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**Regional Seas engagement in the implementation and monitoring of the
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

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Regional Seas engagement in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

I. BACKGROUND

1. In the “The Future We Want” adopted at the Rio+20 Summit, the member States recognized *“that the development of goals could also be useful for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development. We further recognize the importance and utility of a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs),”* (paragraph 246), and resolved *“to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on SDGs that is open to all stakeholders with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the United Nations General Assembly. The Open Working Group was established and was supposed to submit a report to the 68th session of the UNGA containing a proposal for sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action...”* (paragraph 248).
2. Driven by this document, the Open Working Group was formulated and produced a draft document to be adopted at the Post-2015 Summit in September 2015. The draft document is entitled “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and to be further adopted by the General Assembly.
3. In the draft document, 17 Sustainable Goals and 169 associated goals are proposed, many of which are relevant to the work and scope of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans. Among these, *inter alia*, the following goals are highlighted as those more closely relevant to the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAP):

“Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality”

“Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation (Footnote 2: Taking into account ongoing World Trade Organization negotiations, the Doha Development Agenda and the Hong Kong ministerial mandate)

14.7 By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

14.a Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

14.b Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

14.c Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of The Future We Want”

4. The same draft document indicates that “Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the Goals and targets over the coming fifteen years.” (paragraph 47). It further outlines that “[I]ndicators are being developed to assist this work. Quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind.” “Data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible.” (paragraph 48).

II. RREGIONAL SEAS CONVENTIONS AND ACTION PLANS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

5. The UNEP Regional Seas Programme¹, launched in 1974, is one of UNEP's most significant achievements in the past 40 years. It aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas through sustainable management and use of resources and by engaging littoral countries in specific actions to protect shared marine environments. It has accomplished this by stimulating the creation of regional seas programmes for sound environmental management coordinated and implemented by countries sharing a common body of water.
6. Today, more than 143 countries participate in 14 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (Black Sea, Wider Caribbean, East Asian Seas, Eastern Africa, South Asian Seas, ROPME Sea Area, Mediterranean, North-East Pacific, Northwest Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, South-East Pacific, Pacific, Caspian and West and Central Africa) established under the auspices of UNEP. Secretariats of seven of these regional seas programmes are administered by inter-governmental organisations or regional centres while the remaining seven are administered by UNEP. These regional seas programmes received financial and technical support from UNEP in the initial phases of development of an action plan and its initial implementation. There are other regional seas conventions and action plans under general UNEP coordination, and these are Northeast Atlantic, Baltic Sea, Arctic Ocean and Southern Ocean.
7. The Regional Seas programmes function through the implementation of Action Plans. In most cases, such Action Plans are underpinned with strong legal frameworks in the form of regional Conventions and associated Protocols addressing specific problems. In the Action Plans and in some cases in the Protocols, specific objectives and goals are defined for their member states and parties to collectively achieve. In some regional seas, thematic action plans exist and were agreed, such as regional marine litter action plans, regional action plans on land-based sources of pollution, regional contingency plans for accidental oil and chemical spills, and regional marine biodiversity action plans. In some regional seas, Strategic Action Programmes (SAPs) were agreed upon, mainly through the GEF funded projects. These thematic action plans and SAPs also clearly define regional objectives, goals and sometimes targets.
8. Different regional Action Plans and associated legal instruments have varied scopes of action at regional and national levels depending the perceived and assessed issues and problems related to the regional seas environment, requiring different sets of action from one region to another. Generally speaking, many of the regional seas programmes were started based on the scope of the UNEP marine environment activities as defined by the UNEP Governing Council: The overall strategy to be followed was defined by UNEP's Governing Council as²:

¹ The term "a regional seas programme" is used to denote a programme for specific regional seas, normally governed by Inter-Governmental Meetings of littoral states and, in some cases, by legally binding instruments, such as a framework convention and associated protocols. All regional seas programmes seek their programmatic activities in the Action Plans and supportive thematic action plans (such as marine litter action plans, LBS action plans, etc.). The terms "*UNEP Regional Seas Programme*" refers to the coordination programme of UNEP over UNEP-administered and non-UNEP-administered regional seas programmes. Currently, 18 regional seas programmes are participating in this coordination programme (see www.unep.org/regionalseas).

² UNEP. 1982. Achievements and Planned Development of UNEP's Regional Seas Programme and comparable programmes sponsored by other bodies. UNEP Regional Seas Reports and Studies No.1.

- *Promotion of international and regional conventions, guidelines and actions for the control of marine pollution and for the protection and management of aquatic resources;*
- *Assessment of the state of marine pollution, of the sources and trends of this pollution, and of the impact of the pollution on human health, marine ecosystems and amenities;*
- *Co-ordination of the efforts with regard to the environmental aspects of the protection, development and management of marine and coastal resources; and*
- *Support for education and training efforts to make possible the full participation of developing countries in the protection, development and management of marine and coastal resources.*

9. Over the years when the regional seas programmes developed themselves by addressing regional or global emerging issues and needs, the scope of these programmes have also been modified. Many human and sector activities are considered to be pressure to degrade the marine environment, and in order to address the sources and threats to the degradation of the marine environment, the regional seas programmes started addressing the human activities identified to be significant from the perspective of the protection of the marine environment. Further by introducing the ecosystem approach, the member states and regional seas programmes recognised that the maintenance of the marine ecosystem functioning is related to economic and social benefits. Different regional seas programmes took different pathways for their own evolution, resulting in different programmes and their scopes. The Mediterranean Action Plan developed its Sustainable Development Strategy and its regional sustainable development has been monitored through sustainable development indicators. The East Africa regional seas programme introduced the blue economy concept and started working with other ocean sectoral organisations.

III. ENGAGEMENT OF THE REGIONAL SEAS CONVENTIONS AND ACTION PLANS IN SDGS

10. The “Transforming Our World” draft recommends the regional level follow-up as review as follows: *“Follow-up and review at the regional and sub-regional levels can, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. We welcome in this respect the cooperation of regional and sub-regional commissions and organizations. Inclusive regional processes will draw on national-level reviews and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level, including at the High Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF).”* (Paragraph 80). Further paragraph 81 stipulates, *“Recognizing the importance of building on existing follow-up and review mechanisms at the regional level and allowing adequate policy space, we encourage all member states to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage. UN regional commissions are encouraged to continue supporting member states in this regard.”*
11. In order to implement the recommended regional follow-up and review, the regional seas conventions and action plans are encouraged to work in two areas: (i) internalising the SDGs in their strategic documents (Action Plans, thematic action plans and SAPs) and further implementing these documents through regionally coordinated national action; and (ii) coordinate the national monitoring of the SDGs through the regional monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

(i) Internalising SDGs

12. As discussed above, the regional seas programmes have developed various strategic documents, ranging from the Action Plans, thematic action plans, SAPs and National Action Programmes (in support of the SAPs). These documents engage and in many cases oblige the member States in achieving the objectives and goals clearly defined in them. In the implementation of these documents and its monitoring, each regional seas programme has its own institutional framework. The proposal is that the SDGs relevant to the scope and mandate of the regional seas programmes be incorporated into the objectives and goals of the strategic documents, so that the continuing implementation of the strategic documents by its member States automatically drives their implementation of the SDGs. By doing that regionally coordinated SDGs implementation by the member States and mutual assistance and effective external support would become possible.
13. The implementation of the strategic documents are to be reviewed by the existing regional seas institutional mechanisms. By incorporating SDGs into the strategic documents of the regional seas, the existing regional seas institutional frameworks should be able to review the implementation of the SDGs relevant to their scope and mandates.
14. As each regional seas programme has its own defined scope and mandate, it is suggested to carry out the review of the SDGs to see if the existing regional seas objectives and goals can easily tagged with SDGs that are considered to be relevant to the scope and mandate. Regional Seas programmes may choose to revise their strategic document or adopt a new document fully incorporating SDGs relevant to them.
15. Many of the SDGs may be considered to be outside the scope and mandate of the regional seas programmes. Among them regional seas programmes may decide to move the implementation of some of them by establishing partnership with relevant regional and/or international organisations. For example, fishery related SDGs, regional seas programmes may work with regional fisheries bodies to jointly assist the member States in their implementation and monitoring.
16. If and when regional seas programmes so decide, the secretariats of the regional seas programmes will bring to their member states the issues of review of the SDGs vis-à-vis their strategic documents and objectives to explore the best modalities to internalise the SDGs. It is suggested that this consultation would take place within one year of adoption of the SDGs.
17. The review of the strategic document implementation should be strengthened based on the strong needs of the member States in the review of the SDG implementation and achievement.
18. Under the Partnership for Regional Ocean Governance (PROG), which UNEP has been leading together with Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies and Institut du Développement Durable et des Relation Internationales, a project is being developed to support interested regional seas programmes in internalising the relevant SDGs, particularly those evaluated to be

of priority by their members and assisting their members States in achieving these goals. PROG is calling for expression of interests in becoming “Pioneer regions” under this project.

(ii) Regionally harmonized SDG monitoring

19. As discussed in the “Transforming Our World”, the UN member States will move to the definition of indicators to monitor the progress in the implementation of SDGs. The discussion of the indicators are ongoing and will be concluded at the Statistic Commission to be organised in March 2016.
20. The regional seas community already started compiling their existing regional seas based indicators, as summarized in “Measuring Success: Indicators for Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans”³. Further UNEP organised the Technical Workshop on Selecting Indicators for the State of Regional Seas, 30 June – 2 July 2014, Geneva, Switzerland⁴. The workshop discussed possibility and feasibility of setting a coordinated and common set of indicators among the regional seas programmes and recommended to establish a Regional Seas Indicator Working Group. Then first meeting of the Working Group will meet on 23 October 2015, Istanbul, Turkey⁵. The coordinated and common set of indicators should be linked with the World Ocean Assessment and the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme and is supposed to be tied with the SDG implementation monitoring.
21. Based on the results of the above-noted Geneva workshop, the regional seas indicators should be based on the existing indicators used in many of the regional seas in the state of the marine environment reporting, protocol reporting, Action Plan and SAP achievement reporting. All regional seas programmes under UNEP’s general coordination are encouraged to participate in the Working Group. UNEP will be responsible for transmitting to the UN-based SDG discussion results or milestone products from the Working Group with a message that the compiled indicators are readily monitored by the regional seas member States under strong regional harmonization and coordination under the regional seas programmes. In this way the Regional Seas Indicator development process can provide to and receive feedback from the UN SDG indicator processes.
22. Once the Regional Seas coordinated and core set of indicators are agreed and well-coordinated with the SDG indicators, each regional seas programme is urged to use the set of indicators. A set of indicators may include the issues that are considered to be outside the scope and mandate of the regional seas programmes. It is however suggested that the regional seas programmes monitor all SDGs relevant to oceans, and this naturally requires partnership with other regional organisations and mechanisms.

³ http://apps.unep.org/publications/index.php?option=com_pub&task=download&file=-Measuring_success__indicators.pdf

⁴ See the workshop webpage:

http://www.unep.org/regionalseas/globalmeetings/Indicator_RS_meeting/indicator_workshop.asp

⁵ See the meeting webpage:

<http://www.unep.org/ecosystemmanagement/water/regionalseas40/40YearsofAction/IndicatorRSMeeting-2015/tabid/1060470/Default.aspx>

23. Regional seas programmes may also use the coordinated and common set of indicators for the assessment of the state of the marine environment, which in turn may function as the platform to monitor the progress in the achievement of ocean related SDGs.

IV. RECOMMEDATED DISCUSSIONS

24. The regional seas programmes participating in the current meeting are urged to discuss the following:

- Whether the proposed SDG internalization would be possible and useful to their member States in their effort to achieve SDGs;
- Whether they are willing to move towards developing a coordinated and core set of indicators, which are aligned with future monitoring of SDG achievements; and
- The process of discussing this issue with their member States.