Regional Scientific and Technical Capacity Building Workshop on the World Ocean Assessment' was conducted in September 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop, co-organized by COBSEA and NOWPAP, focused on building capacity to prepare integrated assessment, using the South China Sea region as an example.

In order to continue strengthening monitoring on the status of marine and coastal environment, UNEP has published a report "*Measuring success – Indicators for Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans*", in which indicators used in different Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have been compiled and presented. In October 2015, UNEP together with the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans launched the Regional Seas Indicators Working Group and adopted a common set of indicators<sup>1</sup> based on the recommendations provided by the report. These core indicators are planned to be aligned with the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted in March 2016. It is expected that a coordinated monitoring across the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans will help strengthen monitoring and assessment of the state of marine environment at the regional and global levels.

With the extensive engagement of the first cycle, UNEP as well as the UNEP administered Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans<sup>2</sup> provided lessons learnt and recommendations for future processes.

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP/EARS/WG.2/5 Annex 4 Draft Indicators Matrix

<sup>2</sup> Abidjan Convention, Barcelona Convention, Cartagena Convention, East Asian Seas Action Plan, Nairobi Convention, Northwest Pacific Action Plan and Teheran Convention

## **2. Lessons learnt**

### ***2.1 Expert selection process***

From the first cycle, it became clear that it is important to involve sufficient number of experts from the relevant fields to ensure the quality of the assessment. Fair geographical representation is also essential for an inclusive assessment. Based on the long-lasting activities for the protection of marine and coastal environments, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have strong regional networks of experts on oceans and seas and thus it is recommended to use their knowledge for the identification of experts in future. The Western Indian Ocean region, Wider Caribbean region, Mediterranean region and East Asian Seas region shared their experiences on the expert selection processes as below:

- For the Western Indian Ocean region, the selection of experts for the Regular Process was not effective as it could have been. The number of experts that were selected was too few for an integrated assessment. Consequently they did not have sufficient expertise to contribute to all the chapters or network to tap into existing information in the region.
- The selection of experts for the Regular Process was limited to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. In many countries in the Western Indian Ocean region, there was no link between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and technical ministries such as the Ministries of Environment, hence the nominations was not only slow, but also not representative of the available expertise.
- In the Wider Caribbean region, an opportunity was given to deliver a presentation on the Regular Process to the Cartagena Convention Technical Meetings and Conference of Parties in order to promote nomination of regional experts. The number of regional experts improved after these presentations.
- For the Mediterranean region there were European scientific experts only from France, Spain, Greece and Italy, missing experts from the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Whilst these experts are relevant, some inclusion of experts and focal points of UNEP/MAP and the Barcelona Convention should have been made, and suggest in future UNEP/MAP is contacted for their Focal Points and Experts contacts to be provided and considered.
- At the capacity building workshop for the South-Eastern Asian Seas, the participants agreed on the need to find a wide range of experts with relevant knowledge and experience in order to make integrated judgments. Unfortunately, there were not enough experts at the workshop to cover all the parameters.

### ***2.2 Synergies with the existing global and regional assessments***

Although the assessment provided a comprehensive report on the state of the world's oceans, our experiences suggested that the first cycle did not have strong linkages with other global and

regional assessments on marine and coastal ecosystems. At the global level, stronger coordination with other global mechanisms and assessments such as Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) could be useful in order to harness existing data and promote wider knowledge sharing. UNEP is also leading a number of assessments, which can be put forward to support the next phases of the Regular Process. For example, the GEF Transboundary Water Assessment Programme (TWAP) was implemented by UNEP and IOC, to prepare an indicator-based assessment of the world's Large Marine Ecosystems and Open Ocean areas. This project will deliver its results in the form of technical reports and a web-based portal by the end of this year. It has been implemented in close coordination with the World Ocean Assessment Group of Experts and it was originally planned to have close links with WOA. However, the timing and process were not adequately aligned with the TWAP project timelines.

At the regional level, it was also found that there were only weak links with existing regional assessments although the Regular Process was originally meant to be "*building on existing regional assessments*" according to paragraph 36 (b) of JPOI. It should be noted, however, that the experience shared by the Wider Caribbean region below suggested that it is possible to make links between the existing regional processes and the Regular Process through regional workshops. In order to build upon existing knowledge and expertise at the regional level, it is recommended to create stronger links between regional assessments and the Regular Process. For the purpose, it is suggested for the Secretariat of the Regular Process to regularly compile inventory of existing regional assessments to have an overview of ongoing assessments, as was conducted in January 2016 pursuant to paragraph 286 of GA 70/235 resolution. The inventory will help identify possible synergies with global and regional assessments.

The specific experiences and lessons learnt in the Western Indian Ocean region, Wider Caribbean region and Mediterranean region were provided as below:

- In the Western Indian Ocean region there was no link between the regional process and the global process. Hence even where extensive data and expertise exist at the regional level, they were not adequately used for the Regular Process.
- The Regular Process approach was too rigid and was not easy to link with the existing regional processes. The Regional State of the Coast Report in the Western Indian Ocean region was a response to a demand by contracting parties and as a requirement of the Nairobi Convention with a clear aim of contributing to the United Nations-led production of the World Ocean Assessment reports but it was not possible to link the two processes.
- In the Wider Caribbean region, the Cartagena Convention had a partnership for the Regional Meeting on the Regular Process and it was possible to make presentations and links to some of the existing programmes, projects and activities of the Cartagena

Convention. The Cartagena Convention also had an opportunity to provide inputs to the meeting agenda and to identify participants from the region.

- In the Mediterranean region, some key reports of UNEP/MAP are referred to in WOA, including reports of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC), the 2012 State of Environment Report, the 2011 Marine Litter Assessment Report, plus several Mediterranean publications from known scientists, some collaborating with UNEP/MAP.

### ***2.3 Policy relevance of the assessment***

Although the Regular Process intended to provide a scientific basis and not to provide policy recommendations<sup>3</sup>, it is recommended to make the assessment more relevant to policies in order to link the assessment with future action. It was also noted that the high aggregation of data may hamper future actions at the regional and national level as it loses specificity and relevance to local contexts. From the Mediterranean region, it was suggested that the policy relevance of the Regular Process could have been strengthened by coordinating with UNEP/MAP and the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. UNEP through its leadership of the Global Environment Outlook over the years can also provide support in strengthening the science-policy interface, an area which has been identified as a gap in the first report.

### ***2.4 Expert elicitation method***

On the capacity building workshop for the South-Eastern Asian Seas, the participants found that the workshop methodology could be used to build a formal expert elicitation procedure that can be used both at the regional and national scales to produce a rapid integrated marine assessment. However it was noted that the methodology should be applied at a country level first to combine the results into a regional assessment.

## **3. Recommendations for future cycles**

Based on the experiences from the first cycle of the Regular Process, the following recommendations were made.

- Synergies with the existing global and regional practices and processes on monitoring and assessments need to be fostered for future cycles.
- Regional Seas Convention and Action Plans should be further engaged and consulted in terms of identifying experts and key regional processes.
- It is suggested to create stronger connections with future actions even though specific policy recommendations are not provided in the assessment reports.

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<sup>3</sup> A/70/418 paragraph 14

- It is recommended for the Secretariat of the Regular Process to regularly compile the list of global and regional assessments in order to create links and references to existing processes.
- In future capacity building workshops, consider the comments and feedbacks from the WOA capacity building workshops conducted during the first cycle.
- It is also recommended that the invitation to UNEP to provide scientific and technical support should be clearly defined so that it can be included in its Programme of Work and the necessary budgetary support can be provided.