



# Regional Oceans Governance: Key findings of the UNEP White Paper

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Session: 4

Day of presentation: 30 September 2015



# Context

## Fragmentation of regional oceans governance

- UNEP Regional Seas programmes (RSPs)
- Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs)
- Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs)
- Other regional organisations with mandates on marine issues (e.g. EU, COI, etc.).

## Different umbrellas, with specific mandates and geographical coverage

- Overlaps
- Gaps
- Lack of coordination

## Sub-optimal results in terms of oceans governance

# Context

## Objectives of the report

- Analyse the legal, institutional and scientific foundations of these regional mechanisms, exploring their respective mandates and ways of intervention
- Assess their successes and challenges, particularly in terms of cooperation and coordination
- Propose options for better regional oceans governance

## Status of the report

- Authors: J. Rochette, R. Billé, E.J. Molenaar, P. Drankier, L. Chabason
- UNEP Regional Seas Report and Studies No.195, In press
- « Regional oceans governance mechanisms: A review », [Marine Policy 60 \(2015\): 9-19](#)

## Warning

**Regional oceans governance is highly complex,  
fragmented and heterogeneous**

- Success stories and failures
- Efficient and weak mechanisms
- Rich and poor organisations
- Coordinated initiatives and isolated actions
- Etc.

**Not ONE regional landscape but regional landscapeS**

**Providing general recommendations is a dangerous  
exercise**

# 1. The efficiency of each mechanism can be improved

## RFBs

Over-exploitation of fisheries resources

IUU fishing, which demonstrates a lack of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) and compliance mechanisms

Complete coverage of the ocean by RFBs not established

## RSPs

Implementation of regional agreements far from systematic

Lack of political will, political instability in some States and weak enforcement mechanisms

Financial shortfalls which often hold up the implementation of agreements and activities

## LMEs

Dependency to GEF funding

Implementation of the Strategic Action Plans (SAPs)

Challenges related to the follow-up process once the TDA and SAP have been produced and the project terminated

## 2. Cooperation and coordination is a challenge

### RFBs / RSPs

An ancient concern,  
encouraged by UNEP  
and FAO

Bilateral MoUs, with  
different levels of  
implementation  
(NEAFC & OSPAR /  
Abidjan Convention  
and RFBs)

Despite progresses,  
“fish do not appear to  
live in the same sea as  
pollutants” (Ehler  
2006)

### RSPs / LMEs

UNEP sometimes  
external to LME  
mechanisms,  
sometimes GEF  
implementing agency  
(e.g. in the  
Mediterranean)

Very contrasted cases,  
e.g. GCLME / Abidjan  
Convention and LMEs  
in East Asian / COBSEA

### RFBs / LMEs

More limited than  
RSPs/LMEs

But some coordination  
and mutual support in  
specific cases, e.g. RFBs  
sometimes partner of  
the coordinating  
process of a LME  
project ; LMEs  
sometimes support  
RFBs projects, etc.

### 3. Dead-end tracks

**By-passing** existing regional oceans governance mechanisms with internationally funded projects

**Developing legal agreements or action plans without seriously considering future implementation issues, especially human and financial resources**

**Passively or actively maintaining weak regional oceans governance mechanisms while claiming the importance of the regional approach to ocean governance**

## 4. Options to move forward (1/4)

### a) Revise the mandate of key players

- E.g. Broadening mandates of RFBs beyond the management of target species to facilitate EAF, fill the gaps in high seas (RSPs), etc.

### b) Strengthen individual mechanisms

### c) Promote informal cooperation and coordination arrangements

- Need to strive for rationalization through stronger informal cooperation and coordination rather than formal reorganisations

### d) Better connect LMEs with other regional oceans governance mechanisms

## 4. Options to move forward (2/4)

### Facts

- Significant scientific advances
- Added value of TDAs and SAPs widely acknowledged
- A lot of resources invested in capacity building
- Some success stories in terms of cooperation with RSPs / RFBs

### However

- No significant sectoral gap in mandates of existing formal mechanisms (RSPs / RFBs): risks of overlapping
- “Mutual distrust” among the regional mechanisms, which limits cooperation and coordination

## 4. Options to move forwards (3/4)

- (i) LME mechanisms may form a platform for scientific assessments, capacity building and on-the-ground interventions, but these should be operated under existing regional oceans governance frameworks wherever possible (e.g. Mediterranean).
- (ii) When a new international body is deemed necessary to implement the LME approach in a sub-geographic area of a Regional Seas programme, it may be established under the latter's framework (e.g. GCC and Abidjan Convention).

## 4. Options to move forwards (4/4)

- (iii) Replication of the BCC scenario should be based on a detailed and context-specific governance gap analysis rather than being considered a generally applicable pathway.
- (iv) LMEs mechanisms should mainly invest in strengthening existing RSPs / RFBs and building links between other relevant regional institutions, rather than creating new inter-governmental commissions.