

United Nations Regular Process – Why a Global Marine Assessment?

Marine Theme Objective: State of the Marine Environment

What's the problem?

The last two decades have seen efforts to produce regional assessments that cover the whole of the marine environment. Existing assessments provide much needed insight on the specific issues they cover but do not provide an overview of the state of the oceans. They also do not always assess the full range of human activities that impact or depend on ocean resources, or the changes in the delivery of marine ecosystem goods and services.

To address these gaps and to apply the ecosystem approach, the United Nations General Assembly requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC of UNESCO) to co-lead a process for investigating the potential establishment of a "regular" marine environmental assessment process that provides accurate information to decision makers on the state of the marine environment including socio-economic aspects.

What are the aims of the project?

Defra, together with many other international sponsors funded work on the process, called the Assessment of Assessments (AoA), beginning in 2006.

The aims of the "Assessment of Assessments" are to:

- Assemble information about assessments relevant to the Regular Process, which have already been carried out under United Nations bodies and global treaty organisations, regional organisations, national Governments, and by any other relevant organisation, where appropriate;
- Make a constructive appraisal of those assessments, for example, by comparing methodologies, data sources and coverage, in order to identify, collate and synthesise best practices in assessment methodologies and to identify what thematic and other gaps and uncertainties exist in current scientific knowledge and assessment processes;
- Establish how these assessments have been communicated to policymakers at the national, regional and global levels.

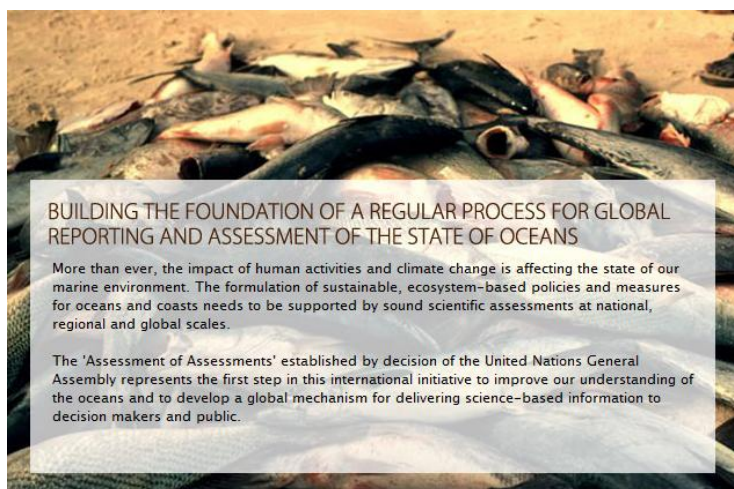
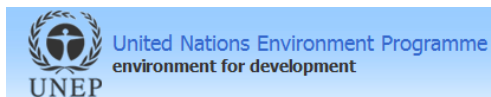


Figure 1: © UNESCO

Which policy areas will the research inform?

Environmental assessment reports on coastal and marine ecosystems, cross-cutting thematic issues related to marine environment and human-well-being will be of global significance to decision makers by increasing their collective understanding of the environmental challenges and emerging issues. It will enhance the capacity of countries and regions to increasingly integrate an ecosystem management approach into development and planning processes, particularly for the oceans and seas, which cover over 70 per cent of the Earth's surface.



What are the results from the project and how will they be used?

The “Assessment of Assessments” report:

AoA assembles information on scientific assessments relevant to undertaking a regular global marine assessment (including assessments covering social and economic issues) that have already been carried out by United Nations agencies and global treaty organisations, regional organisations, national governments and, where appropriate, by other organisations. Available on line at <http://www.unga-regular-process.org/> with online database also available at <http://www.unep.wcmc.org/gramed>.

It critically appraises these assessments by, for example, comparing methodologies, data sources and coverage, in order to identify, collate and synthesize best practices and to identify what thematic and other gaps and uncertainties exist in current scientific knowledge. The AoA reviews how well these assessments have been communicated to policy-makers at the national, regional and global levels, and provides options and a framework for the establishment of the Regular Process (including organisational arrangements, financial implications etc.).

It also proposes the initiation of the first global integrated ocean assessment by 2010, with a view to delivering its results by 2014–2015, when the UN Commission on Sustainable Development will review WSSD targets and commitments related to oceans.

The Regular Process for better global integration:

The establishment of a future Regular Process will initiate a global integrated assessment of the oceans which will require: (i) the development of agreed inter-disciplinary assessment methods that can be used by all Member States; (ii) the investment in capacity development, specifically in the regions where there are data and information gaps; (iii) a transparent review process open to governments and an expert nomination mechanism; (iv) the integration of existing data and information produced by UN and non-UN regional bodies and conventions, including UNEP’s regional seas; (v) the need to align the scope of existing and future ocean observation systems with the requirements of a future Regular Process.

Development and function of the Working Group:

In November 2008, through UNGA Resolution 63/111, the UN General Assembly decided to “establish an *ad hoc* Working Group of the Whole to recommend a course of action to the General Assembly, at its Sixty-Fourth Session, based on the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Steering Group...” (UNESCO, Paris, 15–17 April 2009). The meeting of the *ad hoc* Working Group of the Whole will take place from 31 August to 4 September 2009, at the UN HQ, New York. The membership of the Working Group of the Whole is open-ended, whereas UN agencies will be invited to attend its sessions as observers. The report together with a Summary for Decision Makers will be jointly launched by UNEP and IOC/UNESCO on 31 August 2009 at the UN HQ, New York.



Figure 2: © UNESCO / Dominique Roger

Where can I find further information about this and related research?

The report of the “Assessment of Assessments” and additional information on the process is available on line at <http://www.unga-regular-process.org/>

You may also contact the “Assessment of Assessments” secretariat in UNEP through Salif Diop at the following email address: salif.diop@unep.org and in IOC of UNESCO through Julian Barbière at the following email address: J.Barbiere@unesco.org

Alternatively,

please contact the Marine and Fisheries Science Unit at Defra, Nobel House, London.

Defra Science – did you know?

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