

## Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans

...a framework for regional coordination and cooperation to protect shared marine and coastal resources

### Background

UNEP's Regional Seas Programme – launched in 1974 in the wake of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment – is one of UNEP's most significant achievements in the past 35 years.

It aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas through the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment, by engaging neighbouring countries in comprehensive and specific actions to protect their shared marine environment. More than 143 countries participate in one or more of the 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans around the world.

The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have:

- Provided a regional cooperation framework that mobilises countries to address transboundary issues;
- Improved management of coastal zones;
- Reduced pollution in coastal waters;
- Cast light on marine litter, and reduced it in some areas; and
- Designated regional networks of Marine Protected Areas.

Many long-term and unique issues keep the Regional Seas Programmes relevant to their member states. The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans provide a platform for implementing marine and coastal policies regionally and nationally. Regional Action Plans, which form the basis for the programme, are usually adopted by high-level intergovernmental meetings and implemented, in most cases, in the framework of a legally binding Regional Seas Convention and specific protocols, under the authority of the respective Contracting Parties.

These Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans serve two major objectives:

- To be the principal platform for implementing global conventions, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and global programmes or initiatives regionally – providing UN agencies or global programmes with an existing mechanism to implement their activities on a regional scale; and
- To be the regional platform for co-ordinating programmes and projects that will contribute to the sustainable development of their shared marine and coastal environment.

The individual Regional Seas Programmes also increase regional and inter-regional collaboration by promoting links with each other through the Regional Seas Alliance, which UNEP coordinates.

### Regions

The 18 areas covered by the Regional Seas Programme are: Black Sea, Wider Caribbean, East Africa, East Asia, ROPME Sea Area, Mediterranean, North-East Pacific, Northwest Pacific, Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, South Asia, West and Central Africa, Antarctic, Arctic, Baltic Sea, Caspian Sea, South-East Pacific, and North- East Atlantic regions.

## Priority activities

Each of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans is mandated by its Contracting Parties to cater for the region's particular marine and coastal challenges, including socio-economic ones. Activities can range from addressing chemical wastes and coastal development, to preparing for oil spills – and the response to them - conserving marine species and maintaining healthy ecosystems. All of them, however, evolve around a common purpose – and their shared priorities include addressing:

- Land-based sources of marine and coastal pollution;
- Ship-generated marine pollution, such as oil, chemicals, litter, and invasive species;
- The destruction of ecosystems and habitat caused by increased urbanization and coastal development;
- The conservation and management of marine and coastal ecosystems;
- Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), and Integrated Coastal Area and River Basin Management (ICARM);
- The over-exploitation and depletion of living marine resources, including fisheries; and
- Monitoring, reporting and assessing the marine environment.


The work of Regional Seas Programme is coordinated by UNEP's Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Branch based at its Nairobi Headquarters.

## Framework for coordination and institutional support to the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans

Implementing UNEP's Marine and Coastal Strategy relies on the strengths of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans in effectively addressing the growing degradation of the marine and coastal environment and the priorities set by their member states. UNEP aims to strengthen its relationship with the Regional Seas Programmes by complementing the Programme of Work of their Conventions and Action Plans with expected accomplishments identified in the Marine and Coastal Strategy, through a framework for coordination and institutional technical support.

## Components of UNEP's Regional Seas programme:

- I. Strengthening the scientific component of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans - enhancing the interface between science and policy through national and regional capacity building so as to stimulate the identification and implementations of actions aimed at protecting the marine environment, based on sound science and viable policy and management responses.
- II. Strengthening the institutional and governance capacities of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans - including facilitating technical, administrative, legal and financing mechanisms and implementation tools.
- III. Enhancing the visibility of the Regional Seas Programmes - through common strategies in priority areas affecting the marine environment. Strengthening the communication capacities of the Regional Seas Alliance is essential for improving knowledge management and expanding the community of practice. Raising the profile of the Regional Seas Programmes within relevant regional and international forums will engender potential partnerships with leading organizations and institutions.
- IV. Mainstreaming marine and coastal ecosystem management into national planning and development processes - this includes supporting economic valuations of marine and coastal ecosystem services to make the case for maintaining their socio-economic contributions to society by mainstreaming their values.



For more information on the Regional Seas Programme and partnership opportunities, please contact:

Alberto Pacheco Capella  
Coordinator  
Regional Seas Programme  
Freshwater and Marine  
Ecosystems Branch (FMEB)  
Division of Environmental Policy  
Implementation (DEPI)  
UNEP, UN-Gigiri,  
P.O. Box 30552,  
00100 Nairobi, Kenya  
Phone: +254-20 762 4591  
Fax: +254-20 762 4249  
alberto.pacheco@unep.org  
www.unep.org/regionalseas