

**21" UNEP Governing
Council
Nairobi, February 2001**

Global assessment of the state of the marine environment

Discussion paper prepared by Iceland

Several assessment activities are ongoing

1. The GESAMP reports: "A Sea of Troubles" and "Protecting the Oceans from Land-based Activities -Land-Based Sources and Activities Affecting the Quality and Uses of the Marine, Coastal and Associated Freshwater Environment" were published on 15 January 2001. These reports are a major contribution to our understanding of the state of the marine environment and the impact of human activity. They conclude that despite some progress in particular fields, the state of the marine environment is deteriorating and some of the problems identified by GESAMP decades ago are getting worse. New threats keep emerging. The traditional uses of the seas and coasts - and the benefits that humanity gets from them - have been widely undermined. The driving forces behind this deterioration include population pressure, consumption patterns and *increasing demand* for space and resources. In the report they identify as one of the causes of failure "ineffective communication between scientists and government policy-makers and the public alike".
2. The UNEP Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA) supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other donors has entered its first phase which includes development of methodology and establishment of network of 66 geographical units. This outputs of GIWA will be used to strengthen priority setting within the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA/LBA).
3. The Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) programme has initiated a programme of "Rapid Assessment of Marine Pollution" (RAMP).
4. The UN Atlas of the Oceans project, funded by a grant from UNFIPS, brings together a number of relevant UN agencies to produce an Internet and CD-ROM based product that will focus on the sustainable use of the oceans and the advancement of ocean science.
5. In the year 2000 the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic issued a major Quality Status Report on its region. Governments provided input and the conclusions were reviewed by government during the preparation of the report.

6. Monitoring and assessment is a major component of the workplans of virtually all of the UNEP Regional Seas Programmes.

The need for a clear overview at the national, regional and global level

7. There is a wealth of information available about the marine environment and new information is becoming available. There is a lack of overview, however, in particular on the links between the state of the marine environment and cross-cutting issues of human health, seafood safety and sustainable fisheries. Regular assessments of the impact of human activity (climate, pollution, physical alteration and destruction of habitats) on the state of the marine environments at national, regional and global level are needed to inform decision making.

8. Marine pollution from land-based activities and physical impact in the coastal zone, primarily related to population growth connected with urban development, sewage-related pollution and a large increase in the release of man-made chemicals into the marine environment, is putting increasing pressure on the health of the world's oceans and coastal areas.

9. The impact of marine pollution on sustainable use of marine resources and other ecosystem services provided by the oceans needs to be assessed and communicated to policy makers in an effective and authoritative manner. The current process of assessment of marine pollution needs to be strengthened. The process of making the results science policy-relevant is just as important as the process of collecting the data.

10. There is a lack of coherence in the follow up at the international level and the development of policy recommendations based on the assessment reports.

The involvement of governments in the assessment is vital

11. Government involvement on a continuous basis in the ongoing assessment and monitoring process is of critical importance. This has been illustrated by the success of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change where governments are involved both in the formulation of policy relevant questions and in the review of the conclusions.

12. The Commission on Sustainable Development in its decision 7/1 in the Year of the Oceans in 1999 emphasised that "scientific understanding of the marine environment, including marine living resources and the effects of pollution, is fundamental to sound decision-making." The Commission further recommends exploring the possibility of

establishing a means for GESAMP to interact with scientific representatives of Governments and major groups.

13. An in depth review of the functioning and operation of GESAMP has been called upon by different fora and is being initiated with the support of all GESAMP sponsoring agencies. The results and recommendations of the review are expected to be available by mid-2001.

14. GIWA will provide a good basis for future coordinated action by Governments, UN agencies and other stakeholders but will come to a halt as soon as the GIWA project will be completed.

15. At the 7th session of CSD during the Year of the Ocean's, Iceland suggested that an Intergovernmental Panel on Marine Pollution (IPMP) be established. The panel's main objective would be to carry out comprehensive scientific assessments of the magnitude and potential impact of pollution on the marine environment and its socio-economic consequences for coastal communities and the international community at large.

16. The comprehensive assessment would inter alia focus on the following impacts caused by marine pollution and physical alteration and destruction of habitats: impact on public health, food security, biodiversity and marine ecosystem health, including the marine ecosystem services (e.g. climate). The proposed panel would draw on work carried out by the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) and take into account the ongoing work (e.g., GIWA, GOOS, GEMS/Water) in gathering data on the Marine Environment.

17. The panel would be established jointly by the United Nations Special Agencies and Programmes dealing with the protection of the marine environment. These are the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The World Health Organisation (WHO), The International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

18. It is suggested that UNEP and UNESCO-IOC would take a leading role in establishing this panel. With respect to organisation of the work of the panel, an expert and government review process and the adoption of the conclusions of the panel, the principles adopted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), could be used as a model taking into account the different scope of the assessments.

Next steps

19. The UN Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) will at its second session in May 2001 consider marine science issues. This will provide a good opportunity to evaluate the need for and approaches to global assessments of the state of the oceans.

20. The first intergovernmental review of the implementation of the GPA/LBA will take place this fall: and will among other things review the results of scientific assessments regarding land-based impacts upon the marine environment.

21. The Governing Council may wish to request the Executive Director to explore in co-operation with other UN agencies and in consultation with the Environment Management Group ways and means of establishing a regular process for the assessment of the state of the marine environment, building on ongoing assessment programmes, with active involvement by governments and request the Executive Director to submit a progress report on activities of UNEP on this issue to the Governing Council at its twenty-second session.