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**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Information on implementation of resolution 4/13 on sustainable
coral reefs management*****

Note by the Executive Director

Introduction

1. This is a summary report for UNEA Resolution 4/13 on “Sustainable Coral Reefs Management” adopted on 15 March 2019. The Resolution specifically requests the UNEP Executive Director to deliver on the following mandates related to the sustainable management of coral reef ecosystems:
2. In paragraph 2, the Resolution “requests the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, within the scope of existing resources and in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative, and building, where possible, on existing regional mechanisms, such as the regional seas programmes and the Coral Restoration Consortium, to assist in the compilation of best practices for coral restoration, as appropriate, for the maintenance of ecosystem services, including for coastal defence and restoration of fish nursery areas”;
3. In paragraph 5, the Resolution “Requests the Executive Director, in particular through the Coral Reef Unit and in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative, to continue to develop and strengthen the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, including through integrated monitoring and new technologies, in line with the implementation and governance plan of the Network, to understand and communicate the status and trends of coral reefs globally”.
4. Furthermore, the Resolution, in paragraph 3, “takes note of the report on progress in the implementation of Environment Assembly resolution 2/12 on sustainable coral reef management, recognizes that Member States may consider the findings therein in their efforts to sustainably manage coral reef ecosystems, and notes that Member States and coral reef organizations may also wish to

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review the analysis of global and regional policy instruments and governance mechanisms related to the protection and sustainable management of coral reefs”;

5. And in paragraph 6, the Resolution “encourages Member States, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Coral Reef Initiative and other partners, to build on the success of the 2018 International Year of the Reef and continue their efforts to build awareness of the ecological, economic, social and cultural value of, and critical threats to, coral reefs and their associated ecosystems”.

6. The activities related to this Resolution contribute to the Healthy and Productive Ecosystems Subprogramme. Under the 2019 – 2021 UNEP Programme of Work, the activities related to this Resolution contribute to Expected Accomplishment SP3 EA (a), “the health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks, at the national and international levels”.

I. Progress on Implementation of the Resolution

A. Paragraph 2 on coral restoration best practices

7. To achieve the request of paragraph 2 on coral restoration best practices, UNEP has hired an expert consultant and collaborated with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) to develop a report on “Coral reef restoration as a strategy to improve ecosystem services: A guide to coral restoration methods”. The report was written by 8 coral restoration expert authors and reviewed by an expert advisory committee of 13 coral restoration experts. Furthermore, the report was produced in collaboration with the ICRI ad hoc reef restoration committee, of which UNEP is a member.

8. The report analyses the effectiveness, scalability and cost-efficiency of the most popular coral restoration methodologies globally. The report also presents case studies of successful coral restoration projects around the world, drawing from experiences of the Coral Restoration Consortium and the Regional Seas Programmes. In addition to the full report, an accompanying policy brief has been produced. Management and policy recommendations for stakeholders in coral reef restoration activities are presented. The report and policy brief are submitted to UNEA-5 as Information Documents and are useful documents to shape strategies and investments for coral restoration within the context of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Furthermore, the analysis for the report has been submitted as an article to a peer-reviewed scientific journal. As a follow up to the coral restoration report for UNEA-5, UNEP is planning to co-produce, with industry partners, guidelines on coral restoration specifically for the tourism industry, given their interest in the sector. The guidelines for the tourism industry are planned for release in 2021.

9. In addition, UNEP has supported the French Coral Reef Initiative, the Initiative Française pour les Récifs Coralliens (Ifrecor), to translate the report “A guide to ecological engineering: the restoration of coral reefs and associated ecosystems” which provides an inventory of ecological engineering techniques employed mainly in France but also globally, for the restoration of coral reefs and their associated ecosystems seagrasses and mangroves. The report provides important information and analyses that were critical in informing UNEP’s coral restoration report for UNEA-5.

B. Paragraph 5 on the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN)

10. To achieve the request of paragraph 5 on the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), UNEP has worked closely with the GCRMN and the Regional Seas Programmes to support the development of a global report on the status of coral reefs, which is presented to UNEA-5 as an Information Document. The last GCRMN global report on the status of coral reefs was published in 2008, so this is a milestone global report based on the largest coral reef dataset ever assembled and the first time that global coral cover will be calculated in a standard and quantitative manner.

11. UNEP has supported the development of the global report through supporting regional data collection processes, for example through supporting regional reports on the status of coral reefs in the Pacific, the Western Indian Ocean and the Caribbean regions; and through supporting regional workshops bringing together scientists to share their coral reef data-sets for the global report such as in the Eastern Tropical Pacific (workshop in Galapagos), the ROPME Sea Area (workshop in Oman), and Southeast Asia (workshop in Bangkok). Workshops are usually organized with the relevant Regional Seas Programme for the region. In addition, UNEP supported participation of Regional Seas coordinators, data providers and experts to a global GCRMN workshop to review the methodology for the assessment, in Bangkok. UNEP is also supporting the translation of the global report into all 6 UN languages, and will support communications efforts around the launch of the global report.

12. Furthermore, UNEP is supporting the strengthening of the science-policy interface between the GCRMN and the environmental decision-making authorities in the Southeast Asia region in collaboration with the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) through a series of workshops to present results of regional analyses to policymakers. UNEP will also continue to support science-policy workshops based on the global analysis in key coral reef regions around the world.

13. UNEP continues to serve on the Steering Committee of the GCRMN and supported the development of the Implementation and Governance Plan of the GCRMN, which establishes new operational practices for the GCRMN, including strengthening the role and importance of the regions in coordinating and organising the aggregation and reporting of data, outlining procedures for ensuring data quality in the provision of key indicators from varied but comparable methods, and governance of the GCRMN under the umbrella through a Steering Committee including members of ICRI and chaired by a host institution. UNEP also continues to support the ICRI by attending ICRI General Meetings to present updates on joint collaborations, and by supporting travel to ICRI General Meetings from participants from developing countries. Representatives from ICRI also attend Regional Seas meetings to present updates on the work of the GCRMN.

C. Paragraph 3 on the review of the analysis of global and regional policy instruments and governance mechanisms related to the protection and sustainable management of coral reefs

14. To support paragraph 3 on the review of the analysis of global and regional policy instruments and governance mechanisms related to the protection and sustainable management of coral reefs, UNEP has shared the analysis with all UNEA members through the Secretariat of Governing of Bodies. Nine reviews from members have been received from Argentina, Australia, Gabon, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Oman, Sri Lanka and World Wide Fund (WWF). The reviews included support for the recommendations made in the analysis, and especially support for recommendation 4 on “rapid support for policy implementation” including actions such as:

(a) Coral reef states conduct a self-audit of national policies to deliver the current commitments in international instruments and develop implementation plans for policy delivery, identifying national priorities and any technical and financial support needed;

(b) States may create a new overarching international monitoring group (e.g. a ‘coral reef policy observatory’), or task the International Coral Reef Initiative with the role (in consultation and cooperation with competent international organizations), to be responsible for monitoring progress in implementing international commitments at the national level in coral reef states; and

(c) States agree to create a new financing mechanism specifically for coral reef ecosystems, such as a global fund for coral reefs to provide grant or concessional financing to low-income and lower-middle-income coral reef states through an existing institution such as the Global Environment Facility. The reviews and recommendations of UNEA members are presented to UNEA-5 as an Information Document.

D. Paragraph 6 on awareness raising

15. To support paragraph 6 on awareness raising, UNEP, in partnership with The Ocean Agency, has launched a social media public awareness campaign (the Glowing, Glowing Gone campaign) to raise awareness of the value but also the vulnerability of coral reefs. The campaign was launched in 2019 and has had significant social media impact, with engagement from influencers, goodwill ambassadors and activations during selected global events such as the World Surf League, the Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of Parties and Adobe Max. The campaign has also attracted partnerships with private sector companies such as Adobe and Pantone.

E. Other progress

16. UNEP has also worked with partners to update the analysis of downscaled climate projection data to predict coral bleaching events around the world. These projections will be useful for coral reef managers to understand the bleaching risks to coral reefs in different regions of the world and to make informed decisions regarding investments in coral reef management, restoration and protection.

17. Furthermore, UNEP has joined a collaboration with the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Vulcan, Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and BNP Paribas to create the Global Fund for Coral Reefs. The Fund aims to attract blended finance to facilitate the uptake of innovative financing mechanisms, including

private market-based investments focused on coral reef conservation and restoration, and to unlock financing for coral reef-related climate adaptation through the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and multilateral development banks.

18. Currently, UNEP is collaborating with ICRI to further strengthen the Global Coral Reef Partnership with the Regional Seas Programmes, formed in 2014. The Partnership was initially developed to support countries to adopt and apply an ecosystem approach in coral reef planning and management, and to support countries in delivering internationally agreed coral reef commitments. To strengthen the Partnership, it will more closely integrate regional processes with global processes as mandated by UNEA Resolution 4/13. This includes supporting the Regional Seas Programmes in coordinating and delivering on their role in the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, supporting the Regional Seas Programmes in accessing the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, developing tools and guidelines for the sustainable management of coral reefs, and mutually supporting communications efforts related to coral reefs and awareness-raising. The Steering Committee of the Partnership will meet regularly to review work plans and progress.

19. The activities of the UNEP Coral Reef Unit are currently being supported by generous extrabudgetary financial support from the US Department of State (USD 850,000), the Principality of Monaco (USD 118,483), and the Swedish International Development Agency (USD 300,000). Previous funding from the Government of the Republic of France has also been received (USD 540,000). The activities of the UNEP Coral Reef Unit are carried out under Subprogramme 3 on Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, Expected Accomplishment SP3 EA (a), “the health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks, at the national and international levels”. The work of the Coral Reef Unit is currently supervised by a P-5 level Head of Unit (30%), and carried out by a P-4 level Communications Officer (30%), a P-3 level Programme Management Officer (70%), 3 national UN-Vs (70% each) and a G5-level administrative assistant (50%). This is equivalent to over USD 170,000 annually in staff time from the Environment Fund to support the implementation of the resolution.

II. Recommendations and suggested actions

20. Based on the coral restoration best practice guidelines produced, it is recommended that the guidelines are used by UNEA members in order to inform investments in coral restoration around the world, as the guidelines include analyses of cost-effectiveness and scalability of different coral restoration techniques. It is recommended that Member States use the guidelines to increase the area of coral restoration projects, that they develop targets for area of coral restoration projects at national levels and that they put in place monitoring programmes to evaluate the success of coral restoration projects over longer time periods. Coral restoration is a rapidly evolving field of research and development, and UNEA members are recommended to exchange information about the latest practices being developed and employed in the field.

21. The ICRI ad hoc committee on reef restoration can play an important role in continuing to synthesize and share best practices related to coral restoration, and it is recommended that the committee continue to produce updated materials to submit to the UNEA. Furthermore, within the context of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, it is recommended that UNEA members ensure that coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs are included in frameworks and investments related to the Decade, and that global, national and local restoration targets are set for coastal ecosystems and coral reefs in a similar manner as terrestrial ecosystems. A further product that can be explored in the context of coral restoration are guidelines specifically produced for the tourism industry, given their interest and investments in this field.

22. Based on the GCRMN report on the global status of coral reefs, it is recommended that the UNEA continue to support the GCRMN and that member states join ICRI and the GCRMN in order to strengthen its ability to continue producing regional and global reports more regularly. It is also recommended that UNEA support the development of a global database on agreed-upon coral reef health indicators, to be curated and managed by the GCRMN. Furthermore, it is recommended that the science to policy interface between GCRMN data and environmental decision-making at the highest policy levels as well as at local management levels is improved through support to science-policy processes in critical coral reef regions and in collaboration with the Regional Seas Programmes.

23. The GCRMN report has highlighted the vulnerability of coral reef ecosystems globally, and decisive action is needed at national and international levels is necessary in order to avoid the loss of this critical ecosystem. Member States are encouraged to support international commitments and targets related to the sustainable management of coral reefs, and to develop strong national targets and

managements plans for protecting coral reefs. National management plans for coral reefs are strongly encouraged, and strong implementation of national coral reef management plans including with international cooperation, is necessary to reduce anthropogenic impacts on coral reef ecosystems in order to increase their resilience to global climate change.

24. Based on the reviews received by UNEA members on the analysis of global and regional policy instruments and governance mechanisms related to the protection and sustainable management of coral reefs, it is recommended that the UNEA take note of the policy recommendations identified, and that the UNEA make recommendations on strengthening existing, international mechanisms to deliver the coral reef policy recommendations, including at national and regional levels. In particular, coral reef states can conduct a self-audit of national policies to deliver the current commitments in international instruments and develop implementation plans for policy delivery, identifying any technical and financial support needed. Member States may task the International Coral Reef Initiative with the role (in consultation and cooperation with competent international organizations) of monitoring progress in implementing international commitments at the national level in coral reef states.

25. It is also recommended that UNEA recognize the importance of the funding gap that currently exists for the sustainable management and protection of coral reefs globally and the urgency of addressing this gap. Currently less than 0.01% of climate finance from development banks 2010-15 went on coral reefs and according to an analysis by the Conservation for Biodiversity High-Level Panel, it is estimated that the global investment required for coral reef protection is 5 to 7 times greater than the current funding levels. According to a UNEP report from 2018, between 2010 and 2016, about USD 1.9 billion was committed to implement, monitor and enforce the conservation and sustainable management of tropical coral reefs and associated mangroves and seagrasses, yet coral reef ecosystems alone provide society with living resources and services equating approximately USD 375 billion per year. It is recommended that the UNEA recognize and support the Global Fund for Coral Reefs as the main mechanism for addressing the current funding gap. Furthermore, it is recommended that UNEA further support the work of the Global Coral Reefs Partnership and the Regional Seas Programmes in order to deliver on their mandates on the sustainable management of coral reefs.
