

## Chapter 2. Mandate, Information Sources and Method of Work

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The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, recommended that there should be established a Regular Process for the Global Reporting and Assessment of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects (WSSD, 2002). This recommendation was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2002 (UNGA, 2002).

After considerable preparatory work, including as a first phase the production of the assessment of assessments (AoA, 2009), the United Nations General Assembly approved in 2009 the framework for the Regular Process developed by its Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole. This framework for the Regular Process consisted of: (a) the overall objective for the Regular Process, (b) a description of the scope of the Regular Process, (c) a set of principles to guide its establishment and operation and (d) the best practices on key design features for the Regular Process as identified by the group of experts established for the assessment of assessments (see below). The framework further provided that capacity-building, sharing of data, information and transfer of technology would be crucial elements of the framework. The following paragraphs set out these elements in the terms approved by the General Assembly (AHWG, 2009; UNGA, 2009).

### 1. Overall objective

The Regular Process, under the United Nations, would be recognized as the global mechanism for reviewing the state of the marine environment, including socioeconomic aspects, on a continual and systematic basis by providing regular assessments at the global and supraregional levels and an integrated view of environmental, economic and social aspects. Such assessments would support informed decision-making and thus contribute to managing in a sustainable manner human activities that affect the oceans and seas, in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea<sup>1</sup> and other applicable international instruments and initiatives.

The Regular Process would facilitate the identification of trends and enable appropriate responses by States and competent regional and international organizations.

The Regular Process would promote and facilitate the full participation of developing countries in all of its activities.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1833, No. 31363.

Ecosystem approaches would be recognized as a useful framework for conducting fully integrated assessments.

## **2. Capacity-building and technology transfer**

The Regular Process would promote, facilitate and ensure capacity-building and transfer of technology, including marine technology, in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other applicable international instruments and initiatives, for developing and other States, taking into account the criteria and guidelines on the transfer of marine technology of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

The Regular Process would promote technical cooperation, including South-South cooperation.

States and global and regional organizations would be invited to cooperate with each other to identify gaps and shared priorities as a basis for developing a coherent programme to support capacity-building in marine monitoring and assessment.

The value of large-scale and comprehensive assessments, notably in the Global Environment Facility's international waters large-marine ecosystems initiatives, in identifying and concentrating on capacity-building priorities would be recognized.

Opportunities for capacity-building would be identified, in particular on the basis of existing capacity-building arrangements and the identified capacity-building priorities, needs and requests of developing countries.

States and relevant international organizations, bodies and institutions would be invited to cooperate in building the capacity of developing countries in marine science, monitoring and assessment, including through workshops, training programmes and materials and fellowships.

Quality assurance procedures and guidance would be developed to assist Governments and international organizations to improve the quality and comparability of data.

## **3. Scope**

The scope of the Regular Process is global and supraregional, encompassing the state of the marine environment, including socioeconomic aspects, both current and foreseeable.

In the first cycle, the scope of the Regular Process would focus on establishing a baseline. In subsequent cycles, the scope of the Regular Process would extend to evaluating trends.

The scope of individual assessments under the Regular Process would be identified by Member States in terms of, inter alia, geographic coverage, an appropriate analytical framework, considerations of sustainability, issues of vulnerability and

future scenarios that may have implications for policymakers.

#### **4. Principles**

The Regular Process would be guided by international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other applicable international instruments and initiatives, and would include reference to the following principles:

- (a) Viewing the oceans as part of the whole Earth system;
- (b) Regular evaluation by Member States of assessment products and the regular process itself to support adaptive management;
- (c) Use of sound science and the promotion of scientific excellence;
- (d) Regular analysis to ensure that emerging issues, significant changes and gaps in knowledge are detected at an early stage;
- (e) Continual improvement in scientific and assessment capacity, including the promotion and development of capacity-building activities and transfer of technology;
- (f) Effective links with policymakers and other users;
- (g) Inclusiveness with respect to communication and engagement with all stakeholders through appropriate means for their participation, including appropriate representation and regional balance at all levels;
- (h) Recognition and utilization of traditional and indigenous knowledge and principles;
- (i) Transparency and accountability for the regular process and its products;
- (j) Exchange of information at all levels;
- (k) Effective links with, and building on, existing assessment processes, in particular at the regional and national levels;
- (l) Adherence to equitable geographical representation in all activities of the regular process.

#### **5. Reasons for these decisions**

This framework largely reflected the recommendations of a group of experts, established by the General Assembly in 2005 (UNGA, 2005) and in place by the end of 2006, to carry out (under the guidance of an ad hoc steering group and with the assistance of the lead agencies, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC-UNESCO)) an “assessment of assessments”, reviewing the way in which past assessments, particularly of the marine environment at global and regional levels, had been carried out, in order to establish

the approaches which could ensure that assessments under the Regular Process would be relevant, legitimate and credible – the three necessary conditions for an influential assessment.

The report of the assessment of assessments (AoA, 2009) summarised the justification for the Regular Process as follows:

“5.1 Marine ecosystems provide essential support to human well-being. However, they are undergoing unprecedented environmental changes, driven by human activities, and becoming depleted and disrupted... Keeping the world’s oceans and seas under continuing review will help to improve the responses from national governments and the international community to the challenges posed by these changes. Reviews based on sound science can help the world as a whole understand better what is happening, what is causing it, [and] what the impacts are.”

The report saw an urgent need for a more integrated approach, at the global level as well as at the regional and sub-regional levels. It indicated that such an integrated approach was feasible, and would help to develop a more coherent overview of the state of the global marine environment and its interactions with the world economy and human society. A better understanding is needed of how human activities themselves interact and cumulatively affect different parts of marine ecosystems. Baselines, reference points and reference values would also be needed as a basis for evaluating status and trends over time. More consistent information, both in coverage and quality, and integrated analyses would improve understanding of the rapid changes that are occurring in the oceans and their possible causes. The resulting knowledge would facilitate decisions to manage in a sustainable manner human activities affecting the oceans. Assessment is a necessary, integral part of the cycle of adaptive management of human activities that affect the oceans.

The report went on to explain the benefits from a Regular Process that could be a means for integrating existing information from different disciplines to show new and emerging patterns and to stimulate further development of the information base.

The elements relevant to the framework established by the General Assembly include actions to:

- (a) Demonstrate the importance of oceans to human life and as a component of the planet;
- (b) Integrate, analyze and assess environmental, social and economic aspects of all oceans components and interactions among all sectors of human activity affecting them; it could thus support sustainable, ecosystem-based management throughout the oceans;
- (c) Promote well-designed assessment processes, conducted to the highest standards and fully documented by those responsible for them;
- (d) Promote international collaboration to build capacity;
- (e) Improve the quality, availability, accessibility, interoperability and usefulness of information for ocean assessment; it would also increase consistency in the selection and use of indicators, reference points and reference values;

- (f) Support better policy and management at the appropriate scale by providing sound and integrated scientific analyses for decision-making by the relevant authorities;
- (g) Build on existing assessment frameworks, processes and institutions and thus provide a base for cooperation among governments and at the level of international institutions.

The essential features which differentiate this assessment from earlier assessments are that it is global in scope, that it is to integrate the different sectors that are involved with the ocean and that it is to integrate environmental, social and economic aspects of the ocean. This is an ambitious project, and it has been clear from the outset that the first assessment of this kind would be breaking new ground, and that there would therefore be scope for improvement in future cycles of the Regular Process.

## **6. Timing**

In 2009, the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole recommended that the Regular Process should involve a series of cycles and that the first cycle of the Regular Process should cover the five years from 2010 to 2014. This was endorsed by the General Assembly in 2009, on the basis that there would be two phases of the first cycle, the first phase up to the end of 2012 to agree the issues to be covered and the second phase from 2013 to 2014 to produce the first assessment (AHWG, 2009; UNGA, 2009).

## **7. Modalities**

In 2010, the General Assembly endorsed a series of recommendations from the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the modalities for the way in which the work of the Regular Process should be organized and implemented (AHWG, 2009; AHWG, 2010; UNGA, 2010). The modalities, consisting of key features, capacity-building and institutional arrangements, were developed further in a series of decisions of the General Assembly, on the basis of recommendation of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole of the General Assembly (AHWG, 2011a; UNGA, 2011a; AHWG, 2011b; UNGA, 2011b; AHWG, 2012; UNGA, 2012; AHWG, 2013; UNGA, 2013; AHWG, 2014; UNGA, 2014), informed, among other things, by material prepared by the initial group of experts appointed in 2009. The arrangements for the Group of Experts of the Regular Process were set out in the Terms of Reference and Working Methods (AHWG, 2012; UNGA, 2012), and various paragraphs of the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

The main institutional arrangements thus established are as follows:

- (a) *The Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects:*

The Regular Process is to be overseen and guided by an Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole of the General Assembly comprised of representatives of Member States. Relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations with consultative status recognized by the Economic and Social Council are to be invited to participate in the meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group. Relevant scientific institutions and major groups identified in Agenda 21 may request an invitation to participate in the meetings of the Ad Hoc Working Group. In 2011, the Ad Hoc Working Group agreed on the establishment of a Bureau to put in practice its decisions and guidance during the intersessional period (AHWG, 2011b; UNGA, 2011b).

- (b) *The Group of Experts of the Regular Process:* The general task of the Group of Experts, as set out in the Terms of Reference and Working Methods approved by the General Assembly, is “to carry out any assessments within the framework of the Regular Process at the request of the General Assembly under the supervision of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole”. It was noted that an assessment would only be carried out at the request of the General Assembly. Within this general task, the Group of Experts were to draw up a draft implementation plan and timetable, a draft outline of the assessment, proposals for writing teams for each chapter and proposals for independent peer review. Lead Members for each chapter, drawn from the Group of Experts, are to have a general task of managing each chapter, and a convenor of the writing team from the chapter (who might also be the Lead Member) is to be responsible for ensuring the proper development of the chapter. The Terms of Reference and Working Methods make clear that the Group of Experts is collectively responsible for the Assessment, and was to agree on a final text of any assessment for submission through the Bureau to the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, and to present that text to the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole.

The Group of Experts, originally appointed in 2009 to develop thinking on the “basic building blocks” identified by the Assessment of Assessments, were invited to continue for the first cycle of the Regular Process pursuant to a series of decisions of the General Assembly.

The Group could be constituted of a maximum of 25 members, five appointed by each regional group within the General Assembly. One regional group only made two appointments, and therefore the full membership of the Group has been 22. In accordance with the Terms of Reference and Working Methods, the Group appointed two coordinators from within its membership, one from a developed country and one from a developing country. The members of the Group of Experts are volunteers or are supported by their parent institutions.

- (c) *The Pool of Experts:* The General Assembly approved criteria for the appointment of experts to a Pool of Experts to assist in the preparation of the first assessment and to cover the wide range of issues that an assessment of the ocean integrated across sectors and across

environmental, social and economic aspects would have to address. This assistance would include several distinct potential roles: convenors and members of the writing teams, commentators to enable expertise about parts of the world not covered by the writing teams to be brought in to the Assessment without making writing teams unmanageably large, and peer reviewers to review the complete draft of the Assessment. These experts have been nominated by States through the chairs of the regional groups of the United Nations. In addition, members of the Group of Experts and writing teams could consult widely with relevant experts.

- (d) *Secretariat:* On the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to designate the Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea as the secretariat of the Regular Process. Since no additional staff was allocated specifically for this work, the secretariat function has been provided by the existing staff.
- (e) *Technical and Scientific Support:* Technical and scientific support for the Regular Process has been available from the IOC-UNESCO, UNEP, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These agencies were invited by the General Assembly, together with other competent United Nations specialized agencies, to provide such support as appropriate. A dedicated web-based platform was set up to make information about this Assessment available and to provide a means of communication between members of the Group of Experts and the members of the Pool of Experts. Agreement was reached between Australia, Norway and the United Nations Environment Programme to host such a website at GRID/Arendal in Norway.
- (e) *Workshops:* In addition to the Pool of Experts, steps were taken to convene workshops as forums where experts (including government officials) could make an input to the planning and development of the Assessment. The General Assembly approved guidelines for these workshops, which were 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 Brussels in June 2012 (at the invitation of the Government of Belgium, supported by the European Union), 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), in Grand Bassam in October 2013 (at the invitation of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire) and in Chennai in January 2014 (at the invitation of the Government of India). The workshops were open to representatives of all States, although participation was mainly from experts in the respective regions. Each workshop aimed to consider the scope and methods of this

Assessment, the information available in the region where it was held, and capacity-building needs in that region. Reports of each workshop were made available on the website of the Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea and on the website of the first Assessment.

## **8. Finance**

The General Assembly decided that the costs of the first cycle of the Regular Process should be financed from a voluntary trust fund, and invited the Secretary-General to establish such a fund for the purpose of supporting the operations of the first five-year cycle of the Regular Process, including for the provision of assistance to members of the Group of Experts from developing countries. The Trust Fund is managed and administered by the Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea. Contributions to this fund have been made by Belgium, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal and the Republic of Korea. In addition, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, China, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mozambique, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America have supported workshops in the region and/or the travel and accommodation costs of members of the Group of Experts from their countries. Generous support to the Regular Process has also been provided, financially and technically, by the European Union, IOC-UNESCO and UNEP.

## **9. Guidance**

On the advice of the Group of Experts, the Ad Hoc Working Group decided that there should be comprehensive guidance for the Regular Process. Accordingly it prepared such guidance, covering the responsibilities of the Group of Experts, the members of the Pool of Experts, the writing teams and their convenors, the commentators and the peer reviewers, the approaches to achieve integration and to deal with uncertainty, risk, ethical questions and style. This was approved by the General Assembly (UNGA, 2012), and can be found in AHWGW, 2012.

## **10. Collection of information**

When the methods of work were being developed, it was thought that there would be time for a number of working papers to bring together detailed information and thus to serve as the basis for the preparation of this Assessment. In practice, the time available has not proved sufficient to adopt this approach generally. In some cases, detailed background information has been included in appendices to the relevant chapter.

## 11. Development of the first World Ocean Assessment

The starting point for each substantive chapter has been the outline developed by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, on the basis of proposals from the Group of Experts, approved by the General Assembly (AHWG, 2012; UNGA, 2012) and slightly amended by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole in 2014 (AHWG, 2014). The writing teams, constituted as described above, elaborated this outline and, in some cases, assigned drafting duties within the Group. A draft chapter was prepared, reviewed by the Lead Member (where not part of the writing team), by other members of the Group of Experts to ensure consistency among chapters, and (in some cases) by a panel of commentators chosen from the Pool of Experts, but not otherwise part of the writing team. The writing teams responded as necessary to comments from these reviews and prepared a consensus draft chapter. The consensus draft was submitted to the Group of Experts and secretariat. The Group of Experts collectively reviewed all these consensus draft chapters, in order to ensure consistency and to prepare the synthesis chapters for each Part of this Assessment and Part I (the summary). An editor overseen by the secretariat reviewed each chapter for format and consistency, raising questions for clarification with the writing team where necessary. After any concerns raised by the copy editor had been addressed, the secretariat circulated the entire draft of the first Assessment for review by States, by a team of peer reviewers assigned by the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, on a proposal from the Group of Experts and by intergovernmental organizations. In March 2015, close to 5000 comments were received. The Group of Experts and the writing teams then proceeded to respond to the comments and revise the draft chapters accordingly. At the end of April 2015, the Group of Experts met again in New York to discuss the finalization of the responses and the revision of the chapters. Following a review by the secretariat of the responses and revisions, all chapters of the Assessment were ready for submission to the Bureau by mid-July. The Assessment, including its summary<sup>2</sup> is to be considered by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole in September 2015.

### References

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<sup>2</sup> See A/70/112.

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