

INTER-REGIONAL CO-OPERATION: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

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ABSTRACT

As part of the UNEP-sponsored session on Regional Cooperation on the Protection of the Environment at the Pacific Science Congress, the participants in the different Regional Seas Programme action plans in the Pacific held a round table discussion on inter-regional co-operation. The discussion highlighted the need for inter-regional co-operation in monitoring and in managing common environments or ecosystems such as mangroves or coral reefs. There is a need for more communication between regions on common problems, techniques and results, and on legislation, as well as between specialists with common interests. The regional seas approach balances inter-regional standards and co-ordination with local solutions to local problems.

After viewing each action plan area separately in the previous sessions (see the sections above), it was natural to ask how the three separate programmes in one ocean should co-operate for their common benefit. A round table discussion was organized under the chairmanship of Dr. Stjepan Keckes, Director of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme Activity Centre, with Dr. Luis Arriaga M., co-ordinator of the South-East Pacific Action Plan, Dr. Kasem Snidvongs, co-ordinator of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, and Dr. Arthur Dahl and Dr. Jeremy Carew-Reid, respectively the former and newly-appointed co-ordinators of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. The following topics were raised in the discussion.

Monitoring

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has a mandate to monitor pollution at the global level (including the Pacific) through the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS). This requires uniform methodologies and costly facilities such as the background reference station now being planned for the Pacific.

The South Pacific does not have major regional marine pollution problems, but it does have local problems needing monitoring. Ignorance of the problems will prove more expensive than monitoring; disease from polluted beaches hurts tourism, and export products must be monitored to verify that they do not have contamination above importing country requirements. Deciding what has to be monitored or researched is a regional decision, which may well be different from global priorities. There is already much material published by developed countries on the Pacific. The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), for instance, is compiling the information on radioactivity in a useful form.

The infrastructure for pollution monitoring and the interpretation of the results is very weak, especially in the South Pacific. In the Caribbean, UNEP had to create a regional monitoring centre on St. Lucia. The South-East Pacific has been able to build monitoring on their existing oceanographic and meteorological infrastructure. In the South Pacific, developing a monitoring capability for such a large area will take time and money. It may be necessary to look at possible intermediate steps and simpler techniques. A balance is required between immediate needs for monitoring, such as in areas of coastal pollution or where there are fears of pesticide contamination, and the need for education and public information so that the need for monitoring will be more clearly understood. The results of monitoring can

themselves be used for public information, and baseline data collected now will be important for later comparisons.

London Dumping Convention

Given the great concern expressed by the region about the dumping of wastes, particularly radioactive waste, in the Pacific Ocean, attention was devoted to the London Dumping Convention (LDC) as a possible framework for discussion and action on a world basis to control dumping on the high seas. The convention has provision for regional agreements, and several have already been concluded, including one in the South-East Pacific; another is now being developed in the South Pacific. It is most important that countries in the region become party to the convention so that they can influence these discussions. Different approaches were considered for implementing the expressed desire of South Pacific countries to ban radioactive waste dumping in the Pacific. The use of the waste-receiving capacity of the oceans must be a collective decision, which could best be taken in the framework of the LDC. There will need to be selectivity in the kinds of materials, amounts, and locations for dumping, with users paying for such use of the high seas. Pollution from dumping is very small, and is not now a major problem in the oceans. Inter-regional discussion on this subject might help to reach common positions on this issue in the interest of the whole Pacific.

Common environments

Another area for inter-regional co-operation concerns those special environments or ecosystems that occur commonly in the areas of the different action plans, such as mangroves, coral reefs, atolls and volcanic islands. The sharing of research information and management approaches would be of common benefit. Often simpler and more appropriate methodologies need to be developed for such tropical areas. UNEP is aware of the related concerns in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean areas, and plans to arrange for the exchange of observers.

UNESCO is developing coral reef activities of interest to several regions. There will also be a Coral Reef Congress in Tahiti in 1985 with a special section on the management of coral reefs.

Funding

On a more practical level, the action plans share common problems of funding. No action plan in the Pacific is yet fully self-financing (only Kuwait and the Mediterranean are independent of outside support). Trust funds have been established for the East Asian Seas and the South-East Pacific, while the South Pacific has adopted a formula for government contributions through the South Pacific Commission. There are some possibilities for funding from outside the regions, and some types of bilateral aid are available, but the core part of each programme should be based on government contributions. The governments of each region must themselves decide what they need, and not necessarily accept outside aid that may not be appropriate.

Communication

Participants expressed a clear need for more transfers of information between programmes on common problems, results, and techniques (such as environmental resource mapping). Examples of legislation, and of environmental effects where there was a lack of legislative control or enforcement, were also of interest since the harmonization of national approaches is the basis of any regional agreement.

It would be useful to have directories of those working in each area to facilitate direct communication between specialists. FAO is presently computerizing the regional directories of marine research centres, which will help to meet this need.

There are UNEP-sponsored inter-regional discussions such as those at the Pacific Science Congress recorded here. UNEP also holds meetings of the secretariats for the different action plans, and of the heads of responsible organizations.

The discussions brought out areas where inter-regional co-operation would be useful. However, it was clear that at the heart of the Regional Seas approach is the belief that the open oceans are quite healthy (GESAMP 1982), that most problems are localized and specialized, and that such problems could be solved more easily on a regional level (UNEP, 1982). They therefore require local people who understand local problems. The goal of the action plans is therefore to help countries and regions to study and solve their own problems.

REFERENCES

GESAMP (IMCO/FAO/UNESCO/WMO/WHO/IAEA/UN/UNEP Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution). 1982. The health of the oceans. UNEP Regional Seas Reports and Studies No. 16. UNEP, Geneva.

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