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UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

*Guidelines and principles for the preparation  
and implementation of comprehensive action plans  
for the protection and development  
of marine and coastal areas of regional seas*

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## PREFACE

It is now almost ten years since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972) adopted the Action Plan for the Human Environment, including the General Principles for Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution. In the light of the results of the Stockholm Conference, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to "serve as a focal point for environmental action and co-ordination within the United Nations system" (General Assembly resolution (XXVII) of 15 December 1972). The organizations of the United Nations system were invited "to adopt the measures that may be required to undertake concerted and co-ordinated programmes with regard to international environmental problems", and the "intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have an interest in the field of the environment" were also invited "to lend their full support and collaboration to the United Nations with a view to achieving the largest possible degree of co-operation and co-ordination". Subsequently, the Governing Council of UNEP chose "Oceans" as one of the priority areas in which it would focus efforts to fulfil its catalytic and co-ordinating role.

The Regional Seas Programme was initiated by UNEP in 1974. Since then the Governing Council of UNEP has repeatedly endorsed a regional approach to the control of marine pollution and the management of marine and coastal resources and has requested the development of regional action plans.

The Regional Seas Programme at present includes ten regions<sup>1/</sup> and has over 120 coastal States participating in it. It is conceived as an action-oriented programme having concern not only for the consequences but also for the causes of environmental degradation and encompassing a comprehensive approach to combating environmental problems through the management of marine and coastal areas. Each regional action plan is formulated according to the needs of the region as perceived by the Governments concerned. It is designed to link assessment of the quality of the marine environment and the causes of its deterioration with activities for the management and development of the marine and coastal environment. The action plans promote the parallel development of regional legal agreements and of action-oriented programme activities.

Although UNEP, through the Regional Seas Programme Activity Centre, acts as the overall co-ordinator for the development and implementation of the regional action plans, a large number of international, intergovernmental and regional organizations participate in the day-to-day activities related to specific projects or action plans. The experience of these organizations is periodically reviewed at interagency consultative meetings organized by the Executive Director of UNEP. The meetings are also used to discuss the modalities and the degree of involvement of the various organizations in the continued development and implementation of the Regional Seas Programme.

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<sup>1/</sup> Mediterranean, Kuwait Action Plan Region, West and Central Africa, Wider Caribbean, East Asian Seas, South-East Pacific, South-West Pacific, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, East Africa and South-West Atlantic.

The Third Inter-Agency Meeting on Regional Seas was convened in Geneva, 14 - 18 September 1981. It was attended by representatives of the United Nations, Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, World Health Organization (WHO), Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), Comision Permanente del Pacifico Sur (CPPS), South Pacific Commission (SPC), Baltic Marine Environment Commission (HELCOM), Oslo/Paris Commission (Bonn Agreement), International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), European Economic Community (EEC) and Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

The meeting, inter alia, adopted the guidelines and principles for the preparation and implementation of comprehensive action plans for the protection and development of marine and coastal areas of regional seas (UNEP/IAMRS.3/4, Annex IV) which are reproduced in this document.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. This paper outlines procedures for the development and implementation of comprehensive regional seas action plans. The action plans are to be carried out by Government designated institutions in co-operation with competent bodies within the United Nations system and with appropriate intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The development of action plans for the protection and enhancement of the quality of regional bodies of water and adjacent coastal areas has been identified by UNEP's Governing Council as the most effective means of protecting the global marine environment. It must be assumed that the nature of environmental problems will differ considerably between the regions selected as priority areas by the Governing Council. Each regional grouping of Governments will perceive differently the common problems that they wish to resolve through a co-operative programme, and it cannot be over-emphasized that it is these Governments on whom ultimate responsibility rests to ensure wise management of the common resources; management that should result in optimal socio-economic growth on a sustainable basis without environmental degradation.

2. The Governing Council has attached high priority to that part of UNEP's programme concerned with the development of an integrated approach to environment and development and of strategies by which to meet basic human needs on a sustainable basis without exceeding possible "outer limits". The draft action plan developed for each region must be based on, and contribute to, development within the region and thus should embrace environmental and development objectives set by the Governments concerned. Each regional plan will be concerned with environmental quality, which may be measured in a variety of ways, using socio-economic as well as environmental indices.

3. Geographic boundaries of the regions, as well as the contents of the programmes to be implemented within them, will need to be defined by the Governments concerned, taking into account a variety of criteria based, for example, on biophysical factors, jurisdictional structures, political priorities and/or statistical factors. Coastal and other activities that affect the quality of the regional environment may be viewed differently by various parties. Therefore, Governments should determine the criteria by which their regions are to be defined in order to ensure that the action plan is responsive to the particular characteristics of each region. This will require co-operation among those concerned with diverse sectors and interests, including coastal settlements, industrialization, agriculture, fisheries, human health, transportation, science, and indeed the full range of human activities in the region. At the international level, with which this paper is concerned, it is evident that an extensive, dynamic process of mutual consultations and interactions is called for in order to enlist the resources available throughout the entire United Nations system - and beyond, if appropriate - in the service of the Governments of each region.

## BACKGROUND

4. UNEP's role is to be a catalyst for the initiation of regional seas action plans. UNEP is not to act only as a funding agency. UNEP and the United Nations bodies may usefully provide States with a forum in which they may meet, negotiate and co-operate in order to protect common resources. UNEP should be a mobilizing force and should play the role of overall co-ordinator of activities, ensuring an integrated approach and taking care that the inter-disciplinary character of environmental problems is not neglected. Due consideration should be given to the long-term character of such action plans.

5. The Action Plan for the Human Environment (adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, June 1972) represented the first attempt to formulate a comprehensive programme for international action in the field of environment. The plan formed the basis on which objectives and strategies for a variety of activities launched by UNEP were adopted by its Governing Council. All UNEP's activities are cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary in nature and require a close co-operation among the specialized bodies of the whole United Nations system.

6. Theoretically this approach might require a single, fully comprehensive "super-programme", but, in reality, it is not practical to develop UNEP's activities in this manner. Therefore, priorities were chosen and, in particular, "Oceans" were selected as one of the few programme "concentration areas" by the third session of UNEP's Governing Council (Nairobi, 1975).

7. The following elements, which are the subject of various programmes under way throughout the United Nations system, have been endorsed as part of the general strategy for "Oceans" by UNEP's Governing Council:

- "Assessment of the state, sources and trends of marine pollution and its impact on human health, marine ecosystems, resources and amenities;
- Co-ordination of, and support for, environmental management efforts in the protection, development and exploitation of marine and coastal area resources;
- Assistance to interested Governments in the implementation of existing conventions and promotion of new international and regional conventions, guidelines and actions to control marine pollution and protect and manage marine and coastal area resources;
- Support for education and training efforts to enhance the participation of developing countries in the protection, development and management of marine and coastal area resources;
- Exchange of information on the protection, development and management of marine and coastal area resources."

8. Apart from global ocean activities within the United Nations system, it is felt that the aforementioned strategy may be applied to programmes developed for the protection and development of regional bodies of water and adjacent coastal areas.

9. The UNEP Governing Council has so far identified the following ten areas as components of the Regional Seas Programme: the Mediterranean, the Kuwait Action Plan Region, the Wider Caribbean, the West and Central African Region, the East African Region, the East Asian Seas, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the South-West Pacific, the South-East Pacific and the South-West Atlantic.

## COMPONENTS OF AN ACTION PLAN

10. The following functional tasks, as defined by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm 1972), can be considered as components of a comprehensive action plan:

- environmental assessment;
- environmental management, including environmental law; and
- supporting measures.

11. Any action in a regional sea should be based on sound and reliable environmental assessment. The collection and, as needed, the development of comparable data and information on a region is usually a first task. The type of information falling into this category may relate to:

- socio-economic development that may adversely affect the environment, including identification of favourable opportunities for coastal area development in general;
- institutions and experts available in the region for the implementation of the action plan;
- living and non-living resources, their status and trends in their exploitation;
- pollutants in the regional sea and its coastal waters: their sources, amounts and input pathways;
- levels of pollutants in the various components of the marine environment;
- effects of pollutants on human health, marine and coastal ecosystems and amenities;
- identification of human activities that could be affected by environmental degradation;
- identification of ecosystems that could be endangered by environmental degradation.

12. After appropriate evaluation, this information should provide a general assessment of the state of the environment and should serve as the basis for environmentally sound management and development decisions. It is therefore evident that the actual dissemination to the States concerned of the information gathered under the environmental assessment activity is of paramount importance if effective environmental management and development is to be sustained.

13. A large number of present and planned activities in a region may have impacts, sometimes damaging, on the quality of the environment. In addition, certain activities, when planned in concert, may provide favourable opportunities for



minimizing negative environmental effects and conflicts in use and, possibly, produce beneficial effects. Therefore, the purpose of the environmental management component of the action plan is to assist the Governments in taking environmentally sound decisions on development and to improve their ability to make rational choices among various options concerning alternative patterns of development and allocation of resources. To achieve this goal, efforts should be made by the Governments and the United Nations bodies and other organizations concerned to identify the most significant activities and the trends of their future development, to evaluate the severity or likelihood of their environmental impact and to find measures to reduce either the risk or the severity of their effects.

14. In the "integrated planning" concept the various socio-economic activities are viewed in the light of their relation to the environment and to other uses of the sea. It seems to provide a useful approach to coastal area development and environmental management. To this end, efforts are under way within the United Nations system to develop and implement integrated plans for coastal area development that meet environmental quality criteria.

15. Environmental law (national legislation and bilateral, regional and global agreements) can provide a firm commitment from States to maintain the environmental quality of the region shared by those States. Efforts to achieve this may include promotion of the harmonization of national legislation, the encouragement of the adoption of regional agreements to foster co-operation, and the encouragement of the implementation of existing global agreements.

16. In many instances there is a need for supporting measures for Governments, especially those of developing countries, to enable them to participate in environmental activities so that in due course they can assume a fuller responsibility. This support may include the provision of assistance in the form of: education and training; equipment needed for the assessment of environmental quality; experts to help improve the ability of national institutions to participate in the action plan; harmonization of methodology to ensure the comparability of the results; establishment of specialized regional activity centres, etc. At the request of Governments, inter-agency expert missions may be organized to undertake, in co-operation with national experts and/or institutions, specific tasks related to an environmental problem of regional significance.

## PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACTION PLAN

17. The key to the success of any regional seas action plan is the agreement of Governments concerned and the execution of the programme primarily by national and other appropriate institutions from the region in close co-operation with the relevant components of the United Nations system and other appropriate organizations and the existing structures thereof. The creation of new structures should be avoided unless they are absolutely necessary. The successful implementation of any regional seas action plan also depends to a considerable degree on sound preparations which take into account the specific socio-economic and political situation in a given region, the recognized capabilities and needs of the national institutions which are participating in the action plan, and the results of past and ongoing activities. The relationship of the various preparatory activities that lead to the adoption of an action plan for a regional sea and to its implementation are numerous, and a schematic presentation is shown in the flowchart.

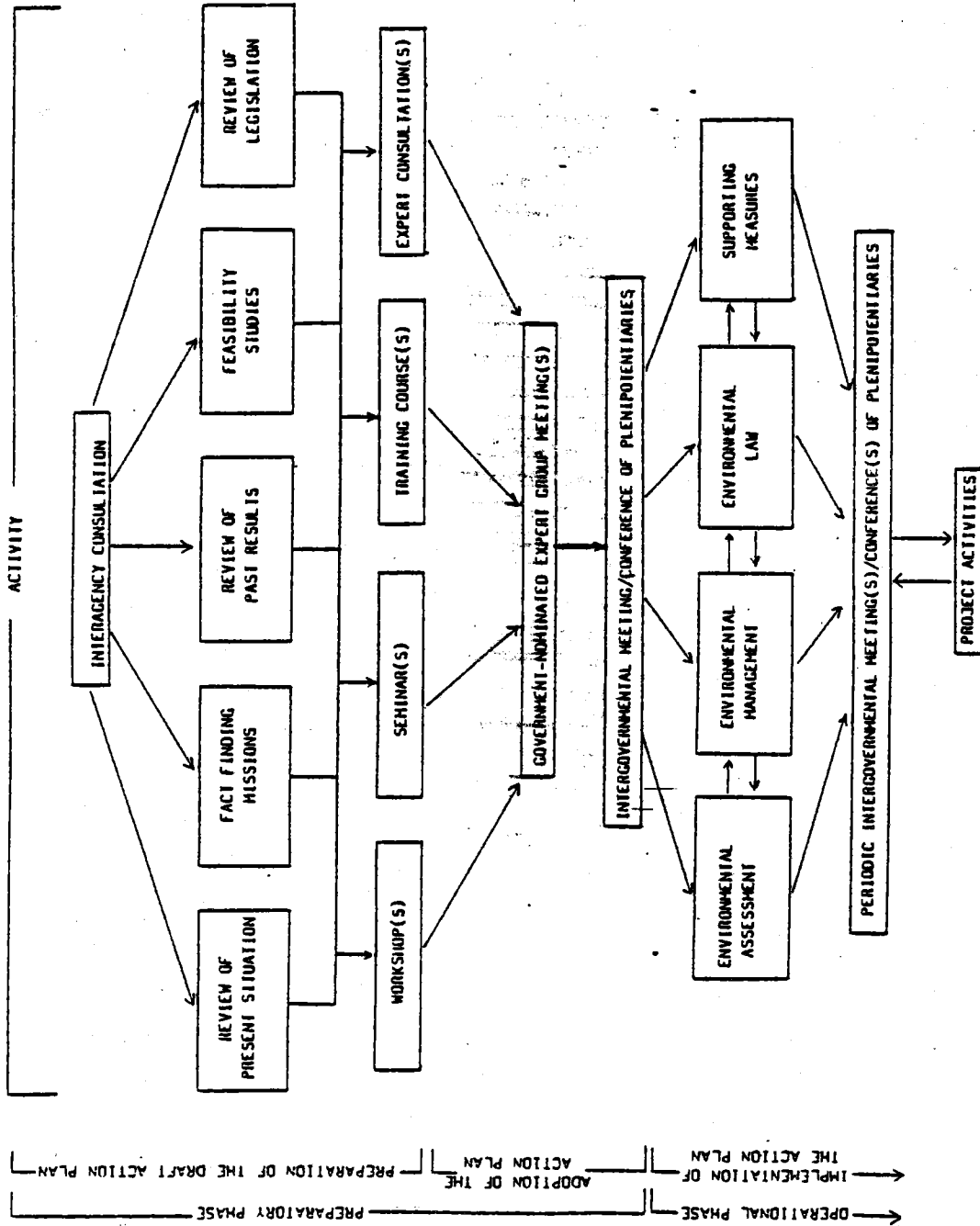
18. An interagency consultation which, as appropriate, may also include organizations concerned outside the United Nations system, is essential for the preparatory phase of a regional programme. At such a consultation the general strategy should be discussed, the programme elements proposed, the timing of, and responsibility for, substantive actions during the preparatory phase determined. Subsequent interagency consultations may be convened to consider more specific subjects in a region.

19. Depending on the envisaged components of the action plan, during the preparatory phase a set of background documents should be developed. These documents should be mainly based on reviews of relevant activities, feasibility studies, reports of fact-finding missions and/or a combination thereof.

20. It is highly advisable, and sometimes even indispensable, that such documents, particularly if they contain action proposals, be reviewed and modified by workshops, expert group meetings or seminars attended by Government-designated experts from the region before they are submitted to an intergovernmental meeting. In this way, the views of the Governments concerned - albeit not officially - may be reflected in these documents, and it may considerably facilitate their adoption at the intergovernmental meetings.

21. It is essential to consult with Governments of the region prior to an intergovernmental meeting the purpose of which is to adopt formally an action plan (see paragraph 22), in order to sound out their views and to seek their advice on the preparation of the draft action plan.

22. The most important event in the development of the action plan is the intergovernmental meeting which should discuss and adopt the action plan for the protection of a regional sea. The draft action plan, supported by relevant technical documentation, should be submitted to the Governments well in advance of the intergovernmental meeting giving them the opportunity to study these documents, to form an opinion on the submitted proposals, and to prepare for discussion and adoption of the action plan.



Flowchart indicating a simplified and generalized scheme for the development and implementation of regional action plans

23. The intergovernmental meeting may recommend, and adopt as part of the action plan, activities that were originally not proposed in the draft action plan submitted to the meeting. These new recommendations may not be sufficiently well elaborated to allow their direct implementation and will require preparatory work along the lines suggested in paragraphs 19 and 20.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN

24. The operational phase of the action plan must involve the full-scale co-operation of the Governments concerned. The actual work should be carried out through Government-designated institutions. When adopting the action plan the Governments select an existing organization, or, if deem necessary, create a new body to assume responsibility for the overall co-ordination and continuous supervision of the implementation of the action plan. If UNEP is selected as the co-ordinating organization, it should, work as much as possible through the bodies and organizations of the United Nations system and, if necessary, other organizations, for the activity concerned. If another organization is designated, UNEP should urge it to work likewise as far as possible.

25. The national institutions collaborating on certain problems may be organized in co-operative networks. Whenever appropriate, and in consultation with the Governments concerned, one national institution should assume the role of a regional activity centre for certain networks. Particularly in the initial stages, each network should be supported by an appropriate agency in co-operation with the co-ordinating organization.

26. The results obtained during the operational phase should, if necessary, be reviewed by Governments on a technical level (by workshops, seminars, expert group meetings) before they are submitted to periodic intergovernmental meetings which can accept them and decide on the termination, continuation or redirection of certain activities.

27. Between the periodic intergovernmental meetings the Governments concerned should be kept fully informed by the co-ordinating organization of the various steps taken in the implementation of the action plan, particularly if these steps involve the activities of their national institutions.

28. While UNEP, or any other co-ordinating organization, is not expected to play a similar role in every region, efforts should be made to transfer gradually the responsibility for co-ordination to selected national institutions, regional organizations or an institutional mechanism created for the purpose of becoming a regional co-ordinating body of the action plan.

29. In the early phases of the execution of an action plan, it is possible that some assistance may be necessary and that such assistance may be derived from various sources. Direct financial support from UNEP and in-kind contributions from United Nations bodies have been made available in the initial phases of the various regional seas action plans. However, Governments are made fully aware of the need for financial commitments on their part to adopted regional seas action plans from the early stages, through the establishment of a trust fund or through other financial contributions. The ratio between governmental financial contributions and contributions from the United Nations system should increase until the financing of the action plan is independent of funding from the United Nations system. Nevertheless, United Nations bodies, if they wish, may make contributions in kind to the work being carried out under the action plan, in the context of their own approved programmes and budget.

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- No. 2 UNIDO/UNEP: Survey of marine pollutants from industrial sources in the West and Central African region. (1982)
- No. 3 UNESCO/UNEP: River inputs to the West and Central African marine environment. (1982)
- No. 4 IMCO/UNEP: The status of oil pollution and oil pollution control in the West and Central African region. (1982)
- No. 5 IAEA/UNEP: Survey of tar, oil, chlorinated hydrocarbons and trace metal pollution in coastal waters of the Sultanate of Oman. (1982)
- No. 6 UN/UNESCO/UNEP: Marine and coastal area development in the East African region. (1982)
- No. 7 UNIDO/UNEP: Industrial sources of marine and coastal pollution in the East African region. (1982)
- No. 8 FAO/UNEP: Marine pollution in the East African region. (1982)
- No. 9 WHO/UNEP: Public health problems in the coastal zone of the East African region. (1982)
- No. 10 IMO/UNEP: Oil pollution control in the East African region. (1982)
- No. 11 IUCN/UNEP: Conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems and living resources of the East African region. (1982)
- No. 12 UNEP: Environmental problems of the East African region. (1982)
- No. 13 UNEP: Pollution and the marine environment in the Indian Ocean. (1982)
- No. 14 UNEP/CEPAL: Development and environment in the Wider Caribbean region: A Synthesis. (1982)
- No. 15 UNEP: Guidelines and principles for the preparation and implementation of comprehensive action plans for the protection and development of marine and coastal areas of regional seas. (1982)
- No. 16 GESAMP: The health of the oceans. (1982)
- No. 17 UNEP: Regional Seas Programme: Legislative authority. (in preparation)
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- No. 19 Rev. 1. UNEP: Regional Seas Programme: Compendium of projects. (1984)
- No. 20 CPPS/UNEP: Action Plan for the protection of the marine environment and coastal areas of the South-East Pacific. (1983)

- No. 21 CPPS/UNEP: Sources, levels and effects of marine pollution in the South-East Pacific. (1983) (In Spanish only)
- No. 22 Rev. 1. UNEP: Regional Seas Programme in Latin America and Wider Caribbean. (1984)
- No. 23 FAO/UNESCO/IOC/WHO/WMO/IAEA/UNEP: Co-ordinated Mediterranean Pollution Monitoring and Research Programme (MED POL) - Phase I: Programme Description. (1983)
- No. 24 UNEP: Action Plan for the protection and development of the marine and coastal areas of the East Asian region. (1983)
- No. 25 UNEP: Marine pollution. (1983)
- No. 26 UNEP: Action Plan for the Caribbean environment programme. (1983)
- No. 27 UNEP: Action Plan for the protection and development of the marine environment and coastal areas of the West and Central African region. (1983)
- No. 28 UNEP: Long-term programme for pollution monitoring and research in the Mediterranean (MED POL) - Phase II. (1983)
- No. 29 SPC/SPEC/ESCAP: Action Plan for managing the natural resources and environment of the South Pacific region. (1983)
- No. 30 UNDIESA/UNEP: Ocean energy potential of the West and Central African region. (1983)
- No. 31 A. L. DAHL and I. L. BALMGART: The state of the environment in the South Pacific. (1983)
- No. 32 UNEP/ECE/UNIDO/FAO/UNESCO/WHO/IAEA: Pollutants from land-based sources in the Mediterranean. (1984)
- No. 33 UNDIESA/UNEP: Onshore impact of offshore oil and natural gas development in the West and Central African region. (1984)
- No. 34 UNEP: Action Plan for the protection of the Mediterranean. (1984)
- No. 35 UNEP: Action Plan for the protection of the marine environment and the coastal areas of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. (1983)
- No. 36 UNEP/CEPAL: The state of marine pollution in the Wider Caribbean region. (1984)
- No. 37 UNDIESA/UNEP: Environmental management problems in resource utilization and survey of resources in the West and Central African region. (1984)
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- No. 40 SPC/SPEC/ESCAP/UNEP: Radioactivity in the South Pacific. (1984)

- No. 41 UNEP: Socio-economic activities that may have an impact on the marine and coastal environment of the East African region. (1984)
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