

## UNEP GOVERNING COUNCIL DECISION 21/13

10th meeting  
9 February 2001

### Global assessment of the state of the marine environment

#### The Governing Council,

Noting Commission on Sustainable Development decision 7/1,

Also noting paragraph 5 of the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, in particular Part XII, and the work programme of marine and coastal biodiversity under the Jakarta Mandate on Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity,

Noting further the ongoing work aimed at improving the knowledge base on the state of the marine environment, including activities being carried out within the framework of the Global International Waters Assessment, the Global Ocean Observing System and the United Nations Atlas of the Oceans,

1. Notes the reports published by the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection entitled “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”;
2. Recognizes that the report “A sea of troubles” identifies “ineffective communication between scientists and government policy makers and the public alike” as one of the reasons for the lack of commitment and the inability of the international community to address and solve the environmental problems of the seas in a comprehensive way;
3. Requests the Executive Director to take an active part in implementing General Assembly resolution 54/33 of 24 November 1999 and General Assembly resolution 55/7 of 30 October 2000 by participating in the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, an annual review and evaluation of developments relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea;
4. Requests the Executive Director, in cooperation with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and other appropriate United Nations agencies, the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity and in consultation with the regional seas programmes to explore the feasibility of establishing a regular process for the assessment of the state of the marine environment, with active involvement by governments and regional agreements, building on ongoing assessment programmes;

5. Requests the Executive Director to present the matter to the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea at its next session in May 2001;

6. Also requests the Executive Director to submit a progress report on this issue to it at its twenty-second session.

**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

## **A proposed Assessment and Monitoring Panel**

15. At the 7<sup>th</sup> 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.

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.

**Proposed Time Frame for Following-up on GC- 21/13 Decision on the Feasibility of a Programme for Global Assessment of the Marine Environment<sup>1</sup>**

<b>CONSULTATIONS &amp; RELATED ACTIONS</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES &amp; TIME-FRAME</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ACC/SOCA</li>   <li>2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and Law of the Sea, New York</li>   <li>3. Open consultative process on the feasibility of the global marine environment assessment</li>   <li>4. The Executive Director of UNEP will evaluate the feasibility of a regular assessment of the state of the marine environment and present his recommendations to UNEP's Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR)</li>   <li>5. If it is decided that regular assessments of the state of the marine environment are feasible, a follow-up strategy will be agreed upon for the preparation of a proposal for the consideration of the next session of the UNEP Governing Council.</li>   <li>6. 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Governing Council of UNEP</li> </ol>	<p>Presentation of paper on process for consultations regarding UNEP decision GC.21/13 (New York, 3-4 May 2001). Preliminary discussions will be held with ACC/SOCA member organisations.</p> <p>Further discussions will be held with relevant organisations and governments at this meeting to obtain their preliminary views on the feasibility of a marine assessment programme, and approaches to be used. (New York, 7-11 May 2001)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations with appropriate organisations and relevant assessment programmes (see column 3)</li> <li>• Review of on-going assessment programmes related to the marine environment.</li> </ul> <p>These activities will be conducted in co-operation with the IOC (UNESCO), IMO and other appropriate UN agencies, including the CBD Secretariat, and in consultation with UNEP's Regional Seas Programme. (latter part of 2001)</p> <p>A consolidated paper reflecting the views of international organizations and bodies on the feasibility of a global assessment of the state of the marine environment will be prepared (April through September 2001)</p> <p>UNEP will prepare a first draft proposal and undertake the necessary consultations (2002)</p> <p>The Executive Director will report back to the Governing Council on the follow-up to decision GC.21/13 for consideration and further action (Nairobi, 3-7 February 2003)</p>

<sup>1</sup> Subject to further revisions.

