

The demise of the ACC Sub-committee on Oceans and Coastal Areas and ICP Proposal for a New Mechanism for Coordination

The Sub-committee on Oceans and Coastal Areas of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC SOCA) has been the task manager of Chapter 17 of UNCED's Agenda 21. IOC has been chairing the Sub-committee since 1999 and has been the secretariat of ACC SOCA since its establishment in 1993.

ACC has gone through a phase of reviewing its mechanism in order to improve coordination and, in that respect, SOCA itself has been in a period of transition during 2001. Briefly, ACC established two new High-Level Committees on Programmes (HLCP) and on Management (HLCM) with the immediate task of reviewing the functioning of all ACC subsidiary bodies. ACC requested the review is to be "zero-based", i.e., looking at what needs to be done rather than what was being done at present.

In carrying out its review of the subsidiary bodies in the programme area in the light of the report of HLCP, ACC concluded in November 2001 that all existing subsidiary bodies should cease to exist by the end of the year 2001, and that future inter-agency support requirements of HLCP would best be handled through *ad hoc*, time-bound, task-oriented arrangements, using a lead agency approach, or by addressing requests to existing inter-agency networks or expert groups. In doing so ACC has decided to move away from the concept of permanent subsidiary bodies with fixed periodicity of meetings and rigid reporting requirements, and, instead, to rely increasingly on ad hoc, time-bound and task-oriented coordination arrangements.

In the mean time, the name of the Administrative Committee on Coordination has been changed to the United Nations System's Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), without a change in its mandate (E/2001/L.50).

Following these developments, many of the UN Programs and Agencies participating in the coordination of oceans and coasts met informally at UN headquarters Tuesday, 9 and Thursday, 11 of April, on the occasion of the third meeting of the Informal Consultative Process on Oceans (ICP), and conducted consultations on the future coordination mechanism they will use following the disappearance of the subsidiary machinery of the ACC (CEB). The former Chair of the Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas (SOCA) acted as Chair. The following agencies/programs participated at these meetings: ILO, FAO, UNESCO-IOC, WMO, IMO, UNIDO, UNDP, UNEP, UN-DESA, UN-DOALOS.

As a result of these consultations, a text (:SOCA02-ICP3 MTG) was submitted to ICP by Patricio Bernal who was invited by the Co-Chair of ICP to "share his experience about coordination on ocean issues and offer his views on the functioning of SOCA and on the lessons to be learned".

ICP 3 welcomed the input from the UN Programs and Agencies participating in the coordination of oceans and coasts and adopted a text on the matter as one of the issues to be suggested and elements to be proposed to the General Assembly at its 57th Session. The text is harmony with the input provided by the UN Programs and Agencies.

Briefly, the ICP 3 proposal first points out why it is essential to establish a new coordinating mechanism for issues relating to oceans and seas, consistent with the new arrangements being developed in the United Nations system. It is then proposed that "*the General Assembly should invite the Secretary-General, as chairman of the United Nations system Chief Executives' Board for Coordination to consider establishing a new coordinating mechanism for issues relating to oceans and seas, taking into account the decisions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in this regard, and should recommend that this new mechanism should be transparent, effective and responsive...*"

The proposed new mechanism include all the core members of the UN System that are regularly involved in issues relating to oceans, with other members of the System participating when that is desirable. The new mechanism would be responding to a continuing need and should have continuity, regularity and accountability.

ICP further proposes that the new mechanism to have a clear mandate and to demonstrate the commitment to cooperation and coordination of the core participating institutions at the highest level. In relation to its work, it is suggested that:

“The new mechanism should be able to work at two levels –

- (i) Through regular reviews of issues relating to oceans and seas which involve several core participating institutions, and of the mandates and workplans of the core participating institutions relating to them, in order to eliminate gaps, inconsistencies and unnecessary overlaps; such reviews would also be aimed at identifying newly emerging problems and devising ways to tackle them; such reviews would need adequate support; the cost of such support should be offset by the savings that would result from improved cooperation and coordination;*
- (ii) Through the establishment of a specific task force, as needed, to carry out task-oriented activities; such task force should report to the new coordinating mechanism; as and when the planning and budgetary cycles of United Nations agencies are made more compatible, such task force might be charged with managing joint actions.”*

Each member of the United Nations system involved in issues related to oceans and seas, would be required nominate a fully-interactive focal point whose details of those focal points should be readily available to all concerned parties.

Liasion with regional organisations, including those dealing with development finance, fisheries management, marine science, navigation and the protection of the marine environment is stressed.

It is also proposed that the General Assembly should recommend that every State and, as appropriate, every regional economic cooperation organization should identify a focal point for coordination and cooperation on issues relating to oceans and seas.