

The Assessment of Assessments
*The first phase of a regular process for global reporting and assessment of
the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects*

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The “Assessment of Assessments” (AoA) is being undertaken as part of the start-up phase of the Regular Process. The AoA responds to the request by governments in order to serve as ground rules for the development of a regular process for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects. It was established by a decision of the United Nations General Assembly and represents the first step in an international initiative to improve our understanding of the oceans and to develop a global mechanism for delivering science-based information to decision makers and the public to be completed within two years of the formation of the Group of Experts (GoE). The start-up phase has consisted of meetings of the Ad Hoc Steering Group (AHSG) for the “Assessment of Assessments” in conjunction with the UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP) and meetings of the GoE. Three GoE meetings have been carried out since March 2007. This presentation informs on the current status of the report.

The first meeting was attended by a selected group of experts approved by the AHSG. The GoE discussed and developed the overall working approach of the Assessment of Assessments. They also considered and developed an annotated outline, a work plan and timetable and considered the utility of the survey and database for the Assessment of Assessments. Definition of 21 Regions for the AoA process, was agreed at this first meeting. The regional framework was developed so that it built on existing assessments including supra-regional aspects. The 21 Regions agreed by the GoE considered the facility of work defined by existing regional mechanisms, an ecologically sensible delineation, administratively manageable number of regional units, ensuring coverage of areas within and beyond national jurisdiction, including all ocean basins. A survey supported the GoE with information on a range of assessments as well as research activities, monitoring and data collection activities generated a database that in conjunction with the report are providing with particular lessons or information on process or outputs, the information generated the GRAME database and a virtual office was created as the principal method of communication and information sharing within the GoE.

The second meeting attended by members of GoE reviewed progress made on part I of the AoA; the state of the assessment landscape for oceans and coasts in the 21 selected regions. The GoE discussed how to proceed with part II of the AoA outline; how to identify best practices from the existing assessments in the regions. The experts agreed to commission additional studies on global assessments and on supranational issues such as climate change, marine pollution and fisheries. It was recognized that the formulation of sustainable, ecosystem-based policies and measures for oceans and coasts needs to be supported by sound scientific assessments at national, regional and global scales and that assessments are required to better understand the status, trends, interrelations, scenarios and predictions in ecosystem conditions, goods, services, vulnerability and to develop responses and policy options.

A preliminary meeting took place a month previous to the third meeting of the GoE with a review of the status of the work carried out by the experts and included a brainstorming session during which the needs for the Regular Process were addressed. The third GoE meeting focused on putting together the first draft of the AoA, which will be sent out for peer-review by the end of May 2008. The meeting agreed on the outlines for the report and assigned responsibilities to the individuals of the Group and agreed on the timeline of activities and milestones for the AoA process. The report of the AoA exercise was agreed to contain an Introduction, three parts and an additional summary for decision makers for the consideration of the AHSG. Comments were provided on the draft of the AoA brochure. The GRAME database was updated with an

additional 130 expert reviewed individual assessments. A new website for the Assessment of Assessments was launched at <http://www.unga-regular-process.org/>.