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International environmental policy and governance issues

Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/15 on strengthening ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution

Report of the Executive Director

I Introduction

1. The United Nations Environment Assembly adopted resolution 6/15 in response to growing scientific evidence of accelerating marine and coastal ecosystem degradation due to climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, as highlighted in recent assessments. In this resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed its commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), all aiming to strengthen regional and global ocean governance.
2. The present report provides an update on progress made in the implementation of resolution 6/15 with a focus on the requests to the Executive Director, subject to the availability of resources, in subparagraphs 3 (a) - (g) and subparagraphs 4 (a) – (e).

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 6/15

A. Strengthening Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs)

3. Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs) are essential vehicles to strengthening ocean governance, building capacity, and supporting integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) responses, marine spatial planning (MSP), ecosystem-based management (EBM), and sustainable blue

economy transition framework and rapid readiness assessment, providing targeted country-level support.¹ The RSP continues to provide technical support to Member States and United Nations specialized agencies to help deliver their obligations under RSCAPs and related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Regional Seas directly contribute to the achievement of the KM-GBF Target 3, including the 30x30 target, by supporting the expansion and effective management of marine protected areas (MPA) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), ratification and future implementation of the BBNJ Agreement and tools for negotiating the Plastics Treaty. As the interface between climate impacts and community resilience, RSCAPs also assist countries with responding to climate threats such as coral bleaching, which jeopardizes fisheries, livelihoods, and food security in many coastal and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

4. At the 24th Global Meeting of the 18 RSCAPS, held on 11th June 2025 during UNOC3, coordinators endorsed the Regional Seas Strategic Directions (RSSD: 2026–2029)² to guide regional action and strengthen the implementation of global goals including on biodiversity protection, pollution reduction and climate resilience³. An official statement issued at UNOC3 reaffirmed the commitment to regional cooperation with a vision and roadmap towards achieving the KM-GBF, including the 30x30 target⁴.

4. At a regional level, RSCAPs have been successfully delivering support to contracting members on a variety of coastal and marine management actions, respective to Resolution 6/15. As follows:

Abidjan Convention: In May 2025, the Abidjan Convention concluded its 14th Conference of Parties in Nouakchott, Mauritania, under the theme “Towards a Resilient

a) *Atlantic Coast*”, focuses on strengthening regional cooperation for sustainable marine and coastal development. While financial challenges to the Secretariat's operation were highlighted, Parties welcomed progress through the recent adoption of protocols on marine protected areas and plastic pollution, thanks to technical support from the Secretariat. The meeting concluded with the adoption of the COP14 Report⁵, Decision⁶, and the Nouakchott Declaration⁷.

b) **Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP):** NOWPAP addresses marine pollution through its Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, supporting collaborative actions, monitoring, and awareness across the region. It conducts assessments like the State of Marine Environment Report and applies tools such as the Global Watch Eutrophication Assessment to monitor marine ecosystem health. Capacity building efforts, including environmental DNA (eDNA) methodologies training with the North Pacific Marine Science Organization, reinforce the role of NOWPAP in advancing regional and global ocean sustainability.

c) **Cartagena Convention Secretariat:** The UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat marked the 25th anniversary of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA Protocol) on 18 June 2025⁸, which has helped protect marine biodiversity in the Wider Caribbean Region through

¹ UNEP Regional Seas Programme. <https://www.unep.org/topics/ocean-seas-and-coasts/regional-seas-programme>

² Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2026-2029/2030 [Draft].

³ Twenty-Fourth Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Programme, Nice, 2025.

<https://www.unep.org/events/conference/twenty-fourth-global-meeting-regional-seas-programme>

⁴ RSCAP Vision and Roadmap towards KM-GBF 30x30 MPA-OECM Target, 2025.

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/47696/UNEP_RSP24_3_Regional_Seas_Conventions_and_Action%20Plans__Vision_and_Roadmap_towards_KM_GBF_30x30_MPA_OECM_Target.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

⁵ UNEP, 2025. Report of the Fourteenth Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14) to the Abidjan Convention. https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/47713/REPORT_COP14_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁶ UNEP, 2025. COP14 Decisions, Nouakchott, Mauritania, 21st to 23rd May 2025.

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/47712/ABC_WACAF_COP_14_6_En_Rev1_Decisions_Final_Version.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁷ The Nouakchott Declaration, 2025. <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/47609/Nouakchott-Declaration-English-Draft-01.pdf?sequence=6>

⁸ The Cartagena Convention Secretariat Celebrates 25 years of the SPAW Protocol Protecting the Caribbean Precious Biodiversity. <https://www.unep.org/cep/news/editorial/cartagena-convention-secretariat-celebrates-25-years-spaw-protocol-protecting#:~:text=The%20Cartagena%20Convention%20Secretariat%20is,today%2C%20June%2018%2C%202025.>

actions such as listing over 300 protected species, designating 37 protected areas, and adopting key strategies such as the Marine Mammal Action Plan (2023–2028)⁹ and the State of Nearshore Marine Habitats Report (2023)¹⁰. The anniversary event (18 June 2025) reaffirmed the lesson that regional cooperation is essential and emphasized continued commitment to advancing the goals of SPAW Protocol for a healthy and resilient Caribbean Sea.

d) **Barcelona Convention:** The Convention and its Regional Activity Centres continued supporting its Contracting Parties in key areas addressing climate change adaptation, MPA effectiveness, monitoring and assessment, harmonized assessment criteria on marine pollution and biodiversity. Notable achievements include the disposal of 2,000 tons of obsolete polychlorinated biphenyls and 50 tons of obsolete mercury through GEF support. COP 24 will be held in December 2025 in Cairo, Egypt.

e) **Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA):** At UNOC3, COBSEA and eight partner institutions successfully launched the “East Asian Seas Regional

f) Collaborative Network of MPAs: Marking a significant step toward accelerating progress on Target 3 of the KM-GBF. This important initiative has been integrated into COBSEA’s Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework which provides technical support on blue economy, MSP and MPAs for contracting parties.

g) **Nairobi Convention:** Five Contracting Parties have ratified the amended 2010 Nairobi Convention and its Protocol on land-based pollution, with ongoing efforts advancing, under the Strategic Action Programme for the Protection of the Western Indian Ocean from Land-based Sources and Activities (WIOSAP) project, to secure the sixth ratification needed for entry into force. At COP11, Parties requested the final negotiation on the amended 1985 Nairobi Convention Protocol to take place. Under the European Union funded, African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States Multilateral Environmental Agreements (ACP MEA3) Programme, the Convention supported the development of a regional ocean governance strategy, along with strategies on marine spatial planning, MPAs, information management, an ocean acidification action plan, and capacity-building activities on BBNJ Agreement ratification.

B. Implementation Support to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity

5. The RSP is actively supporting the effective implementation of the KM-GBF by aligning RSCAPs with its targets. A recently completed project assessed strategies and capacities across 18 RSCAPs, identifying specific gaps and actions needed to align with KM-GBF Targets 1–4 and 7–11. It also reviewed relevant regional and transboundary policy frameworks, conducted a comprehensive indicator gap analysis, and established regional baselines for protection and restoration. These results are now informing more coherent biodiversity monitoring, reporting, and policy development at both national and regional levels, helping countries deliver on their KM-GBF commitments. Furthermore, the RSP is supporting the implementation of the KM-GBF by helping countries update their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and 7th National Reports, with integrated marine and coastal biodiversity priorities. Through the GEF Early Action support, key areas of work included regional and national workshops on EBM, indicator development, and data management, alongside practical tools, case studies, and policy guidance to strengthen national capacity and promote regional coherence.

C. Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the third United Nations Ocean Conference

6. Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14) is aimed at conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. UNEP is not only supporting the achievement of all SDG 14 but also serves as the co-custodian of three indicators related to SDG 14: 14.1 (reducing marine pollution of all kinds), 14.2 (sustainably managing marine and coastal ecosystems) and 14.5 (conserving marine areas). UNOC3 served as a global platform to accelerate

⁹ SPAW-RAC. (2021). Implementation of the Action Plan for Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region: A Scientific and Technical Analysis. Authored by Vail, C. and Borobia, M. UN Environment, Caribbean Environment Programme, Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Regional Activity Centre. 165 pp

¹⁰ Ecosystems Division, Brown, Nicole A., Gardner, Lloyd, Leotaud, Nicole, & Rothenberger, Paige, 2020. The State of Nearshore Marine Habitats in the Wider Caribbean. <https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/36352>

progress on SDG 14 by mobilizing political will, financial commitments, and international cooperation. However, it also concluded that SDG 14 is the least funded of all SDGs and called for scaled-up support, especially for developing countries, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Least Developed Countries.

7. UNEP played a leading role in coordination of UNOC3 and in delivery of a myriad of side events, while also contributing technically to all Ocean Action Panels (OAP) and co-leading on OAP 4 *“Preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities.”* Specifically, UNEP rallied support for ratification of the BBNJ Agreement, highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions for coastal adaptation, spotlighted innovative financing including in the Blue Economy Finance Forum and partnered in initiating the development of the One Ocean Financing Facility - a first-of-its-kind platform to pool new sources of capital from ocean-dependent sectors, mobilize finance at scale, and de-risk investment. UNEP and partners also played a key role in launching the Ocean Investment Protocol with the UN Global Compact to help unlock private capital for a regenerative blue economy and advance the 30x30 Ocean Action Plan to accelerate the protection of 30% of the ocean by 2030, with the World Economic Forum and Friends of Ocean Action.

D. Addressing pollution (including plastics)

8. The UN has actively called for a comprehensive approach to tackling pollution from all sources. To support contracting parties and participating countries in the ongoing negotiations on a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, UNEP serves not only as the secretariat for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) but continues to make relevant information and technical resources widely accessible to member states.

9. Technical support on pollution continues to be provided through e.g. the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) and its global partnerships. UNEP and the Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter, supported over 20 countries in the development of evidence-based national action plans on plastic pollution and enabled meaningful participation of more than 40 government representatives in INC-4 and INC-5. The World Environment Day 2025 launch of the Global Plastics Hub, represented a major milestone, offering countries a centralized platform for technical resources, integrated data, and communities of practice to inform action. The recent launches of the GEF funded Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Program (USD 108 million) have also provided countries with support to address plastic pollution through national circular economy strategies and plans.

10. At the regional level, efforts are advancing through the implementation and ratification of Land-Based Sources of Pollution protocols, adoption of a regional protocol on plastic pollution under the Abidjan Convention, and development of harmonized assessment criteria for marine pollution under the Barcelona Convention. Furthermore, NOWPAP and COBSEA, through their Regional Action Plans on Marine Litter, provide further support for coordinated responses and national planning.

11. Complementary work includes technical support for wastewater surveillance for Africa with European Commission and the Global Wastewater Initiative, further, the regional GEF CReW+ project provided support to Caribbean countries. The Global Partnership on Nutrient Management shares best practices via webinars and supports the development of national action plans on sustainable nitrogen management (e.g. Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago). At a regional level, the Sargassum Working Group's Action Plan (Cartagena Convention) is strengthening the integration of thematic linkages between nutrient pollution, eutrophication, and marine biodiversity conservation.

E. Tackling Ocean Acidification

12. Ocean acidification, caused primarily by increased atmospheric carbon dioxide absorbed by the ocean, poses significant threats to marine life and ecosystems. Through the ACP MEA3 Programme, the Nairobi Convention launched the Regional Ocean Acidification Action Plan and a 10-Year Implementation Plan for countries in the Western Indian Ocean.

13. Recognizing the impact of short-lived climate pollutants, UNEP as host of the Climate and Clean Air Coalition also works within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and KM-GBF framework on integrated climate action to deliver evidence-based data for informed policymaking to help countries (especially SIDS) transition to low-carbon, more resource-

efficient economies. These activities are complementary to UNEP's broader strategy to protect marine ecosystems from acidification and climate-related impacts.

F. Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Management

14. Ecosystem-based approaches, including ecologically representative and equitably governed MPAs and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), are vital for coastal resilience to climate change and other threats¹¹. UNEP applies an integrated ocean governance approach to address transboundary management of marine biodiversity with aim to support conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in synergy with new global frameworks such as the BBNJ Agreement, KM-GBF, and the Plastic Pollution Treaty, under negotiation.

15. UNEP led preparation of the 2023–2025 progress report for the UN Secretary-General on General Assembly resolution 78/159¹², affirming ICZM as a dynamic, adaptive approach essential for managing coastal zones amid climate risks and socio-economic pressures. The report was informed by broad consultations with Member States, UN-Oceans, and RSCAPs.

16. In support of SIDS, UNEP, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), launched the SIDS Ecosystem Restoration Flagship under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. This initiative promotes a ridge-to-reef approach in Comoros, Saint Lucia, and Vanuatu, integrating marine and coastal restoration with sustainable blue finance to drive economic recovery and coastal resilience.

17. UNEP co-chairs the Executive Board of the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR), an innovative blended finance vehicle that supports sustainable management of coral reefs in over 20 coral countries and is the first UN Multi Partner Trust Fund solely dedicated to delivering on SDG-14. Through the GFCR, UNEP also supports the [Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network](#) in keeping the status of coral reefs under review.

18. Further, UNEP's ridge-to-reef and source-to-sea approaches link ICZM and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) practices across the water continuum, as demonstrated by initiatives like Go Blue Kenya and GFCR.

G. Contributions to Early Warning for All Initiative and Status Assessments

19. Early Warning Systems are essential tools for reducing the human and economic toll of climate-related disasters by providing timely, actionable information to communities at risk.⁴ In contribution to the Secretary-General's EW4ALL initiative, UNEP's Climate Information and Early Warning Systems (CIEWS) portfolio, supported by over USD 100 million from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and additional contributions from the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF), is strengthening ocean and climate information services, early warning systems, and disaster preparedness in climate-vulnerable regions. In Asia and the Pacific, six island nations including Timor-Leste have benefitted from expanded observation networks, upgraded forecasting systems, institutionalized climate policies, and capacity-building at national and community levels, resulting in improved disaster risk reduction and climate resilience.

20. From a data analysis lens, UNEP through its Global Environment Monitoring System for the Ocean and Coasts (GEMS Ocean), partners with integrated ocean observing systems including Mercator Ocean International¹³ and the Global Ocean Observation System (GOOS)¹⁴, enhancing scientific understanding of ocean-atmosphere dynamics including systemic research on ocean carbon interaction in a changing climate. Through the *Validation Workshop on Marine Spatial Planning Technical Guidelines and Innovative Tools for the Northern Mozambique Channel*, with the Nairobi Convention, GEMS Ocean supported integration of data and digital solutions to inform national MSP processes.

¹¹ UNEP 2022. Harnessing Nature to build Climate Resilience: Scaling up the use of Ecosystem-based Adaptation. Available at:

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/40415/HarnessingNature_ExeSum_EN.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y

¹² UNGA resolution 78/159. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/159>

¹³ Mercator Ocean International. <https://www.mercator-ocean.eu/>

¹⁴ Global Ocean Observation System. <https://goosocean.org/>

H. Awareness Raising on BBNJ Agreement

21. UNEP has been actively providing capacity building support to member states through awareness raising and resource mobilization efforts under the GEF-8. As a co-implementing agency, UNEP is collaborating with FAO and UNDP on a GEF-IW Medium Size Project supporting BBNJ Ratification thru tailored support to countries regionally and globally. In response to country demand UNEP also provides for delivery of country-level enabling activities with GEF support and has secured support for 29 countries (USD 175,000 per country).

22. To further support awareness raising efforts, UNEP actively participated in four Regional Capacity Building training workshops, organized by UN DOALOS and delivered two online webinars on BBNJ via the Montevideo Environmental Law Programme (March 2025). The RSP conducted regional and national capacity needs assessments across five RSCAPs and 6 member countries (in 2024) and co-organized three regional BBNJ capacity-building workshops (Abidjan, Cartagena, and Nairobi Conventions) in Spring 2025. Two technical papers have been produced-- one with UNEP-WCMC exploring possible linkages between the BBNJ Agreement and UNEP-administered MEAs (CMS, CITES, CBD) and the other with GRID-Arendal looks at possible areas of cooperation between the BBNJ Agreement and RSCAPs.

23. RSCAPs are working closely with partners to provide critical tools to help Member States deliver BBNJ Agreement objectives. For example, at 11th CoP of the Nairobi Convention, Contracting Parties concluded a Decision (CP.11/3) to accelerate ratification of the BBNJ Agreement by raising awareness essential to the implementation of the provisions of the Agreement¹⁵. Similarly, the Abidjan Convention, at its COP14, adopted Decision CP14/5 urging Contracting Parties to ratify the BBNJ Agreement and called for awareness-raising, implementation planning, and assessment of technological capacities to support its effective implementation.

24. Lastly, UNEP has made an offer to provide services as administrative and institutional host to the future Secretariat of the BBNJ Agreement. This offer and others will be discussed at the 2nd Preparatory Commission meeting (August 2025) where operational and administrative arrangements for the BBNJ Agreement will be decided.

I. Climate and Ocean-based Action

25. Climate change is profoundly altering the ocean, threatening its ability to support biodiversity, and sustain coastal communities, especially in SIDS. UNEP has been helping to guide the global dialogue respective to advancing collaborative, ocean-based climate action for both the 2024 Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue, as requested by UNFCCC decision 1/CP.27 in preparation for the dialogue at UNFCCC COP30. Furthermore, RSCAPs supported governments in integrating ocean-based measures into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by providing technical assistance, knowledge exchange, and financing for marine, nature-based solutions, such as expanding blue carbon ecosystems. Project-level support continues, support for NDC 3.0 via the Climate Thematic Fund, and support to ten countries through the NDC Action project. UNEP also collaborates with UNDP's Climate Promise, seeking to integrate NDC, biodiversity, and pollution objectives within national planning frameworks.

26. As part of regional-level climate adaptation efforts, the Barcelona Convention initiated the update of the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework (RCCAF) in the Mediterranean. This process included a desk review of regional and global MAP assessments and reports and stakeholder consultations, with preliminary outcomes discussed at the Thematic Ad Hoc Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) meeting (February 2025).

III. Lessons learned

¹⁵ Report of the Eleventh Conference of Parties to the Nairobi Convention (2024). Available at: https://nairobiconvention.org/clearinghouse/sites/default/files/meetings/Final%20Report_LongVersion_NC%20COP%2011_Final_24%20DEC2024.pdf

27. UNEP has successfully advanced progress on resolution 6/15, drawing the following useful lessons:

- a) Ocean governance tools and sustainable ocean economy practices need further integration within national development strategies as guided by SDG14. Additional funding is needed for UNEP to support its delivery through UNEA resolution 6/15, noting that SDG14 is the least funded of all the SDGs.¹⁶
- b) However, the UNOC 3 Declaration underscored that ocean conservation, integrated ocean governance, and sustainable ocean financing have strong potential to secure new resources (e.g. One Ocean Finance Facility) which will be critical to replicate successful interventions across all Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.
- c) Implementing UNEA resolution 6/15 faces challenges with varying levels of country readiness or political will to engage with new frameworks and MEAs such as the BBNJ Agreement or with adoption of EBM tools, including a sustainable blue economy. This creates uneven progress in regional implementation and capacity-building uptake, requiring even more targeted country-specific approaches.
- d) The ratification and operationalization of new global frameworks such as the BBNJ Agreement and the plastic pollution treaty offer entry points to harmonize global governance with regional and national action. UNEP, together with the UNEP-hosted MEAs, can work synergistically to provide countries with legal, institutional, and technical implementation tools.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

28. The Environment Assembly may wish to:

- a) take note of progress made by UNEP and its partners in the implementation of resolution 6/15 including progress of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans toward delivery of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions (2022–2025) and welcome the updated Strategic Directions for 2026-2029;
- b) invite Governments, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, and other civil society actors to support the further implementation of resolution 6/15 through voluntary contributions.

¹⁶ Johansen and Vestvik, 2020. The cost of saving our ocean - estimating the funding gap of SDG 14. Marine Policy: Volume 112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2019.103783>.