

Update on the activities of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) – South Asia Seas Programme (SASP) – for the 2019 Report of the SG on oceans and the law of the sea

1. 6th Inter Ministerial Meeting (6th IMM) 2019 of the South Asian Seas Programme Plan

The [6th IMM of SASP](#) held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in November, 2019 adopted the report of activities conducted by SASP during 2014-2019. The report shows that SASP is moving in right direction, but the objective of the SASP Action Plan not fully been met yet. The 6th IMM of SASP also adopted the Regional Marine Litter Action Plan and Marine Biodiversity Strategy which frame the SASP activities during next decade (2020-2030). These policies will help SAS to move forwards in conserving the coastal and marine ecology in a friendly way and meeting the objectives of the SASP Action Plan which was not yet been fully met but the ongoing activities shows SAS is moving in right direction.

2. Nutrient Management:

Reports on nutrient scoping studies, coral reef monitoring and, coastal and marine biodiversity strategy indicated that the anthropogenic nutrient are the major contributors to pollute South Asian Seas (SAS) region. To halve this in sustainable manner, the Government of India has submitted a resolution to UNEA 4 titled, ‘Sustainable Nitrogen Management’ ([UNEP/EA.4/L.16](#)). This recognizes the multiple pollution threats resulting from anthropogenic reactive nitrogen, with adverse effects on the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments and contributing to air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and highlights ways to better manage nitrogen.

To address these issues in South Asia, [South Asian Nitrogen Hub \(SANH\)](#) was established in 2019 in collaboration with South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) under the Global Challenges Research Fund (*GCRF*). SACEP secretariat is working with its member countries and other partners at SANH to develop a Framework Policy on Nitrogen Management for South Asia region in order to regulate nitrogen. Ultimately this action will support for cleaner and more profitable farming, industrial recycling of nitrogen, fostering development of a cleaner circular economy for nitrogen.

3. Marine Litter Management:

The [Regional Marine Litter Action Plan \(RMLP\)](#) report was prepared in 2018. This regional report was prepared based on the inputs provided from national status reports by the SAS member countries. This RMLP signifies the threats of marine litter pollution in South Asia and contains specific programs and measures for marine litter prevention and reduction, and timeframe for their implementation. The 6IMM endorsed the regional report, as an implementational and reference tool for future policy, planning, research and development of marine litter mitigation tools in areas related to marine environment as well as pollution from the land and sea-based sources. Some best management practices (MBP) guidelines also developed that could use for combating the plastic litter through reduction and reuse, recycling, composting and fermentation, better management of landfills and land application for the benefit of SAS region. The developed MBP facilitated to support for the preparation of National Action Plan/Policy development.

Recognizing the importance of Regional Marine Litter Action Plan in the region, SACEP-SAS became a regional node under [UNEP-GPML](#) to host for South Asian Seas region. This opportunity will facilitate to

mitigate the marine plastic issues in sustainable manner. Presently, SACEP collaborate with the World Bank funded project “[Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia](#)”, with the objective to catalyze actions that reduce the flow of plastic pollution into South Asian Seas. Under this activity SACEP-World Bank will actively support for regional coordination, cooperation, institutions and policy development that deliver both short and long-term solutions to plastic pollutions in the region.

3.1 Ratification London Protocol

Prevention of Marine Pollution is one of the most important area of [South Asian Seas Action Plan](#). With the decision of 6th IMM, SAS member states are now working to implement the [London Convention and Protocol \(IMO\)](#) at National level to prevent Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and other Matters, which actively respond to the decades of dumping into the oceans, dredging and incineration at sea.

4. COVID-19 prospective

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus in late 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic in March 2020 and is rapidly spreading around the Globe. Most developing countries are vulnerable for medical waste management (MWM) for COVID-19 due to their technical and financial constraints. Now they are tackling with big challenging issues on medical waste management related to COVID-19 to reduce risks for human health and environment. IGES Center Collaborating with UNEP on Environmental Technologies ([CCET](#)) has decided to review current practices and responses for MWM for COVID-19.

CCET has developed the questionnaire form and request SACEP to gather the related information from member countries. The questionnaires consist of three crucial sections as follows;

1. Policy and Institutional Arrangement for Medical Waste Management
2. Statistic Information and Data for Medical Waste Management
3. Practices of Medical Waste Management

Based on the information received from the Government of Afghanistan and Bangladesh these two countries are abided by the Sound Policy, Institutional Arrangement for Medical Waste Management and appropriate guidelines available for managing the Infectious Wastes.

5. Regional Oil spill Contingency plan:

Regional Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan was consolidated in August, 2016, where future training activities were identified and work programmes for trainings and exercises were developed to enhance regional capacity building in spill preparedness and response. Presently all SAS member countries viz. Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India have signed the MoU in 2018 year. SACEP been coordinating with IMO for the further implemental activities in SAS region to achieve the following results of this project:

- I. Key issues of importance regarding co-operation in case of major pollution incidents, such as the use of dispersants, aerial surveillance and liability and compensation addressed and related agreements reflected in the regional contingency plan; and
- II. A regional exercise conducted to test the communication and the operational procedures.

6. Ballast Water Management Convention

Regional Workshop on the BWM Convention held on June 2019 on the aspect of Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement (CME), Risk assessment and port Biological Baseline Surveys (PBBS). The information was well received and it was understood by the SAS member states that the CME, risk assessment and PBBS in relation to the BWM Convention are crucial and most of the Member States were in need of detailed information. Accordingly, the guidance was provided for the relevant authorities involved in flag and Port State control surveys and inspections carried out under the provisions of the BWM Convention. Apart from the theoretical knowledge, practical training sessions were conducted on how to plan and conduct PBBS for introduced marine species using standardized protocols, and how to conduct a risk assessment for the implementation of the BWM Convention with a focus on ship targeting for port State control and exemptions under regulation A-4 and the *Guidelines for risk assessment under regulation A-4 of the BWM Convention (G7)*.

SACEP-SAS also joins the GloFouling Project of the [International Maritime Organization \(IMO\)](#) as a Regional Coordinating Organization (RCO). This initiative helps for better Biosecurity management in the region.

7. Development of Blue-economy by implementing the regional marine and coastal biodiversity strategy.

[Regional Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Strategy for the South Asian Seas Region](#) was adopted in 6th IMM. This strategy provides a framework for coordination and coherence between countries' efforts towards the implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), leading to enhanced national and regional interventions for the achievement of the Strategic Plan. The strategy supports the achievement of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011-2020, including Aichi Biodiversity Targets, particularly those related to marine and coastal habitats. Furthermore, one of the key objectives of the Strategy is to support countries of the region in the process of developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in China in 2020 as well as in its implementation. This Strategy also contributes to strengthening regional coherence in planning for, implementing and tracking progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated targets. This Strategy is particularly and directly relevant to SDG 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development.

8. Ocean Conflicts.

The Indian Ocean has a history of political, economic, and military tensions and conflicts. There are several aspects that contribute to such conflict such as the fluid nature of ocean boundaries, Extended Economic Zone, and Special Economic Zone, that impact property rights regimes.

Recently, the United Nations has declared a Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), identifying that large-scale cooperative and transdisciplinary efforts are essential for transforming capacity to achieve a sustainable future. By taking this opportunity, Australia, South Africa (via New Zealand), India and SACEP-SAS has jointly submitted a proposal to the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The focus of the project is on ocean and coastal conflict at the regional seas scale that will enable us to deepen understanding about barriers and enablers for transforming conflict across the entirety of the Indian Ocean, whilst accounting for distinct regional differences.

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