

ESCAP input for the Secretary-General's Background Note for the Preparatory Meeting of the UN Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14

UNESCAP Resolution Res/72/9 “Regional cooperation to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”¹: “Requests the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with United Nations specialized agencies and international, regional and sub-regional organizations, utilizing extra budgetary contributions and within the mandates of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to undertake an assessment of capacity development needs of the countries in Asia and the Pacific for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14”

UPDATE: Resolution 72/9 aims to enhance the understanding of the capacity development needs to implement SDG 14 by developing a regional assessment. This regional assessment will support and contribute to the wider implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the UN Conference on Oceans in June 2017.

The compilation of this assessment, its dissemination and outreach will play a fundamental role in raising the importance of oceans and marine resources amongst stakeholders, civil society, UN member states and the wider community and will substantially contribute to supporting countries on implementing SDG14 in the Asia and the Pacific region. The implementation of Res/72/9 is being pursued primarily in the context of the preparations for the UN Conference on Oceans in June 2017 to “identify ways and means to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 14”². On implementing the resolution ESCAP is working with members of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM). The following activities are planned:

- Within the RCM Thematic Working Group on Resource Efficient Growth, a Task Team will be established to work on the regional assessment. The Task Team will be led by ESCAP. ESCAP will seek the support of the following agencies to participate in the Task Team: UNESCO, UNEP, FAO, UNIDO and ILO.
- An outline of the assessment will be presented in a side event during the UN Conference on Oceans.
- An Expert Group Meeting could be convened to further develop the assessment.
- The assessment will be presented at the seventy-fourth session of the Commission in May 2018. The secretariat will disseminate the assessment findings through technical materials and policy briefs through ESCAP channels.

In the Pacific, ESCAP is coordinating with UN Conference co-host Fiji³, the preparations that the Pacific small islands developing States will undertake together with sub-regional organizations and UN agencies in the Pacific, to ensure that the needs of the Pacific, including on the means for implementation, are clearly defined. In the meantime, the Pacific Islands Forum

¹ http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/E72_RES9E.pdf

² <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/283/59/PDF/N1628359.pdf?OpenElement>

³ The Fiji Prime Minister had requested the assistance of ESCAP in the preparations for the UN Oceans Conference.

Leaders in their ‘Pohnpei Ocean Statement’ have called on the “Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, regional and sub-regional organisations and commissions and partners of the Pacific Ocean Alliance, based on their individual mandates competencies and comparative advantages, to provide the necessary technical, financial and administrative support to countries’ implementation of SDG14”⁴.

PRIORITY ISSUES: Outlined below are the key priority issues for the Pacific which have been derived from resolutions and processes referenced here and work done on oceans in the Pacific including by ESCAP on Green Economy in a Blue World⁵ and Fisheries and Sustainable Development⁶.

1. Why is Oceans Important?

- Fisheries remain the most important ocean resource for livelihoods, employment, nutrition and opportunities for economic growth in the region, and particularly among Pacific SIDS. The main drivers of fishing vessel overcapacity and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU-Fishing) must be addressed.
- Oceans and seas are threatened by the impacts of climate change. Oceans management and SDG 14 must also play an essential role in responding to climate change. Sea levels are now rising at an accelerating rate, and unless greenhouse gas emissions are drastically reduced by 2050 sea levels will rise by a metre by 2100⁷.
- Rising ocean temperature has a major influence on distribution of marine species and ocean ecology, contributing to coral bleaching which is destroying large areas of the Asia-Pacific regions coral reefs. Ocean acidification⁸ directly threatens all marine animals and plants, and may be a more immediate problem for coastal communities than sea level rise.
- Plastics and nutrient based ocean pollution threatens the environment and sustainable development more broadly, and reflect poor management practices on land that must be addressed.

2. Challenges to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

⁴ <http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/embeds/file/Annex%203%20-%20A%20Course%20to%20Sustainability.pdf>

⁵ <http://pacificpolicy.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2/files/2012/11/Pacific-Perspectives-2012-Green-Economy-in-a-Blue-World.pdf>

⁶ http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Pacific_Perspectives_%202014_0.pdf

⁷ IPCC, Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press Cambridge 2013) 9.

⁸ This is one of the 2 emerging priorities of the small islands developing States (2016 Global Sustainable Development Report)

- Warmer air and sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, rising sea levels and greater rainfall are expected to cause significant losses of the coral reef, mangrove, seagrass and intertidal habitats, which provide shelter and food for coastal fish and shellfish.
 - Progress towards Target 14.3 on ocean acidification will present a particular challenge which will have profound effects on food security and livelihoods for coastal communities across the Asia-Pacific but particularly in Pacific SIDS.
 - There are few well-managed coastal fisheries in the Asia-Pacific. Ineffective coastal fisheries management is a real threat to sustainable development, as it is these fisheries that currently provide coastal communities with most of their nutrition and employment from the fisheries sector. Governments need to establish policies that protect fisheries resources and allow the continuing flow of marine foods to coastal communities.
 - Poor governance of the fisheries sector in the Pacific island region is characterized by inefficient national fisheries institutions and, in some countries, corruption. A fundamental problem is the low capacity of national fisheries agencies. Despite their importance, the sustainability of coastal fisheries has been neglected by most national governments.
 - In addition to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (*LOS Convention*), most Pacific island countries are party to a number of other relevant international and regional treaties that impose obligations for protection the marine environment.⁹ These include:
 - the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), which includes obligations to protect marine ecosystems.
 - the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Conventions on sea safety and anti-pollution measures including protocols under the Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) and the London Convention for the Prevention of Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter.
 - Convention for the Protection of Natural Resources and the Environment of the South Pacific Region (the Noumea Convention).
 - Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.
 - Compliance with obligations under these treaties, including reporting and alignment of domestic legislation, represents a significant challenge to the small bureaucracies of Pacific island countries.
 - There is currently no comprehensive global regime for conserving the marine ecosystems of the high seas, but rather a patchwork of regional agreements on fisheries and specific frameworks that address some threats to marine biodiversity.
-

- The management and regulation of Deep Seabed Mining along the precautionary principle¹⁰ represents a critical emerging issue, as domestic environmental management in developing countries currently appears inadequate to ensure the protection of marine ecosystems, including monitoring of compliance with environmental management conditions established under national and international environmental law.
- National aggregates provide a limited picture of a highly diverse marine ecosystems, regulation and enforcement. The sustainability of marine ecosystems depends on many factors besides protected areas, including pollution, climate change and acidification.
- Statistics for monitoring indicators on ocean pollution are being collected by international agencies; however, it is not yet possible to verify the degree of coverage of existing statistics for monitoring those targets for the Asia-Pacific region.
- Data on fish catches are available for assessing the improvement of sustainability of fishing practices, but the current scientific knowledge on the characteristics of stocks of ocean fish and their habitats is limited for developing complete coverage of indicators for monitoring the sustainability of coastal and off-shore fisheries. Coastal fisheries statistics are weak in most countries in the region. Typically, government fisheries agencies give low priority to estimating the total amount of domestic catches. In general, the smaller the scale of the fishing, the less is known about the production levels, with quantitative information being especially scarce for the subsistence fisheries in most countries.

3. Opportunities

- For monitoring progress towards SDG 14 to be more comprehensive, statistics are needed on a much broader range of benefits and challenges related to conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources. Statistical observations and measures are not sufficient for monitoring sustainability. Other types of information will be needed on the condition of ecosystems and fish populations to complete the picture. Detailed information will also be necessary to produce projections for future uses of oceans and marine ecosystems.
- Fisheries management and the economic value derived from fisheries for SIDS is improving in the region. Conventional fisheries management is in the process of being modified from being oriented towards single-species maximization (e.g. maximum sustainable yield) to one that is much broader in scope, encompassing biological, environmental, economic and social objectives.
- There is a need to strengthen the focus on gender in fisheries. Women play critical but still poorly understood, undervalued and underappreciated roles in fish supply chains. Gender

¹⁰ “Ponhpei Ocean Statement” of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders - <http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/embeds/file/Annex%203%20-%20A%20Course%20to%20Sustainability.pdf>

issues are not prominent on the policy agenda for SDG 14, which sustains a vicious cycle where only limited resources are dedicated to understanding the gender dimensions of fisheries and how to address them. While small-scale fisheries, women's livelihoods and nutritional security are strongly linked, much more attention needs to be given to recognizing, strengthening and protecting the role of women in both coastal and offshore fisheries.

- A growing number of marine protected areas (MPAs) have been created in the Pacific to protect threatened species and important habitats. Benefits of MPAs include habitat and biodiversity conservation, food security, a recruitment source for important marine organisms and the creation of awareness about the need for conservation. MPAs have also had a role in revitalizing management by communities of their adjacent marine resources. Typically, an MPA is not prohibitively expensive for communities to establish and maintain. However, many fisheries specialists feel there is currently an overreliance on MPAs as a management tool, and should be considered one of a number of mechanisms that can be used for safeguarding the marine environment.
- Improving the economic benefits from fisheries to SIDS has made some progress with the strengthening of the vessel day scheme (VDS) which has increased the value of fishing days through the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA). There have been numerous attempts in all Pacific island countries to encourage small-scale fishers to harvest larger amounts of tuna for domestic consumption, but these have had little impact.
- Discussions on a new global treaty to protect marine biodiversity called for at Rio+20 represent an important opportunity to address this challenge. Strengthening the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the negotiation of a new global treaty for the conservation of oceans and seas presents an opportunity to address current gaps in ocean governance.