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Regional Seas and Marine and Coastal Invasive Species

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UNEP's Initiative on Invasive Species

Invasive species are now recognized as one of the top four threats to the marine environment, where they impact not only biodiversity, but also health and economic activities such as fisheries and tourism. Concern over these issues has given rise to a growing collaboration between the UNEP Regional Seas Programme (UNEP-RSP), the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP) and other relevant organizations to develop a joint programme of work on marine invasive species (MIS). This has encompassed a number of activities, including a number of UNEP-RSP activities on MIS, the development of a Joint global work programme, the piloting of an introductory training course on the management of marine and coastal invasives, and the compilation of an awareness-raising brochure on invasive species in the regional seas.

Regional Seas Activities on Invasive Species

Regional Seas Programmes provide an ideal platform for implementation of MIS measures. MIS issues could be incorporated into the agreements by means of a technical annex to a protocol, which would have to be approved by the Contracting Parties or members of the particular programme. A number of the Regional Seas programmes either have relevant articles on MIS in their Conventions or Protocols, or have begun to embark on developing strategies/activities on MIS:

- The Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP): - is currently developing a Biosecurity Strategy;
- Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP): – the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) contains an article on the introduction of non-indigenous species, and the Contracting Parties have requested that CEP develops a programme on invasive species in the Caribbean, in collaboration with other organisations and agreements including the CBD.
- ROPME: – IMO/GloBallast phase 1 included Kharg island, IR Iran as demonstration site, and ROPME has adopted the Regional Action Plan to minimize the transfer of Harmful Aquatic Organisms and Pathogens in Ships' Ballast Waters;
- The Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP): - has a Regional Action Plan concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea, adopted in 2003.
- The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) - Baltic Sea: - is developing a regional action plan to address ballast water, as a follow-up to the adoption in IMO of the Ballast Water Convention. HELCOM is also working towards close co-operation with the North Sea region on this issue.
- The Black Sea Environmental Programme: - the Black Sea Biodiversity and Landscape Conservation Protocol (2002) is being ratified by the BS coastal states. Article 5 to this

protocol addresses the issue of (intentional and unintentional) introduction of non-indigenous species or genetically modified organisms.

Additionally, UNEP-RSP is currently supporting the Caribbean Environment Programme to develop a programme for MIS in the Wider Caribbean. The outputs of this project include:

- Compilation of information on national and regional capacities and experiences on MIS management programmes in the Wider Caribbean, including ballast waters management;
- Adaptation, as necessary, of the joint UNEP/GISP/CBD MIS training manual to the Wider Caribbean, following the findings of the above compilation and of training experiences in other regions, with a view of fundraising and conducting a training course for the region in late 2006;
- Publication of awareness material(s) on MIS issues, using models or examples from other regions.

Joint Workshop on Marine Invasive Species

UNEP-RSP, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and GISP jointly organized a workshop on the development of a Joint Work Programme on MIS in Montreal in June 2005; which was attended by four RSPs (Pacific, Mediterranean, Caribbean and ROPME). The objectives of the workshop were to undertake a comprehensive assessment of existing activities on marine invasive species (MIS), to identify gaps, and to propose activities that would form the basis for future collaborative efforts amongst a broader range of relevant organizations. The report of the workshop, together with a joint draft work plan, 'Towards the Development of a Joint Work Plan for the Management of MIAS' were presented to the Eleventh Meeting of the CBD (Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice) in Montreal from 28 November-2 December 2005. Consultations with relevant agencies are currently being undertaken on the joint draft work plan.

Some concrete recommendations for UNEP-RSP from the workshop include:

- From 4 working groups, it was identified to assess the current need and capacity within the different Regional Seas programmes on MIS;
- The Regional Seas programmes were identified as possible existing platforms, both institutional and legal, for assisting in implementing and coordinating activities on MIS in the regions (this has to be done on a case-by-case basis);
- UNEP-RSP was proposed to play a role in awareness raising on this issue;
- UNEP-RSP could support GISP in the preparation of a (global) information kit on MIS;
- Include MIS in UNEP-RSP activities on Marine Litter (ML is a vector for MIS);
- Consider supporting GISP in developing more specialized training courses on specific MIS issues, using the general training course as starting point and to pilot these in several Regional Seas;

- Consider the possibility of supporting (financially) some regions (such as the Caribbean) in regional activities on MIS, such as implementing the training course that UNEP-RSP and GISP developed.

In response to one of the recommendations above, UNEP-RSP is currently supporting GISP in the development of a needs assessment in the Regional Seas Programmes on MIS. The needs assessment will be conducted primarily through a questionnaire, and aims to determine, prioritize and quantify the needs of RSP countries for capacity building and related management aspects, to improve IAS management capacity in the regions.

Training Course on the Management of MIS

UNEP-RSP and GISP jointly developed an 8-module training course on the management of marine and coastal invasive species. The objective of this joint activity is to support the integration of IAS issues into existing marine and coastal programmes, implemented through the different Regional Seas Programmes, by customising the existing GISP generic IAS training course to focus specifically on MIS.

A Pilot Training course was held in Tanzania (November 2005) and was attended by participants from all the contracting parties to the Nairobi Convention (East Africa), which included scientists, managers and representatives from ports authorities. An independent evaluator attended the course and participants were requested to evaluate all the different modules of the course, as well as the overall course. Using these evaluations, the toolkit is being amended and finalized and then used for implementation in other Regional Seas Programmes.

Awareness on MIS

UNEP-RSP, CBD and GISP are jointly developing a brochure on MIS and the RSP within the context of the CBD mandate, aimed at increasing the information and awareness on MIS and on the role of CBD, GISP and UNEP-RSP, and to use this product as a possible aid in fundraising.