

Dr. Ellik Adler
Coordinator
Regional Seas Programme

United Nations Environment Programme
Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction

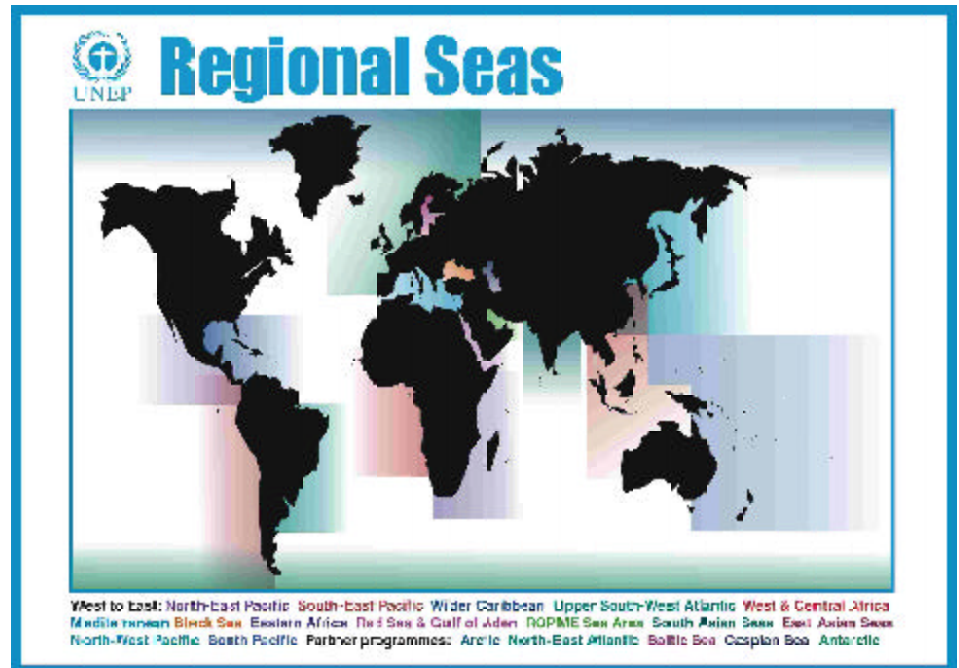
The UNEP Regional Seas Programme, launched in 1974 following the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, is one of UNEP's most significant achievements for the past 25 years.

The Programme aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas by working regionally to engage governments in comprehensive and specific actions to protect their shared marine environment.

Today more than 140 countries participate in 13 regional programmes in the Black Sea, Caribbean, East Africa, East Asia, the Kuwait Convention 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 – all under UNEP's auspices.

There are also five partner programmes for the Antarctic, Arctic, Baltic Sea, Caspian Sea, and North-East Atlantic.

A World of Neighbours: UNEP's Regional Seas Programme



UNEP Regional Seas Programmes.

Common Elements

The Regional Seas Programmes have several common elements. The process of establishing a Regional Seas Programme usually begins with the development of an action plan outlining the strategy and substance of a regionally coordinated programme, aimed at the protection of a common body of water. The action plan is based on the region's environmental challenges as well as its socioeconomic and political situation. It may cover issues ranging from chemical wastes

and coastal development to the conservation of marine species and ecosystems.

In most cases, the action plan is underpinned by a strong legal framework in the form of a regional convention and associated protocols on specific problems. The legally-binding convention expresses the commitment and political will of governments to tackle their common environmental problems through joint, coordinated activities.

Box 1: The Mediterranean Action Plan

Why has this approach worked so well?

First, the limited geographic focus of the action plans and conventions enables the countries to channel the energies of a wide range of interest groups towards a global purpose: preserving the world's ocean and coastal ecosystems, and the livelihoods they secure.

Second, although UNEP applies a common strategy in drawing up its regional action plans, it is by no means inflexible. The specific activities are customized to fit the needs and priorities of the region.

Third, from the start of the process, UNEP consults closely with a region's governments, regional organizations, interested international organizations, and regional experts to determine the scope and substance of a suitable action plan.

Fourth, UNEP ensures that the action plans are firmly grounded on regional knowledge, by producing comprehensive reviews of the environment and environmental problems which governments can use to set priorities.

Fifth, action plans are truly comprehensive. They normally include chapters on environmental monitoring and assessment, management and legislation, as well as institutional and financial arrangements needed to support

The Mediterranean, one of the world's most beautiful regions and a popular holiday destination, faces numerous threats to the marine environment brought about by solid waste generation, over-crowded coastal areas, soil erosion, and pollution from ships. These challenges prompted the Mediterranean countries and the European Community to start working together in the mid-1970s to protect the region's marine environment.

The Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) is the mechanism through which the 20 countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and the European Union, cooperate. It is the first such instrument developed by UNEP. The Action Plan focuses mainly on four key fields of activity: curbing pollution, safeguarding natural and cultural resources, managing coastal areas, and integrating the environment and development. MAP was expanded in 1995 to include sustainable development and make it more action-oriented.

The Athens-based MAP Coordinating Unit (MEDU) is the Action Plan's Secretariat. It manages and organizes the work of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, *i.e.*, the 21 MAP members, as well as the activities of the six MAP Regional Activity Centers (RACs), which offer expertise in specific fields of action. Focal points, appointed by member countries, are responsible for the follow-up and coordination of MAP activities, while the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSDD) provides guidance on policies for promoting sustainable development in the Mediterranean basin.

Since its inception, MAP has involved various United Nations agencies and numerous grassroots organizations in its activities, and seen the adoption of its legal framework, the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (1976) and six related protocols. Several key tools have been developed to reduce land-based sources of the sea's pollution and secure maritime safety and environmental protection in the region.

The Coastal Areas Management Programme was launched in 1987, indicating shift of the Plan's focus to integrated coastal management. The introduction of the Mediterranean Action Plan Phase II (the Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean MAP II) in 1995 incorporated UNCED principles to the Mediterranean context showing the determination of the parties to use the regional mechanism as a tool for sustainable development.

MAP presents a stable regional framework for meeting the challenges of environmental degradation and to link sustainable resource management with development in order not only to protect the Mediterranean region but to improve and maintain the quality of life of its inhabitants.

these actions. All these parts are interdependent, so they make up a coherent and effective whole.

Finally, the programme is flexible and responsive to evolution and changes in the international environmental agenda. The Earth Summit/UN Conference on

Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in September 2002, had an influence on the work programme and priorities of the various regional seas programmes. The five emerging global priority

Box 2: The East Asian Seas Action Plan

In 1981, five states of the East Asian region – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – took the initiative to create a cooperative programme for the study, prevention and control of marine pollution in their shared environment. Backed by the UNEP Governing Council, these countries adopted an Action Plan for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the East Asian Region. In 1994, Australia, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea and Vietnam joined the Action Plan and the 10 countries adopted a revised Action Plan and Long-term Strategy for the 1994-2000 period.

The Action Plan is steered from Bangkok by the Coordinating Body for the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA). The Regional Coordinating Unit (EAS/RCU) serves as Secretariat, and is the lead UN agency for marine environmental matters in East Asia, responsible for coordinating the activities of governments, NGOs, UN, and donor agencies, and individuals.

The Action Plan 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. Recent revisions have expanded it to include technology transfer, environmental governance, land-based pollution, habitat degradation, treatment and re-use of waste, and a transboundary diagnostic analysis carried out in cooperation with the GEF South China Sea project.

The region has not yet adopted a regional convention. Instead, the programme promotes compliance with existing environmental treaties.

A UNEP-lead process of the revitalization of COBSEA and the activities of EAS/RCU is now under way. The Regional Seas programme for this extremely diverse and fragile region faces a promising future, based on the mutual commitment, sense of ownership and growing partnership of its governments and UNEP.

issues which were announced by the UN Secretary General prior to WSSD – water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB) – will be taken on board and addressed by the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.

A New Era

At the request of its Governing Council, UNEP strengthened its commitment to the Regional Seas Programme in the mid-1990s. To generate and sustain its momentum, UNEP

began to convene regular global meetings of the secretariats of all the regional seas and partner programmes. Today, 16 regional programmes discuss common interests, set priorities, and establish lasting links with one another, as well as with global environmental conventions and international organizations. This close collaboration continues today, and the global meetings are characterized by enthusiasm, determination, and productivity.

Since then, the UNEP Governing Council has repeatedly made its wishes clear: the programme is expected to increase both regional and inter-

regional collaboration by promoting horizontal ties among the action plans and partner programmes. It should link more closely and be better coordinated with the Global Plan of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution (GPA). It should also collaborate more closely with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) or global conventions and other partners such as the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), the Global International Water Assessment (GIWA), and the Global Plan of Action for Marine Mammals.

The Governing Council also requested the individual regional seas programmes to strengthen their cooperation with international organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The Governing Council also encouraged the Regional Seas Programme to expand to other parts of the world when requested by the countries of a region. Recognizing the regional programme's valuable role in delivering UNEP's own programme and priorities, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to strengthen its contribution and technical support to the various regional seas programmes.

Change and Flexibility

Many of the regional programmes began to reach maturity, just as the international environmental agenda was undergoing a change and shifting towards new directions.

UNCED 1992 propelled the concept of sustainable development to the forefront of international concern, creating a new paradigm for discussion and action that was embodied in the meeting's major product - Agenda 21.

Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 outlined detailed provisions for the protection of oceans, seas, coastal areas, and related resources. The concentrated work that led to the adoption of the chapter seemed to have a catalytic effect. The decade after UNCED saw the adoption or entering into force of some 20 instruments and initiatives related directly or indirectly to the marine environment or marine biodiversity. These developments had enormous implications for the future of the Regional Seas Programme in general, and for individual activities of the regional programmes.

In 1992 there were a number of such agreements. Governments at the Rio Summit signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Climate Change convention; the Baltic countries adopted the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the



UNEP/Haruo Ohno

Japanese children fishing. The Regional Seas Programme works in partnership with civil society to increase awareness on the marine environment and its resources.

Baltic Sea Area; the Oslo and Paris Conventions combined to create the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic; Black Sea States adopted the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (Bucharest Convention); the Arctic Council for the Protection of the Marine Environment was established; and the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal entered into force.

In subsequent years, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) entered into force (1994); the Washington Declaration established the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) (1995); the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea began operations (1997); and the Stockholm Convention on

Persistent Organic Pollutants was signed (2001).

In addition to the 1992 Bucharest Convention, the decade saw the adoption of several new regional seas agreements: the North-West Pacific Action Plan in 1994, the South Asian Seas Action Plan in 1995, the Convention for the North-East Pacific (Antigua Convention) in 2002, as well as a number of new protocols to existing conventions. In 1995, the Mediterranean countries adopted a revised and modernized text of the very first regional seas legal agreements - the Barcelona Convention and its protocols.

A Milestone in Jakarta

Exemplifying the growing conviction that the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity are essential elements of sustainable development, the 'Jakarta



UNEP/Vincent Young

Fishing at dawn. The Regional Seas Programme seeks to relieve pressure on marine and coastal ecosystems from overfishing, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Mandate' was adopted by parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1995.

The Jakarta Mandate and its 1998 programme of action represent a fresh and progressive approach to the management of marine and coastal resources. Its six main elements echo traditional concerns of the Regional Seas Programme such as marine and coastal living resources, protected areas and mariculture, as well as more recent ones such as alien species and genotypes, and coral bleaching. The Jakarta Mandate and the Regional Seas Programme both promote 'integrated marine and coastal area management' (IMCAM) as the best tool for the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity.

Reaching a Peak at WSSD

The decade-long surge in environmental activity resulting from the Rio Summit culminated in the

WSSD in 2002. This meeting resulted in a Plan of Implementation, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and perhaps most important, an abundance of potential new partnerships among countries, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

Section IV of the WSSD Plan of Implementation, *Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development*, relates most directly to regional seas, and covers a range of water-related issues including the protection of the marine environment. It draws particular attention to pressures on marine and coastal ecosystems from fisheries, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Moreover, it specifically calls for strengthening regional cooperation and coordination between relevant regional organizations and

programmes, including the UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

A Firm Foundation

With nearly 30 years of experience, the Regional Seas Programme provides an ideal platform on which to construct regional sustainable development, using the deliberations and results of WSSD as a blueprint. Practically, it provides regional platforms for both implementation of the principles of sustainable development and for regional implementation of programmes and activities related to global conventions and MEAs.

In fact, at a meeting held during the WSSD preparatory phase, the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans identified their major concerns and priorities as:

- Land-based sources of marine pollution with particular emphasis on responding to pollution resulting from municipal wastewater;
- Ship-generated marine pollution, oil spill preparedness and response, and construction of port reception facilities for ships' wastes (a concern reinforced by the major oil spills that occurred off the coasts of France and Spain within the last three years);
- The impact of increasing urbanization and coastal development on marine and coastal ecosystems, requiring

capacity building in support of integrated coastal management; Conservation and management of marine and coastal ecosystems, including protected areas. Over-exploitation or depletion of living marine resources including fisheries has emerged as a priority concern;

and
Monitoring, reporting and assessment for the marine environment, to fill the need for more accurate scientific and technical information.

Most of these concerns are mentioned in the Plan of

Implementation, and are nearly identical to the issues identified by the Commission on Sustainable Development. As such, they will serve as a useful basis for cooperation between the various MEAs, including the major environmental conventions, and the various regional seas programmes.

Box 3: The Northwest Pacific Action Plan

The Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), brings together the People's Republic of China, Japan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The countries realize that by joining forces, they can strike a balance between the provision for human needs; use of resources and economic development; and the protection, enhancement and sustainability of the environment. The Plan was adopted in 1994 and entered into force a year later. It is currently supported by four countries, with a hope of full participation of all five. DPRK currently has observer status.

NOWPAP focuses on the wise use, development, and management of the coastal and marine environment. To achieve long-term benefits for the region's population and to protect human health and ecological integrity for future generations, NOWPAP incorporates six priority projects to be implemented through a network of Regional Activity Centers (RACs) that serve all member states. Four of these are in operation and deal with a Data and Information Network (DIN/RAC, Beijing), Pollution Monitoring (POM/RAC, Vladivostok), Special Monitoring and Coastal Environmental Assessment (CEA/RAC, Toyama) and Oil and Chemical spills preparedness and response and marine based pollution (MER/RAC, Taejon).

UNEP, UNEP/GPA and UNEP/GEF are developing a proposal on the formulation of a Strategic Action Plan for NOWPAP to address pollution of the marine environment from land-based activities. This will also focus on integrated and coordinated management of the marine and coastal environment for the NOWPAP area.

NOWPAP is currently engaged in the process of establishing its Regional Coordinating Unit (RCU) that will be co-hosted by Japan (Toyama) and the ROK (Busan). The RCU will serve as the nerve center and command post of the Plan's activities.

NOWPAP will work towards the establishment of: a regional monitoring and assessment system, a network of public outreach and environmental education, a regional oil and chemical spill prevention, preparedness and response contingency plan, a Regional Strategic Plan to abate marine pollution originating from land-based sources and activities in accordance with the GPA approach, and regional activities and programs aimed at the protection of the marine and coastal biodiversity; the development into a regional platform for the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other global programmes and initiatives concerning the marine and coastal environment; and the development and implementation of programs (for the sustainable management of living marine resources) found on the Ecosystem Based Management approach.

Other areas of concern in the Regional Seas which could be basis for future collaboration with MEAs, international organizations and civil society include ecosystem-based management of living marine resources such as fisheries; data and information management including the use of sustainable development indicators; dissemination of best practices; and a multi-sectoral approach to IMCAM.

A New Global Strategy

The UNEP Governing Council, at its 22nd Session and Global Ministerial Environmental Forum in early 2003, set out the elements of a global strategy for the regional seas based on the central idea of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans as an instrument for sustainable development.

Other key elements of the strategy are:

Commitment. The strategy calls for member states to develop an enhanced sense of 'ownership' toward their respective regional seas

programmes, leading to stronger political and financial commitment to their implementation.

Participation. The strategy calls for new partnerships, inviting an increase in the participation of civil society and industry in the development and implementation of the regional programmes.

Sustainability. The strategy invites member states to provide sound and lasting financial support to their programmes.

Partnership. The strategy foresees the use of the conventions and action plans as a platform for the regional implementation of MEAs and global programmes and initiatives.

To help realize these goals, the strategy calls for continued administrative support from UNEP to the Regional Seas Programme, and foresees a number of more specific objectives, including:

- increased horizontal cooperation between Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans;
- strengthened links with international organizations such as IMO, UNESCO-IOC, FAO, CBD and other MEAs;
- intensified monitoring and assessment activities, including participation in the new process of the UN General Assembly known as the Global Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment and of the GIWA; and
- participation in the Barbados Plan of Action on Small Island Developing States.

Programme both a mandate and a roadmap for the years ahead. The programme's successes have been instructive. They offer a model for future programmes and a yardstick with which to measure progress.

These many successes have been accompanied by occasional setbacks. In a few regions, a great deal of time and energy were invested in the early stages of a regional programme that never 'caught fire', owing to a lack of political will, insufficient financing, or competition with other, overriding concerns such as war or poverty.

But these cannot be called failures. A failure would have been not to try, to give up in advance simply because a challenge appeared too daunting. A programme in question might yet revive, when the time is right, and when outstanding conflicts are resolved and competing interests reconciled.

WSSD is still being analyzed and digested. As a new era of environmental action emerges, the focus is on the practical implementation of the principles of sustainable development. The Regional Seas Programme has had and continues to play an important role in sustainable development. Given its achievements built upon modest resources, the Regional Seas Programme has given excellent value for its money for all of its three decades. ■

Summing Up

Agenda 21, the WSSD Plan of Implementation and the new global strategy have given the Regional Seas



Topham

Ship-generated pollution is of particular concern in all the Regional Seas.