

**TOWARDS a Regular Process for  
Global Reporting and Assessment of the  
State of the Marine Environment,  
including Socio-economic Aspects**

**Start-up phase (an Assessment of Assessments)**



Following commitments undertaken at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), through resolutions UNGA 57/141 and UNGA 60/30, decided to launch a start-up phase towards the establishment of a regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects. This preparatory stage, which builds on existing global and regional assessments, is referred to as the Assessment of Assessments (AoA).

## **Why should we be concerned about what is happening to the oceans?**

Who would run a business and not try to understand what happens to 71 per cent of its assets? The oceans cover seven-tenths of our planet, yet we do not regularly assess what is happening to them as a whole.

We know that the oceans are vital for the proper functioning of our planet. Yet, for far too long, we have acted as though what we do to the oceans will not affect them.

The oceans are a global common. They are connected to other ecosystems, to human societies and to the economy. It is essential that we understand the current state of the biophysical, social, and economic relationships and be able to better project future trends.

We need to manage the impacts of human activities in a sustainable manner. We must therefore ensure that decision-makers at all levels (local, national, regional and global), have an overall picture of how these impacts affect the oceans, so that they can make informed decisions with the benefit of the best available and most up-to-date science.

Without this holistic picture, we risk the continued degradation of the oceans. Given their vital role in the functioning of our planet, such risks can have irreversible consequences and threaten all States – island, coastal, and landlocked.

We therefore need to understand better what is happening to the oceans and the effects on our well-being. This requires improved monitoring and observation practices, a deeper understanding of the status and trends of environmental changes and the know-how and ability to prevent, mitigate, and adapt to unprecedented environmental changes. Such knowledge intensity requires enhanced capacities, strong networks, regional collaboration and authoritative interactions between science and decision-making.

## **What is being done?**

The international community has not been idle in the face of this need. Since 1992, Agenda 21 has committed States to improving their understanding of the marine environment and its role in natural global processes. It has recognized that managing human pressures on the oceans requires an approach that considers the ecosystem as a whole.



The World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) encouraged the application of the ecosystem approach for ocean and fisheries management by 2010. Moreover, in 2006 the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed "that ecosystem approaches to ocean management should be focused on managing human activities in order to maintain and, where needed, restore ecosystem health to sustain goods and environmental services, provide social and economic benefits for food security, sustain livelihoods in support of international development goals, ... and conserve marine biodiversity."

Over the years national and regional assessments have been prepared for many areas and aspects of the oceans. Specific aspects have also been assessed globally – such as the global fisheries' overviews produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and various specialized topics by the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP). In the last two decades we have seen increasing efforts to produce more holistic regional marine environmental assessments.

While existing assessments provide much needed insight on specific issues, they do not present a global overview of the state of the oceans. Also, they do not always assess the full range of human activities that impact or depend on ocean resources, or the changes in the provision of marine ecosystem goods and services.

To address these gaps and to apply the ecosystem approach, the United Nations General Assembly has requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC of UNESCO) to co-lead a process for evaluating the potential for the establishment of a "regular" marine environmental assessment process that will provide accurate and timely information to decision-makers on the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects.

## **An Assessment of Assessments (AoA)**

The start-up phase of this process is an Assessment of Assessments – a thorough, expert look at what has been done nationally, regionally and globally to assess the marine environment and related aspects of human societies and economies. Assessments are social processes that respond to information needs, emerging issues, and regional realities. They can help determine how to safeguard the long-term productivity of marine ecosystems, direct us towards development that is sustainable, and provide us with options for more effective ocean governance. The AoA start-up phase can provide guidance for achieving these goals through a Regular Process.

A Group of Experts (GoE), representing all the world's regions, has been tasked with conducting the AoA. They will identify:

- (i) Assessments available on the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, and an evaluation of their potential to contribute to a Regular Process;
- (ii) Data available, and how these data might be incorporated into a Regular Process;



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- (iii) Existing data and knowledge gaps and the implications for a Regular Process;
- (iv) How the data has been assessed, including the methods and tools used in the assessments;
- (v) The strengths and constraints of conducting assessment components of the Regular Process on different geographic scales;
- (vi) The characteristics that strengthen the scientific credibility, legitimacy, policy relevance, and usefulness of assessments;
- (vii) The institutional arrangements for the assessments and the best practices and approaches that can be replicated in a Regular Process;
- (viii) The existing networking and capacity building opportunities to strengthen regional assessments that will support a Regular Process;
- (ix) The means for effective communication between scientific experts and policy-makers at national, regional, and global levels;
- (x) The emerging issues and priorities as well as the uncertainties in knowledge where further research is needed.

## The Potential for a Regular Process

The Group of Experts for the AoA is exploring how a Regular Process can:

- Build on existing regional and global assessments and provide a framework for the integration of sectoral and specialized assessments, notably at regional and sub-regional levels, including the influence of land-based activities on the coastal and marine environment;



- Ensure linkages between regions so that issues of common concern can be tackled in a coordinated way;
- Identify the linkages between human impacts on the marine environment, marine environmental change, and human well-being;
- Play a key role in drawing attention to global phenomena such as ocean/atmosphere interactions, including the effects of climate change on the marine environment;
- Organize, analyze, and communicate information so that policy-makers and other stakeholders can make informed choices to reduce human impacts on the oceans and preserve future options;
- Guarantee effective peer-review of the assessment;
- Update results to take on board new scientific findings, and bring them to the attention of decision-makers.

A Regular Process would provide a framework to assist regional and specialized assessment processes to improve data collection and analysis in support of decision-making and would strengthen networking and capacity-building within and between regions.

The work being conducted by the Group of Experts on this proposed framework and options includes:

- Institutional arrangements;
- Inter-linkages between national, regional, and global levels;
- Networking and capacity building requirements;
- Cost estimates of the process;
- Investment and benefit evaluations in relation to current expenditures on marine knowledge infrastructures by sectors.

## What next?

The AoA report will be published along with a Summary for Decision-Makers. These reports will be submitted to the Ad Hoc Steering Group for its consideration and then presented to United Nations General Assembly in October 2009. The AoA will provide decision-makers with a framework and options for the establishment of a Regular Process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects.

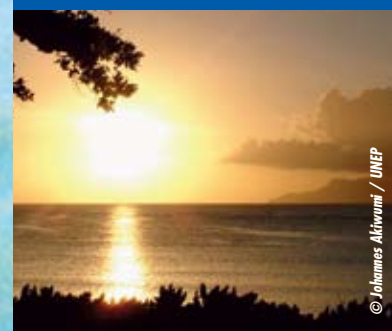
The AoA report is divided into 4 sections:

Part 0: Introduction

Part I: Summary of Findings from the review of Regional Assessments and Supra-regional issues/Thematic Assessments

Part II: Evaluation of Assessments: Best Practices

Part III: The Way Forward: Framework and Options for the Regular Process







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The timeline below provides a schedule of the AoA phase for 2008-2009

| Milestones/activities  | 2008      |         |           |          | 2009     |     |     |
|--|-----------|---------|-----------|----------|----------|-----|-----|
|  | Early Jun | Mid Oct | Early Nov | Late Nov | Feb/ Mar | May | Oct |
| 1. Full text of Parts 0 and II and outlines of Parts I and III available for review by the Ad Hoc Steering Group.  |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |
| 2. Drafts of all four parts of the AoA report completed. A first draft of the Summary for Decision-Makers available.   |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |
| 3. Full AoA report will be reviewed at the Fourth meeting of the GoE. The GoE will also review a first draft of the Summary for Decision-Makers.                             |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |
| 4. Draft AoA report and a draft Summary for Decision-Makers will be sent out for external peer review. Comments to be received by mid-January 09.                            |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |
| 5. Final meeting of the Group of Experts to review comments received, make final revisions, and sign-off on the report.  |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |
| 6. Final versions of the reports presented to the 4th meeting of the Ad Hoc Steering Group for approval of the Summary for Decision-Makers and acceptance of the AoA report. |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |
| 7. Reports published and presented to the 64th session of UNGA.  |           |         |           |          |          |     |     |



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# Who's involved?

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The AoA process has benefited from the valuable input of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP).

Other experts, from all over the world, have also contributed to this report and their support will be acknowledged in the main AoA report.

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## UNEP

Assesses global, regional, and national environmental conditions and trends;  
Develops international agreements and national environmental instruments;  
Strengthens institutions for the wise management of the environment;  
Integrates economic development and environmental protection;  
Facilitates the transfer of knowledge and technology for sustainable development; and  
Encourages new partnerships and mind-sets within civil society and the private sector.

## UNESCO/IOC

Provides UN Member States with an essential mechanism for global cooperation in the study of the ocean.  
The IOC assists governments in addressing their individual and collective ocean and coastal problems  
through the sharing of knowledge, information, and technology, and through the coordination of  
national programmes.

[www.unga-regular-process.org](http://www.unga-regular-process.org)

