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***Coral Reef Partnership in the
Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans***

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Regional Seas Coral Reef Partnership

Synopsis

The development of a global coral reef partnership between UNEP and the Regional Seas is proposed, building on current activities and constituting a successor to the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN). By better utilizing the regional anchoring, global reach, technical capacity as well as inter-governmental platforms and policy mandates collectively possessed by UNEP and the Regional Seas, the partnership can make a significant and lasting contribution to sustainable and ecosystem-based management of the world's coral reefs. In doing so it will support countries meet internationally agreed obligations, including as contained within the Aichi Targets and The Future We Want, as well as measures identified in the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) Call to Action and Framework to Action.

The partnership will provide a means to define a range of common needs across the world's reef regions, and undertake thematic interventions. The focus will be on joint development of tools and guidance at the global level, with demonstration interventions and supporting broad adoption and application through the Regional Seas. The initiative will also establish a community of practice, to support networking and capacity development.

This document briefly describes the partnership in terms of objectives, thematic focal areas and input required of partners. Additional background information is contained within UNEP(DEPI)/RS.14/INF.6, related to coral reef services, values, status and trends, institutional mandates and strengths, internationally agreed targets and priorities, the niche of the partnership, and work areas.

It is envisaged that the partnership will be developed and defined in more detail during 2012, with implementation commencing 2013. The Regional Seas are requested to review the proposed partnership and, work with the UNEP Coral Reef Unit on further development of the approach and initiation of activities.

1. Coral reefs are at a critical stage. Human resource use, development, a range of land-based activities and, increasingly, climate change and ocean acidification, are fundamentally altering reef systems around the world. This threatens coral reef biodiversity as well as the many ecosystem services provided by reefs and on which society depends.
2. This coral reef crisis has prompted national governments to make concrete and ambitious commitments towards ecosystem-based management of reefs, and sustainable use. This includes the following:
 - a. The "Strategic plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020"¹ and Aichi Biodiversity Target 10: "*By 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning*", as well as Target 6 on ecosystem based management of fish and invertebrate stocks and Target 11 on effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas;
 - b. "The Future We Want"², the Rio+20 outcome document, in paragraph 176, supports "*international cooperation with a view to conserving coral reef and mangrove ecosystems and realizing their social, economic and environmental benefits as well as facilitating technical collaboration and voluntary information sharing.*" Several other

¹ <http://www.cbd.int/doc/strategic-plan/2011-2020/Aichi-Targets-EN.pdf>

² <http://www.unccd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>

paragraphs of the document give added impetus to addressing the plight of coral reefs;

- c. Meeting Aichi Target 10 is specifically emphasized in the Oceans Compact, which sets out a strategic vision for the UN system to deliver on its ocean-related mandates;
- d. The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) *Call to Action* provides a global blueprint for coral reef action by countries and organizations under four thematic areas: coastal management; capacity building; research and monitoring; and review. The *Framework for Action* encourages regional organizations to assist countries and communities implementing ICRI, and further encourages UNEP to review implementation and success through relevant programs including the Regional Seas.

The Role of UNEP and Regional Seas

3. UNEP and the Regional Seas are uniquely placed by virtue of mandates, geographic coverage and scale to jointly develop a suite of solutions to the coral reef crisis. This includes extensive experience in working with scientific and technical communities and at the science-policy interface, facilitating and supporting multi-stakeholder international environmental policy processes; and promoting regional cooperation to address emerging and transboundary environmental issues.
4. The Regional Seas constitute a global network of regional, intergovernmental mechanisms for delivering environmental protection and sustainable management and development. The Regional Seas Programme was launched in 1974 with the aim to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas by engaging littoral countries in comprehensive and specific actions towards protection, management and sustainable use of their shared marine environment. Regional Seas have an important and direct role in meeting international targets and commitments under global MEAs, the secretariats of which support mainly normative work.
5. The Global Strategic Directions for the Regional Seas Programme³ adopted in 2007 encompassed several actions particularly relevant to coral reefs, including focusing on participation in the International Coral Reef Initiative. The draft strategic priorities 2013-2016, inter alia, emphasize an ecosystem approach, implementation of the Manila Declaration, and building capacity.

A Global Coral Reef Partnership of the Regional Seas

6. A Global Coral Reef Partnership of the Regional Seas is proposed, as a means to address the critical need to enhance and scale up sustainable, ecosystem-based reef management throughout the world's reef regions, by better utilizing the platform provided by the Regional Seas and UNEP.
7. The goal of the partnership is to support Regional Seas programmes and participating countries deliver internationally agreed commitments relevant to coral reefs, and directly and tangibly address priorities and needs as expressed by governments through UNEP and Regional Seas governing bodies as well as the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)
8. To this end the proposed primary objectives are:
 - i. To develop, at the global level, innovative and practical tools and methods that enable ecosystem based approaches to coral reef management;

³ UNEP(DEPI)/RS.9/6

- II. To facilitate regional and national level adoption and application of tools and methods through demonstration interventions and policy support;
 - III. To enhance networking, capacity building and exchange of best practice and lessons learned through a community of practice for ecosystem-based management of coral reefs.
9. Common coral reef related priorities across regional seas, identified in regional strategies and plans, include: assessment and monitoring; sustainable management of reef fisheries; supporting climate change adaptation; enhancing MPAs and MPA networks; as well as managing the impacts of land-based activities. Developing and applying ecosystem-based approaches emerges as a cross cutting theme. Partnerships are identified as an important foundation for implementation, as is creating diversified and sustainable financing models.
 10. Proposed thematic partnership work areas that align with regional coral reef action plans as well as with UNEP and FMEB priority work areas include:
 - i. Strengthening assessment and monitoring, including through application of methodology based on recommendations of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), and enhancing the role of Regional Seas in reporting through GCRMN;
 - ii. Developing approaches for establishing ecosystem-based water quality standards for coral reefs, and associated indicators;
 - iii. Developing methods for understanding climate change resilience in coral reef seascapes and associated tools for management and adaptation planning;
 - iv. Enabling sustainable reef fisheries through networks of refugia, including through development of design criteria and management guidance; and
 - v. Creating revenue streams for management, fostering private sector and community stewardship, and benefit sharing.

Roles of partners

11. The partnership builds on voluntary participation but requires in-kind contributions by partners towards coordination as well as substantive activities, and a commitment to fundraising.
12. UNEP, through the Coral Reef Unit, will
 - lead partnership development in close consultation with Regional Seas;
 - provide secretariat functions and coordination of partnership activities;
 - provide scientific and technical guidance as well as connectivity to UNEP's global efforts in relevant fields, including UNEP's Marine & Coastal Ecosystem-Based Management programme;
 - integrate partnership activities into UNEP programme of work;
 - support and facilitate information sharing;
 - facilitate liaison with global networks, with a view to strengthen the Regional Seas in the delivery of the ICRI Call to Action, GCRMN assessments as well as the Global Compact, the World Ocean Assessment, and other relevant global initiatives;
 - conduct fundraising and administer grants for partnership activities, including global activities as well as regionally focused demonstration projects, in close collaboration with Regional Seas;
 - seek and develop private sector involvement in and support of activities where possible; and
 - organize partnership meetings (tele/video conferences and as possible physical meetings).
13. Participating Regional Seas programmes will

- ensure purposefulness of interventions, through consultation with governments, regional networks of experts and other entities;
 - provide regional expertise and technical and substantive input;
 - support resourcing of partnership activities, including as possible by seeking allocations through regular budgets and carrying out fundraising activities with UNEP;
 - support national and regional uptake of methodologies, as developed through the partnership, including through GCMRN;
 - develop regionally or nationally focused demonstration interventions and oversee their implementation, in collaboration with UNEP;
 - provide regional projects and activities as a basis for further development and inter-regional exchange through the partnership;
 - ensure liaison and coordination with relevant regional initiatives and institutions;
 - provide input towards the partnership's engagement in global networks and initiatives;
 - attend partnership meetings;
 - integrate partnership activities in their respective work programmes;
 - seek endorsement/approval of the partnership as well as commitments to contribute to its successful implementation from Governing Bodies.
14. A technical/advisory body, comprised by Regional Seas coral focal points and coral reef task force chairs as well as UNEP Coral Reef Unit is further proposed, to guide substantive activities, provide technical support to the community of practice, and advise on the development or revision of regional coral reef action plans, establishment of Coral Reef Task Forces or similar structures, as/where appropriate.
15. Direct benefits of the partnership include:
- Enhanced delivery against global, regional and national obligations related to coral reefs, dependent communities and industries;
 - Facilitation of and support for Regional Seas activities towards assisting countries deliver actions as identified in the ICRI call to action and framework for action;
 - Strengthened regional periodic coral reef assessments through engagement in GCRMN;
 - Increased use of assessment data as well as application of tools and approaches to underpin management and policy decisions;
 - Achieving 'economies of scale' through resource pooling/sharing to address issues of common concern, especially related to development of tools, approaches and methods;
 - Adoption and application of methodologies compliant with best practice, leading to greater consistency and coherence in reef related management activities;
 - Greater learning between regions, exchange of expertise, and cross fertilization of projects;
 - Broadened pool of expertise for regional coral reef activities;
 - Support towards amendment or development of regional strategies and plans relevant to coral reef management;
 - Access to cross-regional partnerships including with the private sector;
 - Improved services to countries and other actors within Regional Seas networks;
 - Project development and funding opportunities.

Immediate next steps

16. The development of joint coral reef related activities by UNEP and the Regional Seas through a partnership approach was announced to ICRI at its General Meeting in July 2012, and has also been submitted by UNEP as a Rio+20 voluntary commitment.
17. Partnership structure as well as thematic work areas, activities and outputs will be further defined through consultation led by UNEP, primarily with and through Regional Seas programmes and associated networks. The terminal evaluation of ICRAN, which is being initiated, will also elucidate recommendations useful for the partnership.

18. Implementation of activities under the partnership will require a diversity of financial donors, in addition to institutional, logistical and, as may be possible, financial support of its members. UNEP will support partnership establishment activities (2012), including concept development, liaison with partners, further defining and prioritizing thematic focal areas, obtaining partnership commitments, and initiating fundraising. In-kind contributions from Regional Seas partners is essential.
19. A fundraising strategy will be prepared as a matter of priority during the development of the partnership in early 2013.
20. Existing financial support from the US towards UNEP's activities on coral reefs with the Regional Seas will be used for partnership coordination and activities mainly at the global level. As possible this may also extend to regional level activities, mainly where complemented by ongoing relevant activities through Regional Seas or technical partners.

Recommendations

21. Regional Seas are requested to endorse the development of a global partnership on coral reefs, based on the outline herein.
22. Regional Seas are requested to review the partnership description, and provide comments and guidance towards its further development and successful implementation.