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Policy issues: State of the environment

**STATE OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME TO EFFORTS TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL
CHALLENGES**

Report of the Executive Director

Addendum

Global assessment of the state of the marine environment

Summary

The present document has been prepared in pursuance of Governing Council decision 21/13 of 9 February 2001. It outlines the progress made by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to date and the findings submitted in response to the request by the Governing Council to the UNEP Executive Director "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". These activities were implemented in cooperation with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC/UNESCO), other United Nations agencies and the regional seas programmes.

* UNEP/GC.22/1.

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Introduction

1. The process of the implementation of Governing Council decision 21/13 included the holding of an initial informal consultative meeting, which took place in Reykjavik, from 12 to 14 September 2001. That meeting strongly agreed that a global assessment of the marine environment was both desirable and urgently needed and welcomed the opportunity to examine the feasibility of developing such a process with all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the Reykjavik meeting recommended, inter alia, that the global assessment process should be aimed at policy makers. Based on a scientific assessment of the global marine environment, the process should provide this target audience with advice, guidance and assistance on actions required to mitigate environmental impacts and changes.
2. In the light of the outcome of the Reykjavik meeting, UNEP decided to convene a second meeting in the form of a technical workshop to further elaborate the key objectives and define the practical framework for developing a global assessment process. This workshop was kindly hosted by the German Government in Bremen, from 18 to 20 March 2002. Funds from the German and Swedish Governments enabled a large number of interested developing countries and international organizations to be represented at the workshop, thereby expanding the audience involved in the consultations to implement decision 21/13 at both meetings to 16 countries and 10 regional and 14 global multilateral environmental agreements.
3. Recommendations of the consultative and technical meetings held in Reykjavik and Bremen were presented at the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process (ICP) on Oceans and the Law of the Sea held in New York, in April 2002. Those recommendations were taken into consideration in Bali at the fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Chairman's Summary of the High-level Segment¹). At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, Governments called for the establishment by 2004 of a regular process under the United Nations for global reporting and assessment of the state of marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, both current and foreseeable, building on existing regional assessments.
4. Detailed information on the activities relating to the implementation of decision 21/13 is provided in document UNEP/GC.22/INF/19.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS FOR ESTABLISHING A REGULAR PROCESS FOR THE GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

5. The participants at the Reykjavik meeting had strongly agreed that a global assessment of the marine environment was both desirable and urgently needed. This was re-affirmed at the Bremen workshop.
6. The main goal for the establishment of a suitable global assessment mechanism is to provide on a regular, timely and scientific basis the necessary assessments of the state and trends of all aspects of marine ecosystems. The primary focus should be given to anthropogenic effects and impacts. They should also be built upon existing mechanisms related to and/or relevant for marine environmental assessments. They should also involve and be used by policy makers and stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels.
7. In addition, the global assessment of the marine environment could have a number of potential functions with respect to the planning and implementation of regional and global assessment processes. For practical reasons, it might be necessary to give focus to the global assessment process by setting assessment priorities that include socio-economic aspects.

¹ A/CONF.199/PC/CRP.3

8. In general, global assessment stakeholders are those involved in policy-making or affected by degradation of the marine environment. To ensure legitimacy, credibility and saliency, global assessment stakeholder groups should be defined at the regional level.

9. The global assessment of the marine environment should take a broad ecosystem approach based on commonly accepted ecological boundaries, addressing in particular those marine areas and/or human activities, which currently are not sufficiently covered by assessment activities as well as less understood ecosystems, communities and species. The scope of global assessment activities should include socio-economic considerations and take into account the relevant work, approaches and experience of national, regional and global organizations. The global assessment component of the process will guide the timing and facilitate the development of regional or thematic assessments on specific issues. Emphasis should be put, first of all, on such activities as maintenance, improvement and more comprehensive and policy relevant assessments.

10. The main data providers for the global assessment are intergovernmental organizations, government agencies and academia, but other sources of valuable and pertinent data should be investigated.

11. The institutional mechanisms and operational arrangements of the global assessment process should have a multilevel architecture to ensure that:

(a) The global assessment is legitimate, credible and salient by applying a science-based approach which involves national, regional and global policy makers and provides an interface with all stakeholders, assessment users and data providers. Regional assessments and their synthesis into global assessment(s) should be peer reviewed by independent experts;

(b) The process is cost-effective, efficient and sustainable by building on existing assessment resources (where possible) in terms of organization, methodologies and procedures. Regional mechanisms and partnerships, where governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are engaged fully on an equal footing, should be used and, where necessary, strengthened;

(c) In cooperation with other United Nations agencies and partners, a secretariat coordinates the implementation of the proposed global marine environment assessment mechanism.

12. The expected outputs of the global assessment should be subject to a transparent peer review process and be reported in a "two-tier" format, consisting of a scientific or technical report (first tier) and a policy-oriented report based on the same information (second tier).

13. The costs and funding of a global assessment process, including capacity-building, should be covered by contributions from key countries to support the process. Possibilities of establishing an earmarked trust fund for the implementation of this process should be explored as well.

14. To increase awareness of the global assessment process, the outcome of the consultations was presented at the United Nations Informal Consultative Process (ICP) on Oceans and the Law of the Sea in New York in April 2002.

15. It was proposed during the Bremen technical meeting that a review of the scope, status and timing of existing and forthcoming assessment and assessment-related activities be carried out under relevant national, regional and global organizations (including the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat, which has been closely consulted). This review is ongoing and will identify gaps in the coverage and means by which they could be addressed in the global assessment process.

16. The major conclusion of the consultations organized by UNEP is that a global marine assessment process should be established based on existing assessment activities in order to facilitate the provision of scientific and socio-economic information for policy makers.

II. SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE GOVERNING COUNCIL ON GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

17. The Governing Council may wish to consider the adoption of a decision along the lines suggested below.¹

Global assessment of the state of the marine environment

The Governing Council,

Recalling decision 21/13 of 9 February 2001, by which the Executive Director in cooperation with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other appropriate United Nations organizations, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Regional Seas Programme, was requested to explore the feasibility of establishing a regular process for assessing the state of the marine environment, with active involvement by Governments and regional agreements, building on ongoing assessment programmes,

Noting that the Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development called, in its paragraph 36 (b), for the establishment by 2004 of “a regular process under the United Nations for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, both current and foreseeable, building on existing regional assessments”,

Welcoming the fact that outcomes of the consultations organized by the United Nations Environment Programme in response to Governing Council decision 21/13, in particular the consultative meetings held in Reykjavik and Bremen, Federal Republic of Germany, on 12 to 14 September 2001 and 18 to 20 March 2002 respectively, have contributed to the target set out in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development,

[Taking note of the decision of the General Assembly under its resolution 57/_ on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, to establish “a regular process under the United Nations for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects both current and foreseeable, building on existing regional assessments”, and to request the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with Member States, relevant organizations and agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Maritime Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Meteorological Organization, and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, other competent intergovernmental organizations and relevant non-governmental organizations, “to prepare proposals on modalities for a regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, drawing, inter alia, upon the work of the United Nations Environment Programme pursuant to Governing Council decision 21/13, and taking into account the recently completed review of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection, and to submit those proposals to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly for its consideration and decision, including on the convening of a possible intergovernmental meeting”,]

Considering the need to link science and policy-making and in that context to promote intergovernmental cooperation, mobilize the scientific community and foster inter-agency cooperation in support of a regular process for reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment,

¹ Text quoting a draft resolution before the General Assembly at its current session has been placed in square brackets and will be amended, if necessary, upon adoption of the resolution by the Assembly.

Stressing that consideration should be given to the need to ensure that sustainable capacity-building in developing countries is established as an integrated part of the assessment process as identified in the consultation process,

Having considered the report of the Executive Director on the global assessment of the marine environment,²

1. Decides to establish an open ended ad hoc group of experts under the auspices of the proposed intergovernmental panel on global environmental change, to consider the contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the follow-up of [General Assembly resolution 57/_ on Oceans and the Law of the Sea] on the establishment of a regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment;
2. Requests the Executive Director to prepare a report to the ad hoc group of experts, convene a meeting of the group in 2003 and submit a progress report to the Secretary-General and to the eighth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum on UNEP's contribution to the implementation of [General Assembly resolution 57/_ on Oceans and the Law of the Sea];
3. Authorizes the Executive Director to seek extrabudgetary resources, including establishment of a trust fund, to support a regular process for reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment;
4. Urges Governments to contribute to the trust fund, once established, and calls upon United Nations organizations to support the work of the open ended ad hoc group of experts.

² UNEP/GC.22/2 and Add.5.