



# INTERNATIONAL WATERS RESULTS NOTES

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## The Caspian Environment Programme Phase I & II

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Project Status: Completed



*This photograph was taken during the visit of the CASPECO technical working groups to the pilot projects in Iran.*

### Key results:

1. A Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), Strategic Action Programme (SAP), and National Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs) were all successfully developed.
2. Support was provided leading to the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea - also known as the "Tehran Convention."
3. Outreach to stakeholders was made including NGOs, the oil and gas industry, the media, and the general public.

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## PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The Caspian Environment Programme (CEP) was established in 1998 to address the most pressing environmental transboundary issues facing the sustainable use and management of the Caspian Sea. It engages all five riparian States: Azerbaijan; Islamic Republic of Iran; Kazakhstan; Russian Federation; and Turkmenistan. Due to the cumulative impacts of unsustainable development practices, the Caspian Sea's ecosystem resilience has diminished over time. This has resulted from a number of drivers, including: overfishing; the separation of Caspian anadromous fish from their spawning rivers; introduction of invasive species of jellyfish (*Mnemiopsis ledyi*); input of Persistent Organic Pollutants/Persistent Toxic Substances from agriculture; and chronic, low level pollution from oil exploration and exploitation. These factors have caused dramatic depletion of Caspian sturgeon, herring, sprat and kilka stocks and associated declines in the livelihoods that depend upon these resources. Fish stocks in the Caspian remain under threat due to inadequate enforcement against poaching; insufficient recognition and application of ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management; genetic degradation of wild genotypes among fish; and the separation of anadromous fish from their natal river systems. *Mnemiopsis ledyi* is also believed to have impacted the cascading feeding interactions relied upon by kilka, resulting in a dramatic decline of kilka populations, a key food source for the endangered Caspian seal.

The overall goal of the CEP is the environmentally sustainable development and management of the Caspian environment, including living resources and water quality, so as to obtain the utmost long-term benefits for the human populations of the region, while protecting human health, ecological integrity and the region's economic and environmental sustainability for future generations.

The first phase of the CEP, which took place between 1998 and 2002, was titled *Addressing Transboundary Environmental Issues in the Caspian Environment Programme*, and its key elements were:

- Improved regional co-operation and collaboration;
- A Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA);
- National Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs) for each country;
- A Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the region as a whole;
- Support in the development of a Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea and its protocols.
- Resource mobilization through strengthening private - public partnership, bilateral and multilateral donors and most importantly through improved national environmental investments for the protection of the Caspian Sea

The second phase, which took place between 2003 and 2007, was titled *Towards a Convention and Strategic Action Programme for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment*. Its primary objective was to support the countries in consolidating the Convention and beginning to implement the Strategic Action Programme, including filling gaps in information and developing capacity in the region for SAP implementation and project execution.

## RESULTS: PROCESS

Phase I:

*Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis* - The TDA was achieved through strong regional input and in a very participatory manner, involving experts from around the region and internationally, in four regional meetings held between July 2000 and November 2001. Caspian Regional Thematic Centres were responsible for generating (through data collection and some limited research) the considerable amount of information within the TDA. It was made available on the CEP website in Russian and English. Through the TDA process, CEP has improved transparency by enabling data to be shared more freely and willingly.

*National Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs)* - All countries developed an NCAP prepared by national experts and overseen by a national environment committee. Each country had delivered the first drafts of the NCAPs to national fora for close scrutiny by other ministries, NGOs, and members of the public. Each NCAP reflects the issues highlighted in the TDA, and the interventions suggested towards achieving the Environmental Quality Objectives (EQOs). The issues highlighted are comparable between the NCAPs; therefore each country recognises the same national and transboundary issues facing the sustainable management of the Caspian Sea.

*Strategic Action Programme* - The SAP was in the early stages of its development by the end of Phase I. Having set out the issues relating to the sustainable use of the Caspian Sea in the TDA, together with EQOs, the SAP provides continuity to the process by presenting a road map for future policy, legislation, regulatory and investment interventions relating to the management of the environment. It is a synthesis of the major transboundary issues identified in the NCAPs and includes both baseline and incremental interventions. The SAP is a shared plan between all CEP partners and it is therefore essential that it has regional consensus, and focuses on actions and interventions that address realistic political, economic and social constraints.

*The Tehran Convention* - Dialogue over the establishment of a Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (the Tehran Convention) started in 1995. The Convention serves as an overarching legal framework governing cooperation on Caspian environmental and sustainable bioresources management, while binding agreements on specific problems are governed by implementing protocols. Seven regional meetings were held during 1998-2003 to finalize the text, rules of procedures and financial arrangements of the Convention.

*CEP Website* – A major accomplishment of the CEP has been the wide dissemination of data and information relating to environmental management and sustainable development through its website. The TDA, NCAPs and eventually the SAP and Framework Convention were all made available on the website, together with links to regional and international centres of expertise and experts. This transparency of information sharing was very new to the region.

## Phase II

*Strategic Action Programme* – The objective in Phase II was to commence implementation of the SAP in the priority areas of Biodiversity, Invasive Species and Persistent Toxic Substances. This included assessment of habitat loss and critically threatened areas, and the establishment of a standardized monitoring methodology. A seal conservation action plan was developed. Progress was made on the CEP invasive species action plan in close coordination with the UNDP - GEF GloBallast project to address, in particular, the impact of the ctenophore *Mnemiopsis*. Assessments were made of Persistent Toxic Chemicals (PTCs, such as persistent organic pollutants, oil products, and heavy metals) in sediments and coastal waters. Finally, a Regional Pollution Monitoring Programme was developed and initiated, and a PTS Regional Action Plan was developed.

*The Tehran Convention* - The Tehran Convention was signed on 04 November 2003 and 90 days after the submission of the instrument of ratification by the fifth Contracting Party entered into force on 12 August, 2006.

*Project Coordination Unit* - A newly formed country-supported PCU located in the Islamic Republic of Iran was created as a mechanism for the development and management of the Caspian Sea environment. In addition to execution of regional projects and support to implementation of national projects, the PCU facilitated a network of institutions addressing transboundary environmental issues as addressed in the NCAPs and SAP.

*Stakeholder and Public Outreach* – A media kit and web-based media database were produced; a monthly e-bulletin was published; and two Environmental Journalism Workshops were held. Stakeholder analyses were revisited, and 40 Micro Environmental Grants targeting environmental awareness were implemented. Promotion and awareness materials including educational posters and banners were developed and widely distributed. An NGO database was developed and updated. NGOs of all Caspian littoral states as well as regional and international NGOs were invited to all major events. The project established a constructive dialogue with the oil and gas industry, which resulted in the industry sharing valuable environmental data and providing some funding. A Public Participation Strategy was designed, approved and initiated.

## RESULTS: STRESS REDUCTION

### Phase II

*Matched Small Grants Programme* - The purpose of this programme was to assist the implementation of small projects that address a national environmental priority, as identified in the NCAP, and that have a positive, multi-country impact. Twelve MSG projects were supported across the five countries and addressed diverse issues such as artificial fish production, small-scale reforestation, and plastics recycling. The grantees were also diverse, including large-scale institutes, small NGOs and micro-private enterprises. The project impacts were successful. For example, the project “Artificial Spawning of *Rutilus frisii kutum* in Iran” appeared to have had a significant impact within the Iranian fishery research agency. Under the project, the agency successfully developed a methodology for artificial reproduction of the fish that it is still to date operating successfully. The agency released two million fingerlings into Anzali Lagoon in a celebratory event covered by local and national media. The project also dramatically increased the knowledge in Iran of the specific autumn run of *kutum*. An integrated pest management project in Iran was also reported to have yielded impressive results in terms of changing agricultural practices and improving the economics of rice production.

## RESULTS: WATER RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS

While these two phases of the CEP were of too early a stage to detect measurable improvements in Caspian environmental amenities, evidence suggests that the Caspian ecosystem is improving. Examples include: fish and seal mortality decline; and decline in invasive *Mnemiopsis leiydi* populations. CEP I & II, in cooperation with the Interim Secretariat to the Tehran Convention, have assembled a sizeable environmental and socioeconomic status baseline against which future status and trends can be monitored and adaptive, ecosystem-based management applied. These include the Caspian Biodiversity Information System, the Caspian Sea Information System, GIS Data, Interactive Caspian Sea Maps, , and various other databases.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1) Effort put into the NCAPs has been effort well spent. The NCAPs have done much to raise the profile of CEP in the countries and improve the understanding of the importance of working together to tackle larger transboundary problems. The NCAPs improved to a great extent Intersectoral coordination and increased environmental investments in the Caspian littoral countries. By starting with the NCAPs and building to a SAP, instead of vice versa, substantial country ownership was gained.

2) Strengthening NGOs and civil society is a major challenge requiring significant resources. It can also be an overly vague goal in the absence of specific targets. If projects are to attempt civil society strengthening, they must have very clear and realistic targets.

3) Individual small grant projects require significant managerial support, technical support and oversight. They also require clear objectives and “mini” logical frameworks. Ensure this is all included in the project design.

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