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Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

Fourth session

Bali, Indonesia, 25–27 October 2017

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

**Governance and policy issues in relation to the
further implementation of the Global Programme
of Action for the period 2018–2022**

Future direction of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

Note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. The present note has been prepared by the Coordination Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Programme of Action on the basis of the note by the secretariat on progress in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities at the national, regional and national levels over the period 2012–2017 (UNEP/GPA/IGR.4/2) and the increased focus on pollution issues during 2017. Governments are invited to consider the proposed policy directions and approaches described in the present note and discuss them at the current session with a view to agreeing on the future policy direction of the Global Programme of Action.

2. A number of new and important global developments have taken place since the third session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting in 2012, with serious implications for the future direction of the Global Programme of Action.

(a) On 25 September 2015, by resolution 70/1 entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” the General Assembly adopted the outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, in which targets 6.3 and 14.1 address land-based marine pollution issues;

(b) By resolutions 67/213 of 21 December 2012 and 67/251 of 13 March 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations decided to establish universal membership of the governing body of UNEP and to change the designation of the Governing Council of UNEP to the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, respectively. The third session of the United Nations

* UNEP/GPA/IGR.4/1.

Environment Assembly will be held in December 2017 under the overarching theme of pollution. Expected outcomes of the session include resolutions and commitments to action towards a pollution-free planet, which may require a specific implementation mechanism

(c) The regional seas conventions and action plans have continued to provide regional support to further global action to address land-based pollution, including through their associated protocols which have been ratified by a growing number of countries;

(d) Increasing political attention is being paid to the concept of the “Blue economy”, which is linked to combating land-based pollution in the context of marine conservation and the protection of ecosystem services for sustainable economic benefit;¹

(e) The key findings of the first World Ocean Assessment,² confirmed the importance of targeting land-based pollution of the marine environment. The assessment was intended to provide a scientific basis for action by Governments, intergovernmental processes, policymakers and others involved in ocean affairs. The Global Programme of Action played an important role in facilitating parts of the Assessment.

II. Introduction

3. A report of the Executive Director to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session, entitled “Towards a pollution-free planet”, is currently being prepared to support discussions by the Environment Assembly. The report will outline issues relating to different categories of pollution, including air pollution, land and soil pollution, freshwater pollution, marine and coastal pollution, and cross-cutting sources of pollution such as chemicals and waste. It will provide insights on possible interventions for preventing, reducing and better managing pollution.

4. At the third session of the Environment Assembly, Member States are expected to commit to voluntary targets to tackle the different categories of pollution. A common document on combating pollution is expected as one outcome of the session, while other expected outcomes include resolutions and commitments to action towards a pollution-free planet, which may require a specific implementation mechanism.

5. The Global Programme of Action is an intergovernmental environmental programme that addresses the connectivity between terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and is therefore relevant to all the above-mentioned categories of pollution identified in the report of the Executive Director, with a particular focus on the marine environment. Furthermore, the Global Programme of Action could also provide support towards the achievement of individual voluntary targets set by Member States and the regional seas conventions and action plans, and towards their alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, playing a leading role in supporting Member States to take action towards a pollution-free planet.

6. The outcomes of the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Review of the Global Programme of Action will feed directly into the preparations for and proceedings of the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

Proposed action

7. Member States may wish to:

(a) Suggest that the Coordination Office of the Global Programme of Action collaborate with any mechanisms established to follow up on the resolutions and commitments to action on pollution emanating from the third session of the Environment Assembly;

(b) Reaffirm their commitment to engage with all regional seas conventions and action plans on how to align their regional and national targets on pollution with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, any internationally agreed global action towards a pollution-free planet as well as voluntary targets set by the Member States.

¹ See *Green Economy in a Blue World*, UNEP, 2012, available from: <http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/8117/-Green%20Economy%20in%20a%20Blue%20World-20121118.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>.

² Available from: http://www.un.org/depts/los/global_reporting/WOA_RegProcess.htm.

III. Future of the Global Programme of Action

8. In 1995, a Global Programme of Action Coordination Office was created within UNEP to facilitate and coordinate the implementation of the Programme and related activities within the United Nations system, and to assist national Governments in their efforts to implement the Programme. However, given that the Programme is a voluntary mechanism without mandatory reporting requirements, with an Intergovernmental Review Meeting held only once every five years, many Governments are not fully aware of the Programme's work. This has implications for Member States' commitment to national action and for the level of support to the secretariat through the Trust Fund of the Global Programme of Action. No contribution has been paid to the Trust Fund since 2011, making the future of the Programme unsustainable in the current circumstances.

9. At present, a session of the United Nations Environment Assembly is held every two years. The Environment Assembly could either function as an intermediate governance mechanism for the Intergovernmental Review Meeting or even replace its sessions in the future.

10. Given the evolving global policy architecture and environment that influences the work of the Global Programme of Action and the role of UNEP in hosting the Programme, three possible options for the future operation of the Global Programme of Action are proposed for consideration by Member States. Each of the three options presented below has associated administrative and financial implications. In addition, the outcome of the third session of the Environment Assembly in December 2017 will have a bearing on the future direction of the Global Programme of Action.

(a) **Option A:** would maintain the Global Programme of Action, recognizing that it plays a unique role in protecting the marine environment from land-based activities. Under this option, sessions of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting would continue to be held regularly, allowing Governments to alter the focus of implementation activities within the scope of the existing framework as required. Greater emphasis would be placed on the respective declarations and workplans adopted at each session of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting.

Implications:

The cost of the current Coordination Office is approximately \$1 million per year. An additional cost of \$600,000 every five years would be needed to convene the sessions of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting. Governments supporting this option would have to collectively contribute at least \$1 million annually to the Trust Fund. Should additional responsibilities be added, an increase in staff would be required. Alternatively, the United Nations Environment Assembly would need to make a commitment to continue covering the entire cost of the Coordination Office. Any such decision would need to be taken in the light of the outcomes and decisions adopted by the Environment Assembly at its third session.

(b) **Option B:** would be built around the outcomes of the third session of the Environment Assembly and could include expanding the work programme of the Global Programme of Action to include all pollutants affecting the marine environment, providing the Programme with a mandate to strengthen collaboration with partners in the implementation of internationally agreed global action on pollution. Expanding the Programme's mandate to provide support to Member States and regional seas conventions and action plans in targeting all pollutants affecting the marine environment would include harmonizing the targets and indicators set out in the 2030 Agenda with the regional targets of the regional seas conventions and action plans and the objectives of the United Nations Environment Assembly. The overall aim would be to secure a strong marine framework for combating pollution. A core component of the work of the Coordination Office would be to provide support and stimulate innovative partnership for action-driven solutions.

Implications:

- (i) The cost of the current Coordination Office is approximately \$1 million per year. The United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session would need to make a commitment to continue covering the cost of the secretariat as part of the outcomes of the session and the Environment Assembly's new commitments to and pledges on action towards a pollution-free planet. The expanded focus of the Coordination Office could be on reducing and preventing pollution in the marine environment.
- (ii) The Coordination Office could be fully integrated into UNEP, but could seek co-financing from Governments through voluntary contributions of either in-kind or financial contributions.

- (iii) Sessions of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting (currently \$600,000/meeting) would be held back-to-back or merged with sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly thereby substantially reducing the costs of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting sessions.
 - (iv) Strengthening of the collaborative work with all the regional seas conventions and action plans to support the development and effective implementation of relevant regional protocols targeting pollution of the marine and coastal environment. The contracting parties to the regional seas conventions and action plans would be accountable for the implementation of the respective protocols.
 - (v) The work programme of the Coordination Office of the Programme of Action would be developed at the Intergovernmental Review Meeting sessions to be held every two years back-to-back (or fully merged) with the United Nations Environment Assembly session. The annual global meeting of the regional seas conventions and action plans would play an important role in linking the global policy arena of the United Nations Environment Assembly with regional implementation through the respective regional action plans and protocols on pollution thereby acknowledging the specificity of each region in addressing land-based pollution. Furthermore, action on pollution would need to be integrated with the targets and indicators on pollution set out in the 2030 Agenda.
- (c) **Option C:** would disband the Global Programme of Action as a multilateral intergovernmental initiative, recognizing that it has achieved its objectives. The exact timing of the step would be determined by Governments and could be immediate or timed to enable the completion of ongoing initiatives and/or a transition of such initiatives to an alternative programme.

Implications:

Current work on the three main source categories of land-based pollution as defined by the Manila Declaration on Furthering the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, adopted by the Intergovernmental Review Meeting at its third session, would be absorbed into the UNEP programme of work.

11. The name of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities is long and unnecessarily complicated. Over the years, Member States and partners have recommended that the Programme's name be simplified to facilitate improved communication. In addition, the abbreviation "Global Programme of Action" or "GPA" provides no explanation of what the Programme actually does. Any future secretariat for targeting pollutants in the marine environment would need a shorter and more straightforward name or brand.

Proposed action

12. Member States may wish to consider the proposed operational options for supporting the future implementation of the Global Programme of Action during the period 2018–2022 and provide a consensus recommendation to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session in December 2017.