Annex II

Guidance for contributors
Part II

Transmittal note by the Group of Experts of the Regular Process

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 approved part I of the guidance for contributors for the second cycle of the Regular Process at its ninth meeting, held in September 2017 (A/72/494, annex IV). The General Assembly took note of part I of the guidance in paragraph 304 of its resolution 72/73.

Part I covers the working arrangements for the Group of Experts of the Regular Process, lead members, writing teams and others.

Much of the remainder of the guidance for contributors for the first cycle was concerned with the internal structure of the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment (World Ocean Assessment I) and the means of integrating different aspects that it considered. This was linked strongly to the structure of World Ocean Assessment I and its role in providing a baseline assessment. Equivalent material does not seem to be needed for the second cycle.

Some further material that was contained in the guidance for contributors for the first cycle remains relevant to the production of the assessment, which is to be the main output of the second cycle of the Regular Process.

The Group of Experts has reviewed this material and produced the present draft of part II of the guidance for contributors. It recommends this draft to the Bureau and the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole for consideration to form part II of the guidance for contributors for the second cycle of the Regular Process. This completes the response of the Group of Experts to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 310 of its resolution 71/257 that it review the guidance for contributors.

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Part II of the guidance for contributors

[*Continued from A/72/494, annex IV*]

G. World and regions

42. The prime audiences for the assessment are policymakers at the national, regional and global levels. The focus of draft chapters must therefore be to provide an assessment that will be useful to such policymakers. The aim is not to duplicate or reinterpret regional or thematic assessments, but to put trends and data gaps into context, showing both commonalities at the global scale and regional differences. Existing regional, subregional and thematic assessments should be identified and used where available and relevant. It will therefore be important for writing teams to strike the right balance between aggregating material at the global level and providing detail about the regional and national levels. The assessment must give a balanced view of the world's oceans as a whole, and not focus on regions for which there may be abundant and/or readily available information.

H. Risk

43. “Risk” can be formally defined as the product of the likelihood of an event and the seriousness of the event if it were to occur. Risk assessments included in World Ocean Assessment I will need updating and significant new risks will need to be identified and evaluated in the second world ocean assessment. In all assessments, when a risk is being described, both the likelihood and the potential severity of each consequence should be made as clear as possible. Where “potential severity” is actually a range of possible outcomes, “worst case” scenarios should be clearly differentiated from other potential outcomes of similar or possibly higher likelihood.

44. There are several ways that risk can enter into decision-making. One is the risk that some pressure, either a natural event or a human activity, will have some undesirable consequence if it is not managed or mitigated effectively. Another is the risk that such management or mitigation could have its own undesirable impacts on some other ecosystem feature or benefit. Assessments should always consider both these aspects of risk.

45. The details of how this will be done should be case-specific, as there are many tools for quantifying and communicating risk. The selection of the appropriate method of reporting risk depends on the quantity and quality of data and information that is available. Where a degree of risk is expressed, sufficient information should be given for that expression to be interpreted.

46. Given that the aim of the assessment of the second cycle of the Regular Process is to integrate information on diverse pressures and ecosystem properties globally and supraregionally, it is expected to have to accommodate a wide range of data quality and quantity and of knowledge of relationships and impacts. There will be no single best approach, therefore, to risk quantification and communication. In reviewing draft chapters, the Group of Experts will consider how risk has been quantified and communicated by contributors, including to ensure the standardization of such considerations throughout the assessment.

I. Characterizing and communicating uncertainty

47. Some of the conclusions of the assessment produced by the second cycle of the Regular Process may be controversial. As such, they will be subject to intense scrutiny by stakeholders. However, all parts of the report must be as accurate as possible since an error in any part can undermine the credibility of the entire report. To this end, contributors must exercise caution and discipline in describing the uncertainty associated with any statements made in their chapters.

48. Uncertainty is characterized and communicated by describing how much is known about a topic (that is, the quality and nature of the evidence available) and the likelihood that a particular event will occur. Each conclusion will need to be accompanied by a judgment of its uncertainty. There are several different ways to express uncertainty: the likelihood of an event happening; the degree of confidence that the evidence supports the conclusion; the level of understanding of the processes being described; and the degree of acceptance by experts of the conclusion.

49. The level-of-understanding scale is a convenient way of communicating the nature, number and quality of studies on a particular topic, as well as the level of agreement among studies. This scale can be supplemented by quantitative likelihood or confidence measures, if such are deemed to be needed and appropriate.

50. Contributors are encouraged to make statements about the likelihood of an outcome or event as explicit as possible, but must ensure that the methods that they use for estimating or otherwise evaluating probabilities or likelihood (such as expert judgment, analysis of data and modelling) are appropriate to the quantity, quality and nature of the information available.

51. Contributors should avoid reporting conclusions with high levels of confidence for which there is little evidence, and should always seek clarity when making definitive statements. All conclusions should withstand scrutiny and be supported sufficiently by the available information cited in the assessment. In reviewing draft chapters, the Group of Experts will consider such conclusions and related supporting information, including to ensure that the same standards are applied throughout the assessment.

J. Handling the full range of views

52. An assessment is intended to arrive at a judgment of a topic. Although all reasonable points of view should be considered, they need not be given equal weight or even described fully in a draft chapter. The writing teams should be composed of contributors with diverse viewpoints as a first step towards ensuring that a full range of views is considered. The writing teams should also be fair and objective in their consideration of the information available for assessment.

53. It is important to avoid “confirmation bias”, that is, the tendency of authors to place too much weight on their own views relative to other views. Writing teams should explicitly document a wide range of scientific viewpoints and ensure that due consideration is given to properly documented alternative views.

54. There can be multiple interpretations of the available body of information, each with support from some portion of the scientifically sound information but inconsistent with other portions. Policymakers are often best served by being informed of the nature of the discrepancies in the scientific and technical information, the range of interpretations that cannot be rejected and the implications, including risks, of each interpretation. The assessment should ensure that these nuances are brought out.

K. Attribution

55. The sources of all information in the assessment should be documented and given proper attribution.

56. Writing teams must ensure that copyright permissions for all diagrams, figures and tables are obtained and fully documented. A filing system will be established by the Group of Experts to bring together all such permissions, and writing teams must enter in it the permissions that they have acquired no later than when submitting the draft chapter.

57. It is the responsibility of the contributors to ensure that proper attribution is provided for all sources of information cited, as well as providing evidence of copyright permissions for all diagrams, figures and tables included in their contribution. The convenor, in collaboration with the lead member (if separate), will be responsible for ensuring that each contributor complies with these requirements. The writing teams will be requested to replace any text where such problems arise, with revised text that avoids them. In the course of the review of the draft chapters, attention will be paid to ensuring that attribution and copyright requirements are complied with to the same standard throughout the assessment.