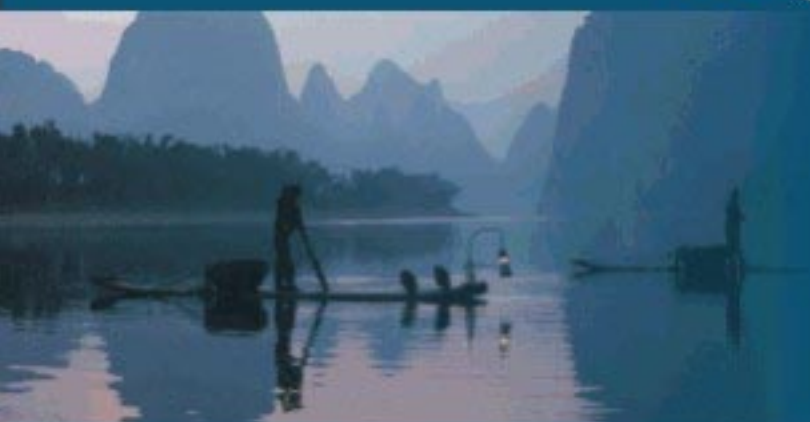




Regional Seas



A survival strategy for



our oceans and coasts



Foreword

As acknowledged by the United Nations Secretary-General himself, UNEP's Regional Seas programme has emerged over the last quarter century as an inspiring example of how to craft a regional approach to protecting the environment and managing natural resources.

The programme started from the premise that that the environmental problems facing different ocean and coastal areas could be best tackled at the regional rather than global level. Today, however, the 18 regional seas and partner programmes see the need for greater collaboration and mutual support.

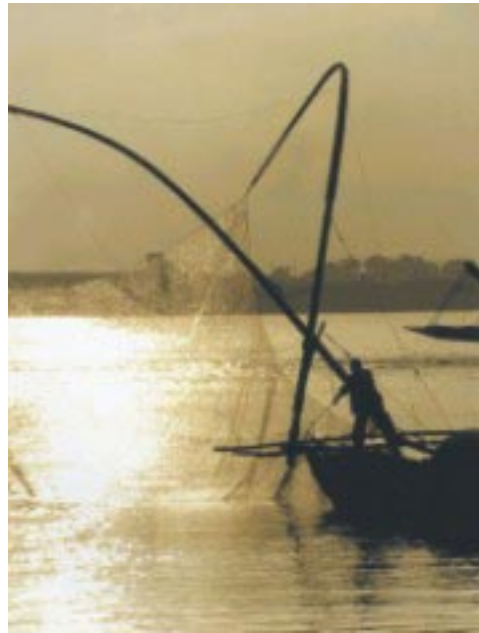
For this reason, UNEP has decided to breathe new life into its Regional Seas programme. By exploring fresh concepts, and finding opportunities for increased cooperation among the regions, UNEP hopes to fashion a revitalized programme that is much more than the sum of its many parts.

This publication, describing where the programme stands at the dawn of the new century, is a benchmark of this process.

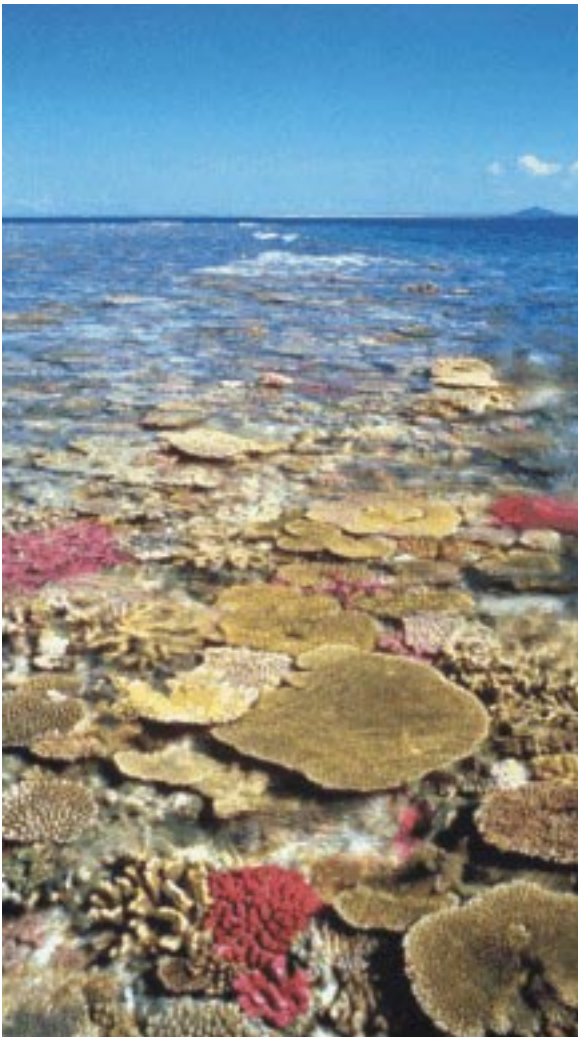
*– Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director,
United Nations Environment Programme*

Regional Seas

A survival strategy
for our
oceans and coasts



UNEP/HU ZONG HUU



UNEP/SHOUKYA UTSUKA

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A time to act

Since the 1960s when Jacques-Yves Cousteau first raised the alarm over the deteriorating condition of the marine environment, most of us have come to realize what's at stake: our fisheries – a primary source of food for many of us – our holiday beaches, our treasured coral reefs and species-rich coastal wetlands, even our health.

More recently scientists have cautioned us that the very survival of life on Earth may be vulnerable to our unwitting assaults on the atmosphere with 'greenhouse' gases and ozone-depleting chemicals, on the land with our bulldozers and chainsaws, on our fellow creatures with pesticides, driftnets and asphalt.

Even our oceans, the great environmental buffers that keep conditions for life (temperature, atmospheric gases, water and nutrient cycles) on an even keel are threatened. The forces in play are enormous, and could bring about fundamental changes in our environment so rapidly that life would have little time to adapt. Deserts could form in the great plains, the world's foodbaskets. The great ocean and air currents could re-route, turning Switzerland into Siberia or Argentina into the Sahara. Entire temperature zones could shift hundreds of kilometres in a few decades. Island chains and coastal plains could disappear altogether.



QING DAO BEACH, CHINA. UNEP/WANG JIAN MIN

Coastal encounters

Seven out of 10 people around the globe live within 80 km of the shoreline. Almost half the world's cities with a population of over one million are sited near tide-washed river mouths. Coastal zones provide all but 10 percent of the world's fishing catch, and the beach is the favourite playground for a large segment of humanity. The continental shelves are the ocean's most biologically productive regions.

But the coast is also where our activities have the greatest and most immediate effect; where developers clear mangroves and flush silt and sediment into previously clear waters, where urban and industrial wastes pollute estuaries; where tourists crowd around the very coral reefs where fish are harvested with dynamite or poison.

Growing threats

Globalization has intensified many of the threats to marine life. Ships remain the cheapest form of long-haul transport for goods in bulk, so thousands of tankers ply the world's oil routes, with regular spills and discharges that can clog holiday beaches, killing off wildlife and destroying local tourist and fishing economies for months if not years. Invasive species are transported in the holds and ballast waters of ships, threatening biodiversity around the globe by preying upon or out-competing native species of animals and plants.

On the global agenda

Coastal and marine problems were for long treated as purely local or national issues. With the rise of environmental awareness over the last fifty years they began to move up the global agenda. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment expressly underlined the “vital importance for humanity of the seas and all the living organisms which the oceans support.” The Rio Earth Summit of 1992 embodied a new concern with sustainable development. Agenda 21, the international blueprint for the environment and development community in the new millennium, devoted Chapter 17 to the oceans and coastal areas. The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity and the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change put marine activities in a new perspective, in which global and regional questions were closely linked.

UNEP's Regional Seas

The Governing Council of the United Nations environment Programme endorsed the regional approach to controlling marine pollution several times before UNEP started its Regional Seas Programme in 1974. In its first major regional activity, UNEP brought together a task force of scientists and officials to shape a plan of action for the Mediterranean, adopted in its final form at Barcelona in February, 1975.

Since then, 13 regional Action Plans have been established under UNEP auspices: the Black Sea, Caribbean, East Africa, East Asia, the ROPME Sea Area (Kuwait region), Mediterranean, North-East Pacific, North-West Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, South Asia, South-East Pacific, South Pacific, and West and Central Africa. A plan for the South-West Atlantic is in development and three similar independent agreements amongst developed countries are in place in the Baltic, Arctic, and North-East Atlantic. Altogether, more than 140 countries participate in at least one regional Action Plan.

Environment: a unifying cause

Environmental protection has proven to be a profoundly unifying issue. In region after region, from the Mediterranean to Kuwait to the North-West Pacific, the pattern is repeated: countries that agree on little else can meet at the same table to discuss how to protect their marine and coastal environment.

Perhaps just as remarkable have been the broad-based partnerships forged between dozens of international agencies, often with additional support from the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Of the seventeen Regional Seas and partner programmes, eleven are underpinned by conventions with their respective protocols.

These regional agreements have been extraordinarily effective in engaging governments in protecting the environment. Unlike the global environmental conventions, these regional conventions and Action Plans are comprehensive, covering issues ranging from chemical wastes and coastal development to the conservation of marine animals and ecosystems. Their limited geographic focus enables them to channel the energies of a wide range of interest groups into solving what are, after all, a series of interlinked problems.

Key issues

Some of the priority issues that are being addressed by the Regional Seas agreements include:

Ecosystems and biodiversity. Coral reefs are among the most productive and diverse of all natural ecosystems. Recent decades have been catastrophic for them, however: some 10% of the world's reefs may already have been degraded beyond recovery, and another 30% are in decline. Meanwhile biologically rich coastal wetlands, including mangrove forests and salt marshes, are favourite sites for dredging and filling by industry, farmers and home builders. Sea turtles and marine mammals such as seals, manatees and small whales are at particular risk.

Living resources. Fish, molluscs, and crustaceans are major food sources for subsistence communities around the world. But overharvesting combined with pollution and other environmental stresses have caused fish stocks around the world to collapse. Some 70% of major fish stocks are estimated to be overexploited or in danger of being so.

Land-based sources of pollution. Municipal, industrial and agricultural wastes and run-off account for as much as 80% of all marine pollution. Sewage and waste water, persistent organic pollutants (including pesticides), heavy metals, oils, nutrients and sediments – whether brought by rivers or discharged directly into coastal waters – take a severe toll on human health and well-being as well as on coastal ecosystems. The result is more carcinogens in seafood, more closed beaches, more red tides, more beached carcasses of seabirds, fish and even marine mammals. To better address this world-wide problem, governments established the Global Plan of Action on Land-based Sources of Pollution in 1995 (see page 7).

Shipping and sea-based pollution. Some 20% of sea pollution comes from the deliberate dumping of oil and other wastes from ships, from accidental spills and offshore oil drilling, and the steady drip-drip of hydrocarbons from ship engines.

Coastal development. Heavy population pressure on the coasts is causing more and more of the natural environment to be paved over or converted into ports, tourist beaches, and new communities. Coastal development often entails dredging up bottom sediments, reshaping the shoreline and thus local currents. The wholesale cutting of mangrove forests and other habitat leads to erosion and sedimentation.

Vulnerability of small islands. Environmental pressures take a particular toll on small island states, whose size and isolation make them vulnerable to extinctions, habitat loss, and sea-level rise. The 40-plus small island developing States and territories recognized by the United Nations all participate in the Regional Seas, while the Caribbean and South Pacific are dominated by small island countries.

Marine mammals. Many species of whales, seals and dolphins are threatened world-wide. Hundreds of thousands of dolphins and whales die each year in fishing nets. Coastal development and herbicides destroy the habitat of manatees and dugongs. Marine otters are hunted for their pelts or killed by people who see them as competitors for fish and sea urchins. Growing public concern in the early 1980s led UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN to draw up a Global Plan of Action for Marine Mammals, and since then several Regional Seas have incorporated marine mammal conservation into their Action Plans and protocols.



COMMON DOLPHIN. UNEP/ANDREW DRAKE

How Action Plans work

Action Plans are adopted by member governments in order to establish a comprehensive strategy and framework for protecting the natural environment and promote sustainable development. In 11 of the 17 regional programmes, the Parties have also adopted a legally-binding convention setting out what governments must do to implement the Action Plan. Most conventions have added protocols, which are separate but linked legal agreements addressing specific issues – such as protected areas or land-based pollution – in more detail.

An Action Plan outlines the strategy and substance of the programme, based on the region's particular environmental challenges as well as its socio-economic and political situation, and is usually made up of the following parts:

Environmental assessment. Monitoring and assessment activities provide a scientific basis for setting regional priorities and policies. Regional institutions and experts participate in a programme to determine the causes of environmental problems as well as their magnitude and impact on the region. These may include scientific baseline studies; research and monitoring of the sources, levels and effects of marine pollutants; ecosystem studies; and studies of coastal and marine activities. Assessments are also made of the social and economic factors that relate to environmental degradation and the status and effectiveness of national environmental legislation.

Environmental management. Each regional programme includes a wide range of environmental management activities such as cooperative projects on training in Environmental Impact Assessment; management of coastal lagoons, estuaries and mangrove ecosystems; control of industrial, agricultural and domestic wastes; formulation of contingency plans for dealing with pollution emergencies; etc.

Environmental legislation. An umbrella convention most often provides the legal framework for an Action Plan. It also expresses the political will and legal commitment of the Governments to tackle their common environmental problems, acting both together and individually. Conventions are put into practice 'on-the-ground' through protocols dealing with specific problems – oil spills, response to emergencies, land-based pollution, and conservation of wildlife and habitats, for example. In some regions the convention has emerged as the centrepiece of the programme.

Institutional arrangements. Governments agree upon an organization to act as the permanent or interim secretariat of the Action Plan, usually called the Regional Coordinating Unit (RCU). Governments also decide how often to hold intergovernmental meetings to review progress, approve new activities and discuss the budget.

Financial arrangements. UNEP, together with selected United Nations and other organizations, provides "seed money" or catalytic financing in the early stages of the regional programmes. Ultimately, the Governments of the region are expected to assume financial responsibility. Government financing may be channeled through regional trust funds administered by the organization responsible for secretariat functions of the Action Plan (often initially UNEP, later the RCU or a new independent regional organization).



Future directions

Throughout the quarter century of the Regional Seas Programme, the results and experience of the early Action Plans helped to fine-tune the approach described above. Fresh and innovative ideas were used to adapt the basic Action Plan model to particular regional contexts. The Programme grew in scope and imagination as well as in size.

Today, a new framework for international action is emerging, and is reflected in all the Regional Seas. It encompasses rather than replaces the former programme elements of science, management and law. Its main components are:

- **biodiversity conservation:** by which activities to protect marine species and habitats are drawn within the expanding sphere of influence of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its partner conventions;

- **land-based activities:** aimed at tackling the main sources of environmental degradation at their source, within the framework of the Global Programme of Action (GPA) for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, and

- **integrated coastal management:** pursuing sustainable development of the coastal zone and utilization of marine resources according to principles developed by regional programmes, and now brought together by UNEP as Guidelines for Integrated Coastal Area Management (ICAM).

A time for revitalization

Over the next few years, UNEP and the Regional Seas secretariats will work together to energize all of the regional programmes through a five-part strategy:

Strengthen UNEP's contribution to the Regional Seas. UNEP recognizes the valuable role that the Regional Seas Programme plays in delivering UNEP's own programme to the regions, and is committed to channelling support and financial resources more effectively to the regional conventions and Action Plans. It directly supports the secretariat function for several of the Action Plans, and has contributed financial resources as well. For example, UNEP has provided financial support to the African Regional Seas programmes in support of the Conference of Parties' meeting (Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions) and to the Regional Seas Coral Reef Assessment project. UNEP has also provided funding to the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) to extend technical support to programmes in Eastern Africa, the Wider Caribbean, South-East Pacific and East Asia for reports on the regional status of coral reefs.



UNEP/YOSHIKI KAWACHI

Promote horizontal ties among Regional Seas Action Plans. The sharing of experiences, best practices, and lessons learned can provide an invaluable form of cooperation. For example, some of the more mature Regional Seas conventions have developed considerable expertise in the management of coastal and marine areas and could provide technical cooperation and assistance to the newer and less developed conventions.

On the basis the example set by towns and cities around the world, a practical – and creative – move towards increased collaboration for Regional Seas could be the practice of “twinning”. The first Regional Seas twinning arrangement was signed in May 2000 between the Helsinki Commission for Baltic Marine Environment Protection and UNEP's Regional Seas Programme for the Eastern African Region. It seeks to strengthen efforts by East African countries to protect the western part of the Indian Ocean.



UNEP/AS DUNCAN

Carry out the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA). GIWA is a four-year global initiative led by UNEP and executed by Kalmar University in Sweden. The Assessment will focus on the root causes of environmental degradation in 66 international marine, freshwater and groundwater sites around the world.

GIWA is urgently needed because the challenges facing international waters often fail to attract national funding. Financed by the Global Environment Facility, GIWA aims to provide the most objective and comprehensive assessment of transboundary water problems ever made. This will result in an information base that can be used for finding solutions and for setting global priorities for on-the-ground action.

Collaborate with the Global Programme of Action (GPA) for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. The 1995 GPA was established to strengthen regional and national efforts to tackle perhaps the most important threat to Regional Seas: the flow of chemicals, human wastes, and other materials into the sea via air, rivers, and coastal activities. It targets pollution from entire catchment areas, taking in sources such as agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and tourism.

The goals of the GPA, whose secretariat is based in The Hague and administered by UNEP, can be realized in large part through the activities of the Regional Seas programmes, while the GPA can help to promote greater support for activities and coordination at the regional level.

Exploit synergies with global conventions and agreements. The Regional Seas programmes and Action Plans can provide the appropriate level for the implementation of many global instruments, in particular those dealing with the protection of the marine environment. They can also ensure proper coordination between regional and global conventions and serve as a vehicle for gathering information.

Key partners can include the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Global Plan of Action for Marine Mammals, the Climate Change Convention, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and many others.

Ready to go

Today, with the revitalization of the Programme and UNEP's added support, the Regional Seas offer a regional mechanism that is already in place and ready to address the global environmental challenges of the 21st century. The Regional Seas Programme also offers a technical, scientific, legal and institutional framework

Mediterranean

The virtually enclosed waters of the miniature ocean we call the Mediterranean Sea have been the well-beaten crossroads of European, Asian and African civilizations for thousands of years. Historians call our region the 'cradle of civilization', but we are proud to say the Mediterranean is also the cradle of the Regional Seas Programme. Ours was the first Action Plan, adopted in 1975 by the Mediterranean States and the European Community, quickly followed by the Barcelona Convention of 1976 and a succession of landmark protocols.

But our work really began in the 1960s, on the day that Jacques-Yves Cousteau first raised the alarm over the deterioration he saw in the Mediterranean environment. As our monitoring programmes confirmed, the main cause was pollution from land-based sources, supplemented by oil from heavy tanker traffic and ill-managed coastal development.

A key element of the Mediterranean model has been a focus on cooperation and inclusion. From the beginning we demonstrated how countries in political conflict could be united by the desire to protect their shared natural and cultural heritage. A huge number of organizations also joined in, from the specialized agencies of the UN system to national research laboratories to grassroots environmental groups.

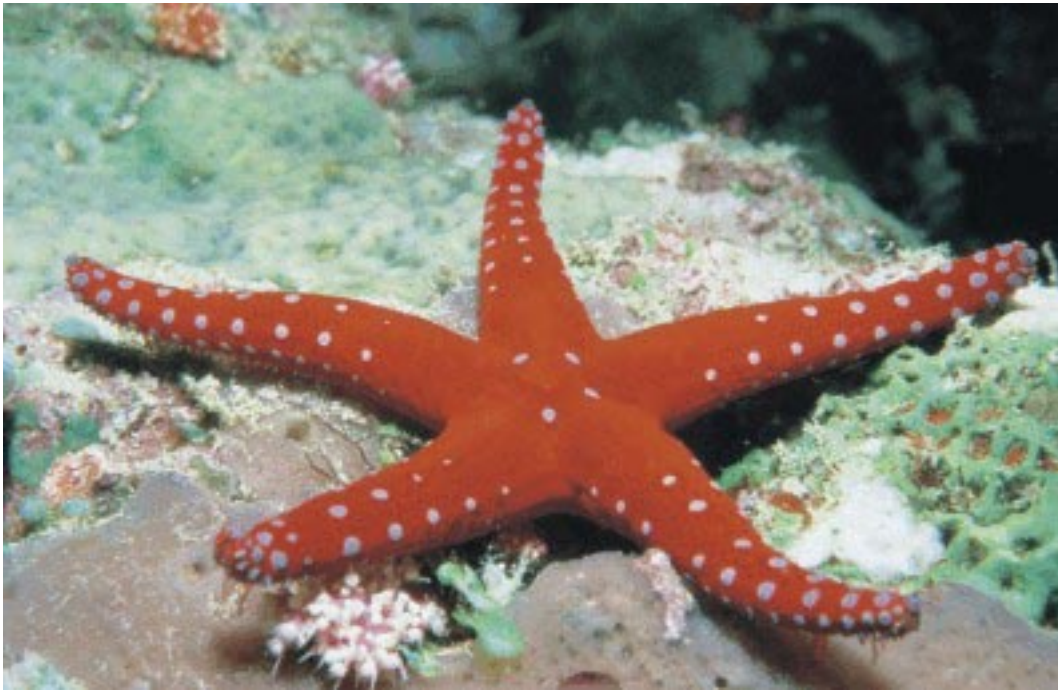
A quarter-century has seen our Athens headquarters supplemented by six regional activity centres, revision of the Action Plan and Convention to reflect a new emphasis on sustainable development and biodiversity conservation, biennial meetings of governments to review progress and reset our compass, and the establishment of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development with a pioneering structure and mandate.

But we have a long way to go. The blessings of our Mediterranean climate, fascinating wildlife and cultural treasures continue to attract more settlers and tourists than ever, exacerbating the old environmental threats and causing new ones to appear. We welcome the renewal of the Regional Seas Programme and the chance to work in new ways to meet these challenges.

*Lucien Chabason, Coordinator,
Mediterranean Action Plan*



ISLANDS OF MALTA. UNEP/ADRIAN MALLIA



PERSGA

Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

Ours is a truly unique environment. Our waters have been used for thousands of years for fishing and trading, and to transport religious pilgrims. Today the people of the region share these same waters with oil tankers, cargo ships and tourist boats, representing potentially serious risks to our relatively pristine marine ecosystems. Coastal populations are increasing, posing new and growing threats to the environment if this growth is not managed properly. Climate change and sea level rise, once considered distant threats, are an approaching danger for low-lying areas.

Our extensive and very beautiful coral reefs are inhabited by many species which occur nowhere else in the world. Today these reefs are attracting tourists in ever-increasing numbers, but if this growing industry is not well managed we are in danger of losing a great and sustainable resource.

The Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are shared by many countries, and a regional approach is the only way to protect our shared heritage. Adoption of the Jeddah Convention and the original Action Plan in 1982 made ours one of the first Regional Seas programmes to get off the ground.

Today the Strategic Action Programme for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has been developed by the countries of the region in cooperation with the Global Environment Facility and its implementing agencies. These are the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank. The programme is also supported by the Islamic Development Bank.

The Strategic Action Programme, formally launched in 1999, is already generating new insights into our treasured environment. It is my great hope that the results of the Programme will be an asset to the countries of the Region in their planning for the management and conservation of our unique coastal and marine environments.

*Nizar Tawfiq,
Secretary General, PERSGA*



ROPME Sea Area (Kuwait region)

For the past three decades the ROPME region has witnessed one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world. The rise in industrialization, together with high population growth and rapid urbanization, have resulted in ever-increasing environmental problems.

Our marine waters are shallow and virtually landlocked, experiencing extremes of salinity and temperature. Evaporation is high, precipitation is poor and freshwater supply is decreasing. The risk of oil pollution in the Sea Area is one of the highest anywhere, mainly due to the concentration of offshore installations, tanker terminals, petrochemical industries and the huge volume of oil transported by ships.

In April 1978, the eight Governments of the Region adopted the Kuwait Convention and Action Plan, making us one of the first Regional Seas. The Plan mainly covers programme activities relating to oil pollution, industrial wastes, sewage and marine resources. Projects range over coastal area management, fisheries, public health, land-based activities, sea-based pollution, biodiversity, oceanography, marine emergencies, GIS and remote sensing.

Milestones include the creation in 1979 of the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), the establishment in 1982 of the Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Centre (MEMAC), and the adoption of four protocols addressing marine emergencies, hazardous wastes, land-based activities and sea-based pollution.

Recognizing that environmental issues are diverse and interdisciplinary, ROPME has joined hands with the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) and UNEP's Regional Office for West Asia to coordinate our programme activities, avoid duplication and save time and resources.

Another notable feature of our programme is its influence in the participating countries, and the cooperation it has stimulated. Our *State of the Marine Environment Report* is a great witness of how seriously our Member States are taking the protection of their marine environment.

*Abdul Rahman Al-Awadi,
Executive Secretary of ROPME*



ROPME



CARIBBEAN SEA TURTLES. UNEP

Wider Caribbean

In the Wider Caribbean, “diversity” is more than a buzzword. We profit from a variety of tropical and sub-tropical ecosystems covering 28 continental and island countries. Coral reefs, mangroves and sea grasses support an assortment of marine life that help sustain the environment and economy of the equally diverse peoples of the Wider Caribbean — the legacy of Hispanic, African, English, French and native cultures. Economic development in the Wider Caribbean runs the gamut from some of the poorest developing countries to the richest of the industrialized world.

Coastal economies are based on clean and healthy marine ecosystems. Unfortunately, our environmental problems are also diverse: coral reefs and sensitive habitats threatened by sewage and other land-based pollution; marine mammals threatened by boaters and waste; overfishing; uncontrolled coastal development; and the list continues.

In 1981, the Caribbean Action Plan was adopted as a comprehensive approach to regional coordination to protect and develop the marine environment. The legal framework of the Action Plan is the Cartagena Convention, adopted in 1983. There are now 21 Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention – the only regional environmental treaty in the Wider Caribbean. The Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP)

was established by the Caribbean nations and territories in support of the Convention, and is now implementing agreements on oil spill response and contingency planning, specially protected areas and wildlife and land-based marine pollution. The CEP embraces the region's diversity in its efforts to advance economic prosperity and environmental health.

Today, the Programme has emerged from a period of revitalization and redirection. Activities focus on coastal area management; oil-spill preparation; land-based pollution; biological diversity and environmental information systems. The Action Plan and the Cartagena Convention are fully integrated and implemented through sub-programmes that address the priority areas of the Convention and other related global and regional initiatives. With the continued support from the member governments, the future of environmental protection in the Wider Caribbean is looking hopeful.

*Nelson Andrade Colmenares, Coordinator,
Caribbean Environment Programme*





FISHING AT DAWN. UNEP/VINCENT YEUNG

East Asian Seas

East Asia's astonishing variety of political, economic and social systems is matched by its environment: ship-crowded straits, island groups, wide gulfs, shallow estuaries – and some of the most heavily populated cities in the world where millions rely on fish for much of their protein.

The threats seem just as varied and include erosion and siltation from land development, logging and mining, blast fishing in coral reefs, cutting and conversion of mangroves, overfishing, unimpeded development and disposal of untreated wastes.

The East Asian Action Plan was approved in 1981 in response to concerns over the effects and sources of marine pollution. It was initially sub-regional, involving only five countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Another five were welcomed in 1994, bringing to ten the number of countries ready to face up to East Asia's environmental challenges. Today it encompasses assessment of the effects of human activities on the marine environment, control of coastal pollution, protection of mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs, and waste management.

The Action Plan is steered by its coordinating body, COBSEA. The Regional Coordinating Unit in Bangkok serves as Secretariat for COBSEA and is in fact the lead agency of the United Nations for marine environmental matters in East Asia, responsible for coordinating the activities of governments, NGOs, UN and donor agencies, and individuals in caring for the region's marine environment. Recently we have revised the Action Plan to include monitoring and environmental assessment, technology transfer, and environmental governance. We have worked with the UNEP/GPA (Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities) to address pollution from sources on land. A project "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand" was approved by the Global Environment Facility and is under way.

East Asia is among the Regional Seas programmes which has no regional convention; instead the programme promotes compliance with existing environmental treaties, and relies on member countries' goodwill.

*Hugh Kirkman, Coordinator,
East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit*



South-East Pacific

Our region stretches the entire length of the Pacific coast of South America from Colombia to Cape Horn, encompassing tropical, sub-tropical, temperate and subantarctic systems. In spite of this diversity, our five countries are united by a common natural feature – the cold, nutrient-rich Humboldt current which supports one of the world's most productive fishing grounds.

We are also famous for being the primary target of El Niño, a phenomenon of the equatorial Pacific producing dramatic alterations in local – and ultimately global – conditions, and affecting everything from the weather to marine ecosystems to human livelihoods.

UNEP began providing financial and technical support to our region in 1976, through a mechanism for interagency cooperation developed with the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS). Preparatory work on a regional programme was capped in 1981 with the adoption of the Action Plan and the Lima Convention.

These documents were designed to address the major environmental threat identified at that time: pollution near our cities, ports, industrial centres and shipping lanes by sewage, minerals, food processing wastes and oil. Pollution from land-based sources, marine emergencies, protected areas and radioactivity were dealt with in subsequent protocols.

When Agenda 21 and the biodiversity and climate change conventions transformed the international environmental landscape, we already had in place a regional mechanism for their implementation, reinforced by the technical, scientific, legal and institutional groundwork laid by our Action Plan.

Among the Regional Seas, ours was the first to have its own Action Plan for Marine Mammals, one of the first to create a network of coastal and marine protected areas, and among the first to adopt a comprehensive strategy for coastal zone management.

But perhaps our greatest achievement has been the remarkable amount of training and capacity building carried out in the first decade of the Action Plan, setting the stage for future accomplishment.



Ulises Munaylla Alarcon, Adviser of the Plan of Action of the South East Pacific, Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS)



GALAPAGOS, ECUADOR. IUCN/JIM THORSELL



Regional S



West to East: North-East Pacific South-East Pacific Wider C
Mediterranean Black Sea Eastern Africa Red Sea & Gulf of
North-West Pacific South Pacific Partner programmes: Arc

Seas



Caribbean Upper South-West Atlantic West & Central Africa
Aden ROPME Sea Area South Asian Seas East Asian Seas
North-East Atlantic Baltic Antarctic



LOGS COVER LAGOS LAGOON, NIGERIA. UNEP/KAYODE FAOSEK

West and Central Africa

Our region's coastal countries, from Mauritania to Namibia, benefit enormously from their highly productive and diverse ecosystems. Rich fisheries, coastal tourism, industries and busy ports are economic mainstays.

But in recent decades these ecosystems have suffered greatly from rapid development, improper use of resources and extensive pollution. Coastal erosion and floods are already particular problems, likely to be exacerbated by climate change. Crucial habitats are disappearing virtually everywhere, and human societies are both the perpetrators and victims of this destruction.

UNEP first looked at the possibilities of implementing a regional programme in 1976. A large number of background studies, surveys and workshops prepared the ground for the programme. Additional international organizations soon became involved; their productive partnership, and their determination to win the approval and participation of all the west African countries, resulted in a draft Action Plan for submission to regional experts.

In 1981 the Action Plan and the Abidjan Convention were adopted by the Governments; the Convention entered into force in 1984; and soon projects on contingency planning, pollution, coastal erosion, environmental impact assessment, environmental legislation and marine mammals got under way.

Progress slowed in the intervening years, owing to competing priorities and a lack of resources. Our troubled region has seen terrible conflicts resulting in immense poverty, but the Regional Seas partnership forged in the early 1980s lives on, ready to resume its work. The next step is to rekindle our hopes and see how we can learn, benefit from, and contribute to other Regional Seas programmes – particularly our sister programme in Eastern Africa.

In March 2000, a successful Conference of Parties was held in Accra with a full quorum of Ministers – the first since 1993. Armed with this new commitment we can begin to fulfill the promise of our potentially rich and prosperous region and its natural splendours.



Dixon Waruinge, UNEP Focal Point for West and Central Africa

South Pacific

The sea has always been a part of the people from the 22 island States and Territories of the Pacific. The Pacific Ocean provides food, a means of transport, and a source of pride and identity for Pacific Islanders.

Our cultures have traditionally emphasized wise environmental management, but industrialization, urban drift and increasing populations are placing pressure on land and marine ecosystems that were once largely unspoiled.

UNEP's work in the region began in 1978. This has always been pursued in cooperation with the existing regional organizations: the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Forum Secretariat and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Islands. In 1982 after 19 States and Territories had compiled country reports, a conference on the human environment in the Cook Islands led to an agreement formally recognizing the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

They also signed a Natural Resources and Environment Declaration, that stressed sustainable management, conservation goals and control of radioactive discharges. Some were surprised at the unity of these many small island nations divided by vast tracts of ocean, but Pacific islanders have long found common cause in their vulnerability to outside pressures.

Complementing this unity was the support of regional organizations and the role of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) serving as programme secretariat. Our role has since expanded further with scores of projects being undertaken. UNEP's participation has focused on pollution monitoring and research, climate change impacts and support for SPREP.

Recently we signed an agreement with UNEP to revitalize our cooperation on all environmental issues, including financing and conservation activities, regional climate change, and nature-based tourism.

These seeds mark the beginning of a new era in environmental cooperation between our organizations. SPREP looks forward to a mutually rewarding and enjoyable relationship.

*Tamari'i Tutangata, Director,
South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).*



UNEP/STUART SHARP

Eastern Africa

The great currents of the Indian Ocean bathe and nourish our extensive coastline – the coral reefs that fringe the narrow continental shelves and the species-rich mangroves, which abound near river estuaries. These heavily-fished ecosystems supply commercially important oysters, crabs, shrimp and mullet to East African economies, yet are particularly vulnerable to oil pollution from heavy tanker traffic, silting from large-scale erosion, and effluents from coastal industry, agriculture and human settlements.

Eastern Africa joined the Regional Seas Programme in 1980, and five years later the Nairobi Convention and Action Plan were adopted, along with protocols on pollution emergencies and on protected areas and wildlife.

After a slow period when resources were scarce, the programme has again picked up pace. In 1996 the Convention entered into force; a year later the Regional Coordinating Unit was inaugurated in the Seychelles and the first meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention was held. To date all nine East African countries have ratified the Convention and South Africa has asked to join.

At the second Contracting Parties meeting in 1999, a joint bureau for the Nairobi and Abidjan (West and Central African) Conventions met and agreed to set up a joint programming unit in Nairobi to further cooperation on regional projects and international issues.

For the first time in a decade we have a biennial programme – focusing on marine protected areas and coral reefs, habitats which suffered a severe bleaching in 1998 – and a regional overview and action plan on land-based pollution. Experts are considering ways to update the Convention, implement existing protocols and develop new ones.

The programme is also getting a boost from some new partnerships. In May 2000, a twinning agreement was signed with the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission to promote the exchange of experience, and we are exploring how the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions can assist one another.

*Rolph Payet, Interim Coordinator,
Regional Coordinating Unit of the
Eastern African Region*



GIANT TORTOISE OF ALDABRA ISLAND (SEYCHELLES), A WORLD HERITAGE SITE. IUCN/JIM THORSELL



STURGEON FISHING, DANUBE DELTA. IUCN/LIZ HOPKINS

Black Sea

Our beautiful and productive sea is confronted with many environmental problems. The most significant of these is massive over-fertilization – largely from agricultural, domestic and industrial pollution – leading to excessive growth of algae and oxygen depletion (eutrophication). Other major problems include pollution by oil spills, overfishing, and the introduction of exotic species. Among those to suffer have been our famous sturgeon, our greatly appreciated dolphins, and of course our people whenever they fish, swim or simply comb our beaches.

Inspired by the early Regional Seas conventions, in April 1992 the six Black Sea countries signed the Convention for the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution and soon ratified it. The 'Bucharest Convention' includes Protocols on land-based sources of pollution, dumping of waste, and emergency response in the case of accidents. To ensure the implementation of the Convention, a Commission with representatives from each Black Sea country was established. Then in 1993 the Black Sea Environmental Programme was founded to provide a programme of practical actions. The Programme helped participating countries to prepare the Black Sea Action Plan, which was completed and adopted in 1996.

The aim of the Action Plan is to “enable the population of the Black Sea region to enjoy a healthy living environment in both urban and rural areas, and to attain a biologically diverse Black Sea ecosystem with viable natural populations of higher organisms, including marine mammals and sturgeons, and which will support livelihoods based on sustainable activities such as fishing, aquaculture and tourism in all Black Sea countries.”

Some principal achievements of the programme so far have been to set up a regional network of scientific institutions equipped for monitoring pollution, training personnel, and collecting detailed scientific information as a basis of future work. Currently, a new Global Environment Facility project is being prepared that will focus on reducing nutrients in the entire Black Sea basin.

*Mehmet Cevikoglu, Technical & Information Officer,
Black Sea Environmental Programme*





JAPANESE CHILDREN FISHING. UNEP/HARUO OHNO

North-West Pacific

This region, which involves the People's Republic of China, Russia, Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea and Japan suffers from the usual problems of expanded coastal development and population pressure, eutrophication, chemical pollution, dumping of waste, oil pollution from wastewaters, and "red tides" that pose health risks to populations that rely on fish for much of their diet.

In 1988, UNEP began receiving requests to extend its Regional Seas Programme to the North-West Pacific, based on the countries' concern over these threats and their interest in prediction technologies based on scientific modelling and joint environmental monitoring. UNEP readily agreed.

There followed an extraordinary moment in 1991 when representative of the region's States met informally to discuss developing an Action Plan – once again showing how concern for the environment can help overcome political differences. One delegate hailed the gathering as "a historic starting point for mutual understanding and cooperation. Several meetings of experts and national focal points were held over the next few years in a remarkably positive and productive atmosphere, and in 1994 the Action Plan for the North-West Pacific (NOWPAP) was adopted by the countries.

At the same time, five priority projects were adopted on information management, survey of national environmental legislation and policies, a regional monitoring programme, cooperation in marine pollution preparedness and response, and creation of a network of regional activity centres. Most are now well on their way. Meanwhile, a Forum on Marine Pollution, Preparedness and Response has been established, and work proceeds on a regional contingency plan.

The next critical priority is to establish the Regional Coordinating Unit and the network of regional activity centres. Then NOWPAP can truly realize its potential to become one of the world's most remarkable examples of regional cooperation for the environment.



*Ellik Adler, Regional Seas Programme Coordinator,
UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions*

South Asian Seas

Dramatic seasonal monsoons proclaim the exceptionally dynamic nature of our region's climate, geology and ocean currents. Our seas are rich in shallow tropical marine species, our estuaries are lined with extensive mangroves, and our islands are sheltered by magnificent coral reefs.

But if our environment is remarkable, our environmental problems are all too mundane: expanding human populations, oil transport across the Arabian Sea, heavy use of agricultural and industrial chemicals, harmful fishing practices, and ill-planned land use. These pressures have destroyed important habitat, driven many wildlife species near to extinction, and altogether compromised our peoples' future.

We do have one unusual problem for which our region is known: we risk losing an entire island nation to changing climate and rising seas. The Maldives, a vulnerable nation of coral islands that barely rises over two metres above sea level, could become uninhabitable within 50 years.

To address these critical problems, the South Asian Seas Action Plan was adopted in March 1995 and today enjoys the unqualified support of the region's five countries. The South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) has been privileged to participate in this work, and is now serving as the Action Plan secretariat. The plan focuses on integrated coastal zone management, development and implementation of national and regional oil-spill contingency planning, human resource development through strengthening regional centres of excellence, and land-based sources of pollution. We have just begun a two-year programme on the development and implementation of Integrated Management of the Environmentally Sensitive Coastal and Marine Ecosystems. And although we do not yet have our own regional convention, we are working diligently to apply existing global environmental and maritime conventions to our region.

Like our counterparts in the other Regional Seas, we know we must learn to control the impact of development if we are to keep our fisheries sustainable, our environment healthy and our people thriving.

*Prasantha Dias Abeyegunawardene, Deputy Director, Programmes,
South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)*





BEACH CLEANUP IN COSTA RICA. UNEP/INGRID CAVANAGH

North-East Pacific

The newest of the Regional Seas, this programme has engaged seven countries from Colombia to Mexico. Included are coastal areas noted for their productive fisheries and their biodiversity-rich mangroves, but these resources— and the societies that depend on them – are threatened from a number of directions: overexploitation of resources, maritime trade, rapid development and political conflict. The result has been poverty, food insecurity and inland degradation.

Moreover, the region still has a troubled legacy to overcome. In the 1980s, Central America was gripped by a profound political and economic crisis marked by an accumulated 18.3% decline of per capita gross domestic product. The end of the Cold War may have ended the major conflicts afflicting the region, but it has not brought an end to poverty.

On the bright side, this was a Regional Sea waiting to happen. The programme can draw on a long list of potential partners for guidance and support, particularly the international organizations already active in the region who have long experience in other Regional Seas. There is a wealth of background information available, much of it generated by neighbouring programmes in the Caribbean, South-East Pacific and South-West Atlantic, and the many training and capacity building activities already under way.

Encouraged by the enthusiasm of the participating countries, UNEP drafted an Action Plan and convention. In March 2001 eight governments adopted the Action Plan, and plan to sign the Convention later in the year. This is an important step towards improving the health of the environment and the lives of the region's people, and further heal the wounds of a troubled and insecure time.

As in other Regional Seas, the protection and sustainable management of the environment is proving an effective instrument for peace. Specific issues such as food security, environmental security, liability, Integrated Coastal Area Management (ICAM) and the participation of civil society will make this a forward-looking Regional Seas convention.

*Juan Alberto Manelía, Chief of Infrastructure,
Central American Commission on Maritime Transportation (COCATRAM)*



Upper South-West Atlantic

The coast of South America is a rich natural environment of extraordinary natural beauty. The climate varies from subtropical to temperate, giving rise to a great variety of coastal habitats such as mangroves, dunes, estuaries, coral reefs and wetlands. These are fed and greatly influenced by the region's great inland water systems.

These differences in terrain are echoed in the many causes of environmental degradation: sewage, industrial effluents, careless use of agrochemical products, solid wastes, urban expansion, and activities related to the extraction, transport and storage of oil.

In 1980 UNEP's Governing Council decided to launch a programme for the marine and coastal environment of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. In 1997 UNEP reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation and strengthening of a programme for this region, focusing on projects and activities related directly to the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment Land-based Activities (UNEP/GPA).

In 1998, in cooperation with the UNEP/GPA Coordination Office, and the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC), a Regional Programme of Action on Land-based Activities and a regional assessment for the Upper South-West Atlantic were prepared and endorsed by representatives of the three Governments. The first steps in implementing the programme, which covers the coast from Cape São Tomé in Brazil to the northern Peninsula Valdez in Argentina, are now under way.

In the meantime, UNEP has continued to support cooperation for the protection and management of the region's marine environment through ROLAC, the Marine Mammal Action Plan and international partnerships with, for example, the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

With a renewal of interest on the part of the three States and UNEP's continued support and commitment, we hope soon to see a fully developed programme for this magnificent and biologically rich coast.



*Jorge Illueca, Director,
UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions*



ARTISANAL FISHING IN BAHIA, NORTHERN BRAZIL. IUCN/JIM THORSELL

Regional Seas independent partners

Baltic Sea: Helsinki Convention

On 24 March 1974 the Baltic Sea States signed the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, known as the 1974 Helsinki Convention. This was the first international agreement to cover all sources of pollution, whether from land, sea or air. It also regulated cooperation to combat marine pollution by oil and other hazardous substances.

In its first two decades, considerable progress was achieved within the framework of the 1974 Helsinki Convention, including improvements in the sanitary conditions of previously polluted water, significant reductions in discharges of organochlorine compounds from industry and of lead emissions from land-transport, and rehabilitation of some formerly seriously endangered living species.

In 1992, a new Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area was signed by all the countries bordering on the Baltic Sea and by the European Economic Community. When the 1992 Helsinki Convention entered into force on 17 January 2000, the 1974 Helsinki Convention ceased to apply. Today work continues to limit discharges of nutrients and hazardous substances from land-based activities, prevent pollution by shipping, and conserve natural habitats and biological diversity – activities in keeping with the overall goal of the 1992 Helsinki Convention to bring about sustainable development and use of natural resources in the Baltic Sea Area.



*Mieczyslaw S. Ostojki, Executive Secretary,
Helsinki Commission*

North-East Atlantic: OSPAR Convention

The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention) was adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 1998. Its purpose was to merge and modernize the Oslo and Paris Conventions to include several new principles of conservation, including the 'precautionary principle'; the 'polluter pays principle'; best available techniques (BAT) and best environmental practice (BEP), including clean technology. The 1992 Convention included a series of Annexes dealing with the prevention and elimination of pollution from land-based sources, by dumping or incineration and from offshore sources; and with assessment of the quality of the marine environment.



In 1998 the first Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission adopted a new annex concerning the protection and conservation of the region's ecosystems and biological diversity, and adopted a number of strategies aimed at guiding future work of the Commission. These strategies deal with hazardous substances, radioactive substances, eutrophication and conservation of ecosystems and biological diversity. New rules governing the participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Commission were also adopted. In 1999 the Commission adopted a strategy on environmental goals and management mechanisms for offshore activities.

*Ben van de Wetering, Executive Secretary,
OSPAR Commission*

Arctic: PAME

The Arctic Council was established at Ottawa in 1996 to help improve international co-operation and consultation on Arctic issues, and to further the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic, particularly with regard to sustainable development and environmental protection.

A primary focus of the Council is to oversee and coordinate the programmes established under the 1991 Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. These include the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) – a Regional Seas partner programme. (Others are the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, and the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Programme).

PAME cooperates with the other working groups within The Arctic Council on pollution prevention and control, habitat protection and biodiversity, identification and assessment of environmental problems, sustainable development and environmental protection. At its First Ministerial Meeting in 1998 the Arctic Council identified several specific priority tasks for PAME: to coordinate implementation of the regional programme for the protection of the Arctic marine environment from land-based activities, promote application of the Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines, review existing international agreements and arrangements, and consider the status of shipping in the Arctic and additional regulations that might be needed.



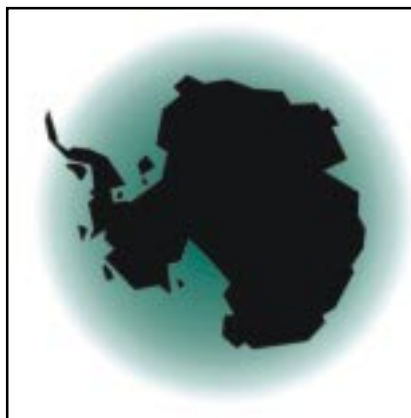
*Soffia Gudmundsdottir, Executive Secretary,
Protection Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)*

Antarctica: Antarctic Treaty System

Antarctica is the only continent on Earth to be completely governed by its very own international agreement. The Antarctic Treaty was adopted in 1959 by the 12 nations present in Antarctica at that time, who agreed to set aside their differences and work peacefully together to carry out scientific research. A further thirty-one nations signed the Treaty after it came into force in 1961, and it is still open to any member of the United Nations.

Since the first Consultative Meeting in Canberra in 1961, several measures have been adopted covering such areas as exchange of information; interchange of scientific personnel; preservation of historic sites; conservation of fauna and flora; protection of specific areas; conduct of tourists; mineral resources (CRAMRA); emergency assistance; and operation of the Antarctic Treaty System.

Although Antarctica does not have a multisectoral, integrated type of a Regional Seas Action Plan, there were two milestones of particular relevance to the Regional Seas Programme. One was the adoption of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which came into force in 1982 and which pioneered the development of the 'ecosystem approach' to the regulation of fisheries. The second was adoption in 1991 of the Madrid Protocol on protection of the Antarctic environment, which designates Antarctica as a 'natural reserve, devoted to peace and science'.



*Jorge Illueca, Director, UNEP Division of
Environmental Conventions*

REGIONAL SEAS CONVENTIONS AND PROTOCOLS

CONVENTIONS

Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution
Adopted: (Barcelona, 16.2.1976) Entry into Force: 12.2.1978

Amendment to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution
Adopted: (Barcelona, 10.6.1995) Entry into Force: pending

Kuwait Regional Convention for Cooperation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution
Adopted: (Kuwait, 24.4.1978) Entry into Force: 1.7.1979

Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region
Adopted: (Abidjan, 23.3.1981) Entry into Force: 5.8.1984

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific
Adopted: (Lima, 12.11.1981) Entry into Force: 19.5.1986

Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment
Adopted: (Jeddah, 14.2.1982) Entry into Force: 20.8.1985

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region
Adopted: (Cartagena de Indias, 24.3.1983) Entry into Force: Pending

Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region
Adopted: (Nairobi, 21.6.1985) Entry into Force: 30.5.1996

Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region
Adopted: (Noumea, 25.11.1986) Entry into Force: 22.8.1990

Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area¹
Adopted: (Helsinki, 9.4.1992) Entry into Force: 17 January 2000

Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution
Adopted: (Bucharest, 21.4.1992) Entry into Force: pending

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic¹
Adopted: (Paris, 22.9.1992) Entry into Force: 28 March 1998

Draft Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northeast Pacific

¹ Instead of protocols, the Helsinki Convention and OSPAR have related Annexes.

PROTOCOLS, AGREEMENTS OR CONVENTION ANNEXES BY SUBJECT

Pollution from Oil and Harmful Substances	Land-based Pollution	Specially Protected Areas & Wildlife	Radio-activity	Trans-boundary Movement of Wastes	Offshore Exploration and Exploitation	Dumping
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