

REDUCING POLLUTION



Chris Stowers/Panos Pictures

Within sight of one of the world's largest bodies of water, residents of six nations bordering the Black Sea and the rivers that feed into it must look elsewhere for adequate drinking supplies. The Black Sea waters, overburdened by pollution, eutrophication, invasive species, overfishing, and other human demands, have left local residents surrounded by a severely degraded resource that has ruined their way of life and hobbled their economic development. The combined costs of all these problems, including impacts on human health, may approach \$1 billion per year.

In the most extensive campaign against pollution currently supported by GEF, Black Sea and Danube Basin countries have collaborated in a broad effort to:

- Identify major transboundary pollution problems,
- Highlight needed policy, institutional, and legal reforms in each country, and

- Support priority investments to reduce discharges from municipal sewage, industrial, and agricultural pollution sources.

With much of the analytical framework in place, the 17 collaborating countries are now poised to implement additional GEF-funded projects on the ground to reverse the degradation of the Black Sea.

GEF ACTION IN THE BLACK SEA

While legend has it that Jason and his Argonauts searched the Black Sea region for the Golden Fleece, early explorers often fought the westerly current of the Bosphorus for more palatable rewards. For centuries, salmon and huge sturgeon crowded up the rivers to spawn while giant schools of anchovy circled the sea in an annual migration. Even in more recent times, the Black Sea waters supported some two million fishermen and their families.

In addition to its prodigious fisheries, the Black Sea also served as a vacation spot for 40 million people annually before pollution took its toll. Its drainage basin is five times larger than the sea itself, encompassing 17 countries with enough pollution to make this water body the most seriously degraded regional sea on the planet.

The process of restoring the Black Sea began soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the six riparian states of the region—Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine—signed the Convention for the Protection of the Black Sea in 1992.

Thanks to this early start, the Black Sea region was one of the first GEF-supported international waters projects to proceed from concept design to an on-the-ground presence. Initially more than \$20 million in GEF support was provided to Black Sea and Danube Basin countries to complete strategic work on identifying priority trans-boundary problems, hot spots of pollution sources, and policy reforms and investments for solving their water-related problems. Currently, the GEF is providing more than \$115 million to support 12 projects dealing with the Black Sea.

Working in cooperation with a broad array of partners, the Black Sea and Danube Basin countries:

- Identified 500 pollution hotspots, of which 300 were high/medium priority;
- Adopted a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) that included commitments for country policy, legal, and institutional reforms needed for the Black Sea and Danube Basin clean up; and
- Agreed on specific commitments to install clean technology and reduce organic and toxic discharges by 30 percent in a decade. Also, by the year 2010, the countries committed themselves to reducing nitrogen pollution by about 14 percent and phosphorus pollution by 27 percent.

A BASINWIDE APPROACH

As a result of these commitments, facilitated through GEF and European Union assistance as well as active participation by Black Sea and

Danube Basin governments, a series of regional projects are under development by the GEF and its partners. The objectives are to assist countries in adopting needed policy, institutional, and legal reforms and making priority investments. This coordinated effort highlights the new “programmatically approach,” which is helping the countries of the Black Sea and its entire drainage basin meet obligations under the Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities.

Among the activities proposed are single country investment projects in the municipal wastewater and agricultural sectors, and investment projects for private sector pollution reduction. These efforts illustrate the potential for GEF to assist in developing financing packages with partners on behalf of water issues.

Joint action among nations is not limited to pollution abatement. Many floodplain wetlands in Black Sea tributaries have been diked or drained for conversion to agriculture and have become degraded as a result. They are often trans-boundary in nature, such as the Drava-Mura system in Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia that has recently received protection to conserve its biodiversity resources. GEF investments are currently supporting wetland restoration in Bulgaria and Romania as well as on the Danube Delta of Romania and Ukraine. Biodiversity projects supported by GEF are also included in integrated land and water management. Already, Georgia, Ukraine, and Turkey have sought GEF support to protect important wetlands of the Black Sea region.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Global Environment Facility
1818 H Street NW
Washington DC 20433 USA
Tel: 202-473-0508
Fax: 202-522-3240